

Secretary Haaland Announces Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative

Outlines Path Forward on Troubled Legacy of Federal Boarding School Policies in Remarks to National Congress of American Indians

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WASHINGTON — In remarks to the National Congress of American Indians 2021 Mid Year Conference today, Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland announced a Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative, a comprehensive review of the troubled legacy of federal boarding school policies.

Today's announcement is accompanied by a [secreterial memo](#) in which Secretary Haaland directs the Department to prepare a report detailing available historical records, with an emphasis on cemeteries or potential burial sites, relating to the federal boarding school program in preparation for a future site work. This work will occur under the supervision of the Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs.

"The Interior Department will address the inter-generational impact of Indian boarding schools to shed light on the unspoken traumas of the past, no matter how hard it will be," **said Secretary Haaland**. "I know that this process will be long and difficult. I know that this process will be painful. It won't undo the heartbreak and loss we feel. But only by acknowledging the past can we work toward a future that we're all proud to embrace."

Secretary Haaland recently reflected on the inter-generational trauma created by these policies in an [op-ed](#).

"We must shed light on what happened at federal Boarding Schools," **said Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs Bryan Newland**, who also delivered remarks outlining implementation of this effort. "As we move forward in this work, we will engage in Tribal consultation on how best to use this information, protect burial sites, and respect families and communities."

Beginning with the Indian Civilization Act of 1819, the United States enacted laws and implemented policies establishing and supporting Indian boarding schools across the nation. The purpose of Indian boarding schools was to culturally assimilate Indigenous children by forcibly relocating them from their families and communities to distant

residential facilities where their American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian identities, languages, and beliefs were to be forcibly suppressed. For over 150 years, hundreds of thousands of Indigenous children were taken from their communities.

The Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative will serve as an investigation about the loss of human life and the lasting consequences of residential Indian boarding schools. The primary goal will be to identify boarding school facilities and sites; the location of known and possible student burial sites located at or near school facilities; and the identities and Tribal affiliations of children interred at such locations.

The recent discovery of 215 unmarked graves by Canada's Tk'emlúps te Secwepemc First Nation at the Kamloops Indian Residential School prompted the Department to undertake this new initiative with the goal of shedding light on these past traumas.

The work will proceed in several phases and include the identification and collection of records and information related to the Department of Interior's own oversight and implementation of the Indian boarding school program; formal consultations with Tribal Nations, Alaska Native corporations, and Native Hawaiian organizations to clarify the processes and procedures for protecting identified burial sites and associated information; and the submission of a final written report on the investigation to the Secretary by April 1, 2022.

The Interior Department continues to operate residential boarding schools through the Bureau of Indian Education. In sharp contrast to the policies of the past, these schools aim to provide a quality education to students from across Indian Country and to empower Indigenous youth to better themselves and their communities as they seek to practice their spirituality, learn their language, and carry their culture forward.