



THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR
WASHINGTON

MAY 11 2022

Dear Reader:

The consequences of Federal Indian boarding school policies—including the intergenerational trauma caused by the family separation and cultural eradication inflicted upon generations of children as young as 4 years old—are devastating. When my maternal grandparents were only 8 years old, they were stolen from their parents’ culture and communities and forced to live in boarding schools until the age of 13. Many children like them never made it back home.

We still see the evidence of this attempt to forcibly assimilate Indigenous people in the disparities our communities face. Indigenous people experience longstanding intergenerational trauma, cycles of violence and abuse, disappearance, premature deaths, and undocumented physiological and psychological impacts. The loss of culture and language because of this forced separation has been particularly devastating to the generations that followed.

As a Nation, we have experienced dark chapters in our past, and we recognize the need to address the harms and lasting legacies that these policies have left so we can continue to grow and to heal long-lasting wounds.

In June 2021, I launched the Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative to shed light on the troubled history of Federal boarding school policies and their legacy for Indigenous people as a first step on the path toward healing. I directed the Department of the Interior (Department), under the leadership of the Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs, Bryan Newland, to prepare an initial report detailing the Department’s historical records relating to its implementation of Federal Indian boarding school policies to prepare for the later work of mending the profound damage these policies have caused to the people who experienced them.

The Department’s report is the first attempt by the United States Government to comprehensively address the facts and the consequences of its Federal Indian boarding school policies—implemented for more than a century and a half—resulting in the twin goals of cultural assimilation and territorial dispossession of Indigenous peoples through the forced removal and relocation of their children to schools across 37 States.

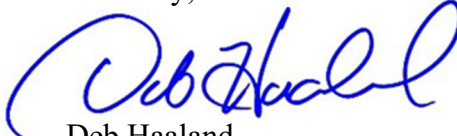
As the first Native American Cabinet Secretary in the United States, today I lead the very Department that operated and oversaw the boarding schools in which generations of Indigenous children were barred from speaking their native languages, using their family-given names, and learning their spiritual practices and cultural traditions. The Department’s work thus far shows that an all-of-government approach is necessary to address the intergenerational trauma experienced by survivors and their descendants and to strengthen and rebuild the bonds within Native communities that these policies originally set out to break.

I am pleased to release the first volume of the report, which represents the first attempt to produce a historical list of all Federal Indian boarding schools, to collect information about known and possible student burial sites, and to lay out a critical historical overview that sheds light on the damaging consequences of these policies and marks a path toward redressing their lasting consequences. A second volume will follow and will serve as a roadmap for continuing the compilation of records, in order to further efforts to heal the intergenerational trauma and associated economic, health, social, spiritual, and political impacts created by these failed policies.

While the first volume of the report provides an overview of the investigative work the Department has completed thus far, there is more to accomplish and additional information to be researched and identified. In the months ahead, I will launch a listening tour to give voice to Indian boarding school survivors and their descendants, help connect communities with trauma-informed support, and facilitate collection of a permanent oral history so that these stories—our stories—can be heard by future generations so this painful history is not repeated.

As I release this report, I am mindful that that the work we do will require a sustained commitment from the Federal Government to complete the investigation and to engage with Tribal communities and to give voice to those who have yet to be heard or who never had the opportunity to be heard. I understand that the burden of reliving this painful past will be immensely difficult for Indigenous families—including my own—who carry this trauma. By acknowledging this past, we will work toward a future that we can all embrace.

Sincerely,



Deb Haaland