

INDIGENOUS INITIATIVES

Background (Continuation)

One of the most traumatic phases of Indigenous history and present in Canada is linked with the Residential School system.¹ The government-funded ‘Indian Residential School’ system was established in Canada under colonial rule in the mid-seventeenth century to indoctrinate Indigenous children with Western European sociopolitical culture. The expansion of the system persisted as schools were intentionally constructed at a considerable distance from Indigenous communities, aiming to limit interaction and intensify the feeling of detachment among children from their families and cultures. Children faced harsh punishments for speaking their native language or embracing their cultural background, and these punishments often included physical,

¹ Residential schools systematically undermined Indigenous, First Nations, Métis and Inuit cultures across Canada and disrupted families for generations, severing the ties through which Indigenous culture is taught and sustained, and contributing to a general loss of language and culture. Because they were removed from their families, many students grew up without experiencing a nurturing family life and without the knowledge and skills to raise their own families. The devastating effects of the residential schools are far-reaching and continue to have a significant impact on Indigenous communities to the present-day.

https://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/the_residential_school_system/#:~:text=In%20the%201880s%2C%20in%20conjunction,their%20families%20and%20familiar%20surroundings.

Most of the research on the residential school system mentions the personal and intergenerational trauma transmitted as a result of this system. [Reconciliation Education](#) notes that the he IRS system caused intergenerational trauma for Indigenous Canadians, which manifests in several ways including but not limited to Indigenous Canadians have the highest unemployment rate, Indigenous youth are extremely overrepresented in the child welfare system and unequal treatment in criminal justice, and reduced life expectancies.

TRC was created to help survivors to begin to heal from the trauma of the Residential School system. Wilson, K. (2018). Pulling Together: Foundations Guide. Victoria, BC: BCcampus. Page 59.

Retrieved from <https://opentextbc.ca/indigenizationfoundations/>

psychological, and even sexual abuse.² Many students tragically lost their lives or went missing, and due to inadequate documentation, they effectively vanished without a trace. In the 1980s, due to the rise of Indigenous activism, Survivors of the IRS system initiated legal actions against the Canadian government to seek redress for the inflicted harm.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission is a government- approved committee formed in 2008. Throughout a span of six years, the TRC organized numerous community events, attentively listened to thousands of hours of testimony from over 6,000 Survivors, collected pertinent documentation, and meticulously crafted an authentic and emotionally devastating account of the IRS system and its ongoing detrimental impact on Indigenous communities. Their final report with [TRC's Call to Action](#) was published in 2015.

TRC's Call to Action is an important guideline for the Reconciliation efforts in Canada because it is crucial to acknowledge the historical and continuous injustices committed against Indigenous communities and the enduring impact of colonialism that persists in our society today. [The 94 Calls to Action \(CTAs\)](#) serve as practical policy suggestions designed to facilitate the process of healing in two distinct manners: by recognizing the complete and horrifying past of the residential school system, and by establishing mechanisms to prevent the recurrence of such abuse in the future.

² <https://www.reconciliationeducation.ca/what-are-truth-and-reconciliation-commission-94-calls-to-action#6>

Canadian and British Columbian governments strongly encourage higher education institutions to align their policies with UNDRIP and TRC's Call to Action.³ Columbia College is committed to decolonization and Indigenization of education and fostering meaningful relationships with the Indigenous communities on this land.

³ Based on the data provided by June 2023, the Government of Canada highlighted TRC's Call to Actions #62 and #65 and these call upon federal, provincial and territorial governments to commit to "Education for Reconciliation."

[https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1524504501233/1557513602139'](https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1524504501233/1557513602139)

The Ministry of Education and Child Care of BC, with the overarching guidance of numerous Indigenous experts, organizations and Indigenous government representatives to build an education system that serves Indigenous students well. TRC's Call to Action # 62 and 64 are listed as the action steps for BC Reconciliation education.

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/k-12/administration/program-management/indigenous-education/actions-taken-on-reconciliation>

BC DRIPA action plans focus on UNDRIP's goals and education aligned with those goals are in DRIPA's action plans.

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/indigenous-people/new-relationship/united-nations-declaration-on-the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples/implementation>