



During the boarding school era, Native American communities, families, and parents endured the pain, suffering and trauma of the forced removal of their children, and their placement in government or religious based boarding schools away from the loving nurturing environments of home. The traumatic effects of boarding schools continue to be endured, directly and indirectly, through the survivors, as well as the children and grandchildren, of American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian communities and families that have resiliently persevered, survived, and continue to thrive.

The recent findings of hundreds of children in unmarked graves in various locations throughout Canada reopens a wound that has never fully healed for the Native American and First Nations people of North America. The intentional eradication of culture, identity, and language to “kill the Indian, and save the man”, was a means to “solving the Indian problem” through assimilative practices disguised as education. The impact of Indian boarding schools in the United States and Canada exposes a glaring reality that does not live only in history, but its profoundly traumatic effects resonate and live within tribal communities, families, and stories throughout North America in the present.

Indian boarding schools were the mechanism utilized to forcibly assimilate Native Americans through education. Many of these children were not only stripped of their identity, but their lives were taken. For those survivors of boarding schools, their lives were forever altered.

The National Indian Education Association (NIEA) and the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition (NABS) share in the grief, pain, and mourning for our children who never returned home. It is in honoring their lives and voices that we strongly advocate and support educational initiatives that explicitly and inherently provide an education that adheres to the community, familial, and tribal identities from which our students emerge. NIEA and NABS will continue to work together to ensure the continual shift of educational systems that honor the rich cultures, history, knowledge, language, and traditions of all Indigenous people.

Native Americans have and will continue to break the barriers of what mainstream education relegated us to in the past. We are doctors, engineers, lawyers, professional athletes, and even Secretary of the Interior for the United States of America. Education was once an assimilative and genocidal means to eradicate Native Americans, literally and figuratively. Now, it is time to integrate and sustain self-determined community/tribally derived educational practices and systems to attain a true means of tribal sovereignty, through educational sovereignty.

Collectively, We, must not let the memory of our children be in vain. We must continue to carry their dreams and hopes forward. We must begin to understand the direct and indirect effects and traumas that we carry intergenerationally, and we must begin to heal. Although we cannot erase the past atrocities of the boarding school era, we can collectively begin to recognize the impacts of this trauma that continues to loom heavily upon Native American country. We can actualize, and realize, education as a mechanism to effectively illuminate and examine this history, so that we can steadfastly demonstrate the brilliance, resilience, and vibrancy that has allowed us to not only remain, but to thrive as Native Americans.