

# **Native American Boarding Schools in Michigan**

**Final Report**

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## Executive Summary

The Michigan Department of Civil Rights (MDCR) contracted Kauffman and Associates, Inc., a Native American woman-owned company, to conduct a preliminary study to understand the history and ongoing impact of boarding schools in Michigan on Native American children and families in Michigan (Appendix A). The goal of this Michigan Native American Boarding School (MiNABS) preliminary study was to partner with Michigan tribes to identify steps toward healing and reconciliation for MiNABS survivors and their descendants.

At the heart of this study are the voices of survivors and their families. Survivors and descendants were interviewed and surveyed, sharing personal histories, reflections, and truths that have long been silenced. Their stories form the foundation of this report and guide its recommendations.

To ensure the study was Tribally led and culturally grounded, a Tribal Advisory Group (TAG) was established to co-design the study framework and methodology. This group provided critical guidance throughout the process, ensuring that Tribal values, priorities, and protocols were respected.

A Tribal consultation was held in Manistee, Michigan, creating a dedicated space for tribes, their legal representatives, and survivors/descendants to provide feedback on the study process and final report. This consultation honored Tribal sovereignty and ensured that the final report reflects the voices and concerns of those most impacted by and invested in survivor experiences.

The study utilized a multi-method approach, including a literature review, key informant interviews, community engagement talking circles, survivor questionnaires, and Tribal community oral histories. Feedback from Tribal communities was integrated into the final report to ensure it captures all areas of importance to the tribes and their citizens.

Above all, this essential work tells the story of the tragic legacy of Michigan boarding schools and the continued impact on Michigan's Native American families. It is a step toward truth, healing, and justice—guided by survivors, grounded in Tribal leadership, and intended to inform meaningful action by policymakers.

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## List of Abbreviations

AI/AN	American Indian and Alaska Native
BCIM	Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions
BIA	U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs
DOI	U.S. Department of the Interior
IRB	institutional review board
MCAS	Michigan Children's Aid Society
MDCR	Michigan Department of Civil Rights
MiNABS	Michigan Native American Boarding Schools
MOA	memorandum of agreement
MOU	memorandum of understanding
PTSD	post-traumatic stress disorder
SD	standard deviation
TAG	Tribal Advisory Group

## Literature Review

This literature review explores the historical trajectory of Native American Boarding Schools in Michigan contextualizing their emergence and decline within the broader framework of the United States federal policies aimed at territorial acquisition, resource extraction, and the assimilation of Indigenous peoples. The placement of Native American children into boarding schools was promoted as a cost-effective alternative to military conflict, serving as a strategic tool in the government's efforts to address what was termed the "Indian problem." It is essential to examine these schools from a broader national context and to understand the intergenerational impact that still affects Native American communities in Michigan.

Understanding the enduring impact of boarding school institutions requires situating them within a national, historical, and legal context. This includes an overview of the Native American population in Michigan, traditional educational practices prior to colonization, and foundational legal doctrines such as the Marshall Trilogy and treaty-making processes that shaped federal Indian policy. The literature review also defines key concepts such as data sovereignty and the nature of boarding schools and examines the lived experiences of Native children within these institutions, highlighting cultural disruption and intergenerational trauma.

Throughout the literature review and broader report, terminology such as *American Indian*, *Native American*, and *Indigenous*, is used intentionally and contextually to reflect historical, legal, and cultural nuances. At times, *American Indian* and *Indian* are employed when referencing federal policies, treaties, and legal frameworks, as these terms are embedded in historical and governmental documentation. *Native American* is used to describe contemporary populations and experiences within Michigan, especially when in relation to current educational practices and community demographics. *Indigenous* is used to emphasize the continuity of relationships with land and culture and is retained when citing scholars who use this term to frame their work. Terminology supports the data sovereignty and cultural accuracy and reflects the layered historical and contemporary realities that inform both the literature and the study.

## Background and Purpose

In 2021, the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) launched the Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative to investigate the history and legacy of Native American boarding schools across the United States. This effort prompted the initiation of the present work to specifically explore the impact of these institutions in Michigan. The purpose of this report is to provide an entry point for understanding the historical and ongoing effects of

Native American boarding schools in Michigan, and to guide future research, dialogue, and exploration rooted in community priorities and truth-telling.

## **The Anishinaabek**

Tanner (1987) identifies Indigenous Peoples with traditional homelands in the Great Lakes region as including the Haudenosaunee (Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca), Huron/Wyandot, Anishinaabek, Menominee, Dakota, Meskwaki, Sauk, Ho-Chunk, Kickapoo, Mascouten, Miami, and Shawnee (p. 2). Among these, the Anishinaabek represent a culturally and linguistically related group residing across Canada and the United States, primarily around the Great Lakes. This group includes the Ojibwe, Odawa, Potawatomi, Algonquin, Chippewa, and Mississauga peoples (Hele, 2022).

Within the present-day geographic boundaries of Michigan, all 12 federally recognized and four state-recognized tribes are Anishinaabe. These tribes hold treaty-protected rights to education and retain their inherent and sovereign authority to educate their citizens and share their histories, languages, and cultures. In addition to treaty and inherent rights, federal and state laws affirm that Tribal citizens are entitled to civil rights in education. However, the history of Indian boarding schools illustrates a stark contradiction: These rights were routinely violated in practice, contributing to long-term educational and cultural harm.

### **Traditional Anishinaabe Education**

Although there is no singular written record detailing precolonial Anishinaabe pedagogy, a rich body of knowledge exists through oral traditions, linguistic and cultural artifacts, and early ethnographic accounts. These sources inform contemporary understandings of Anishinaabe educational systems, which were deeply relational, land-based, and rooted in community responsibilities.

Anishinaabe societies traditionally organized themselves into *doodemag* (clans), each with distinct roles and responsibilities, such as teachers, healers, hunters, and philosophers, which contributed to the wellbeing and governance of the community (Chartrand, 2012). Education was not confined to formal instruction but was embedded in daily life, storytelling, ceremony, and intergenerational relationships.

Central to Anishinaabe cultural education are the *Niizhwaaswi Gagiikwewinan* (Seven Grandfather Teachings), which continue to guide values and behavior through the principles of respect, love, humility, honesty, courage, wisdom, and truth (McMillan, 2023; Bouchard & Martin, 2009). These teachings were traditionally transmitted orally and remain foundational in contemporary Anishinaabe pedagogy.

Cajete (1994) describes Indigenous education as holistic, emphasizing the interconnectedness of all living things, the importance of learning through relationships, and the integration of individual and collective needs. These educational approaches contrast sharply with colonial models introduced through boarding schools, which prioritized discipline, rote memorization, and cultural suppression. Where Anishinaabe education fostered adaptive, experiential, and culturally grounded learning, colonial systems sought to erase Indigenous knowledge and identity.

## The Marshall Trilogy and the Legal Foundations of Tribal Sovereignty

Tribal sovereignty refers to the inherent authority of Indigenous nations to govern themselves, independent of external powers. This sovereignty predates the formation of the U.S. and is affirmed through treaties, federal law, and Tribal governance. It includes the right to make laws, govern lands and people, and maintain cultural and political systems. Importantly, Tribal sovereignty is not granted by the U.S. government; it is recognized.

The legal framework for understanding Tribal sovereignty within the U.S. context is shaped by three foundational Supreme Court cases known as the Marshall Trilogy:

- *Johnson v. M'Intosh* (1823): This case established the doctrine of discovery as a legal principle, asserting that European colonial powers—and later the United States—acquired title to Indigenous lands through "discovery," limiting Indigenous land rights to occupancy.
- *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* (1831): The Court described tribes as "domestic dependent nations," establishing a trust relationship between tribes and the federal government. While this language is paternalistic, it laid the groundwork for the federal government's legal obligations to tribes.
- *Worcester v. Georgia* (1832): The Court ruled that state laws have no authority in Indian Country, affirming that tribes are "distinct political communities" with exclusive jurisdiction within their territories. This case reinforced the federal government's sole authority to engage with tribes.

Together, these cases form the basis of federal Indian law and the trust doctrine, which holds that the U.S. has a legal and moral obligation to protect Tribal interests. Later cases, such as *Talton v. Mayes* (1896), affirmed that Tribal sovereignty is inherent and not derived from the U.S. Constitution. *Morton v. Mancari* (1974) clarified that the federal-Tribal relationship is political, not racial, reinforcing the legitimacy of Tribal self-governance.

### **Treaties and Their Enduring Legal Relevance**

Treaties are binding agreements between sovereign nations. From 1778 to 1871, the United States entered into hundreds of treaties with Native nations, often in exchange for land cessions and promises of protection, education, and resources. These treaties established distinct sets of rights, responsibilities, and protections for Tribal nations, often in exchange for vast land cessions. While these agreements were framed as “contracts among nations,” they were frequently negotiated under conditions of coercion, imbalance, and misrepresentation. However, these treaties are recognized under the U.S. Constitution as the “supreme law of the land” (Article VI, Clause 2), and they remain legally binding today.

The Indian Appropriations Act of 1871 ended the formal treaty-making process, but it did not invalidate existing treaties. As affirmed in Public Law 100–647 (1988), “no obligation of any treaty lawfully made and ratified with any such Indian nation or tribe prior to March 3, 1871, shall be hereby invalidated or impaired.” Courts have also established interpretive principles for treaties: Ambiguities must be resolved in favor of tribes, treaties must be interpreted as tribes would have understood them, and they should be liberally construed to uphold Tribal interests.

### **Data Sovereignty in Indigenous Research**

Data sovereignty is a contemporary extension of Tribal sovereignty into the realm of information governance. It refers to the right of Indigenous Peoples to control the collection, ownership, access, and use of data about their communities, lands, and cultures. This includes both quantitative and qualitative data, as well as oral histories, cultural knowledge, and community narratives.

In this study, data sovereignty is upheld through:

- Tribal oversight of research design and implementation.
- Culturally grounded methodologies that respect Indigenous knowledge systems.
- Community consent and control over data use and dissemination.
- Protection of sensitive cultural information, including protocols for storage, access, and reporting.
- These principles ensure that research is conducted ethically, supports Tribal self-determination, and contributes to healing and truth-telling rather than extraction or harm.

### **What Is a Treaty?**

Under Article VI, Clause 2 of the U.S. Constitution, treaties—including those with Native nations—are considered the supreme law of the land. They form the legal foundation of

federal Indian law and the federal trust responsibility. The Marshall Trilogy reinforced this framework by recognizing Tribal nations as “domestic dependent nations” (*Cherokee Nation v. Georgia*, 1831) and affirming that states have no jurisdiction in Indian Country (*Worcester v. Georgia*, 1832).

The courts have since established key principles for interpreting treaties with Native nations:

- Ambiguities must be resolved in favor of tribes.
- Treaties must be interpreted as tribes would have understood them.
- Treaties should be liberally construed to uphold Tribal interests.

These principles acknowledge the power imbalances and language barriers present during treaty negotiations. Because treaties were written in English and often negotiated under duress, the burden of clarity and fairness rested with the federal government. Courts have consistently held that any shortcomings in treaty language are the responsibility of the United States.

Although the Indian Appropriations Act of 1871 ended the formal treaty-making process, it did not invalidate existing treaties. As affirmed in Public Law 100–647 (1988), “no obligation of any treaty lawfully made and ratified with any such Indian nation or tribe prior to March 3, 1871, shall be hereby invalidated or impaired.” These treaties remain legally binding and continue to shape federal obligations to Tribal nations today.

## What Is a Native American Boarding School?

Native American boarding schools were institutions established by religious organizations, the military, and the federal government to assimilate Indigenous children into Euro-American society. These schools included day schools, mission schools, and off-reservation boarding schools. While framed as educational institutions, their primary function was cultural erasure—removing children from their families, languages, and traditions, and replacing community-based learning with rigid, colonial models of control.

By the late 19th century, the U.S. Office of Indian Affairs oversaw a network of Indian agencies responsible for administering these schools. In Michigan, the Mackinac Agency managed all Indian schools within the region. Each school district had a supervisor tasked with overseeing educational operations, inspecting facilities, and reporting on student attendance, academic progress, and physical and moral “standing.” These reports were submitted to the Indian Office, which maintained centralized control over school operations.

Indian agents conducted regular inspections and submitted detailed quarterly and annual reports. These included:

- Student demographics (name, tribe, age, sex)
- Attendance records
- Inventory of supplies and costs
- Staffing and salary structures
- Educational and vocational programming

School superintendents, often living on-site, were responsible for maintaining buildings, managing staff, and documenting student progress. Staff roles ranged from teachers, nurses, and disciplinarians to farmers and tradespeople, reflecting the schools' emphasis on vocational training and labor over academic instruction. Staffing was extensive and included positions such as assistant superintendent, clerk, physician, principal teacher, industrial and manual training instructors, matron, nurse, seamstress, laundress, cook, disciplinarian, farmer, carpenter, tailor, engineer, and night watchman (U.S. Department of the Interior, Office of Indian Affairs, 1898, p. 11).

While these administrative records provide insight into the structure of the boarding school system, they often obscure the lived experiences of Native children. The bureaucratic tone of federal reports masks the trauma, abuse, and cultural suppression that characterized many of these institutions. The boarding school system violated treaty-based educational rights and Indigenous sovereignty, replacing Indigenous pedagogies with assimilationist models.

### **Types of Boarding Schools**

Shelton et al. (2019) identify three primary types of schools built specifically for Native children:

#### *Reservation Day Schools*

Located on reservations, often adjacent to government buildings, these schools were typically small (serving up to 30 pupils) and operated by missionaries. They offered basic education, including industrial training for boys and domestic training for girls. Some also included cultural instruction, though this was often limited or framed through a colonial lens (National Archives and Records Administration, 1997).

#### *Reservation Boarding Schools*

As day schools declined, reservation boarding schools became central to the federal assimilation strategy. These institutions were designed to separate children from their families and immerse them in Euro-American values and routines. Education was militarized, and conditions were frequently overcrowded and unsanitary. Instruction was often delivered by underqualified staff with minimal resources (Shelton et al., 2019, p. 9).

### ***Off-Reservation Boarding Schools (Indian Industrial Schools)***

These larger institutions, often located near urban centers, enrolled students from multiple reservations. With populations reaching up to 1,000 students, they emphasized industrial education and labor. Many operated “outing programs,” where students were placed in White households to perform unpaid labor under the guise of cultural adaptation. These programs exploited Native children and subjected them to neglect and abuse.

### **The Meriam Report**

The *Meriam Report*, officially titled *The Problem of Indian Administration* (1928), was a landmark federal study that exposed the failures of U.S. Indian policy, particularly in education, health, and economic conditions (Brookings Institution, Institute for Government Research, 1928) and documented widespread issues in Native American boarding schools, including poor living conditions, inadequate education, and systemic mistreatment. As the DOI noted, “all of the work commonly performed by paid help in the White boarding schools is done by Indian students under the direction of the few White members of the school staff” (U.S. Department of the Interior, Office of Indian Affairs, 1923, p. 13).

### **Forced Removal of Children**

#### ***Policies and Criteria Used to Determine Removal***

In the late 19th century, Native American boarding schools faced criticism for disorganization and a lack of systemic planning. Superintendent John Oberly described the system as disorderly, while J.B. Harrison from the Indian Rights Association highlighted the absence of a comprehensive education plan. There were no systematic relationships or standardized policies for recruiting and sorting students among day schools, reservation boarding schools, and off-reservation boarding schools.

Additionally, government policies were inconsistently interpreted and implemented (Adams, 1995). Schools on the reservation were technically required to send their best students to off-reservation institutions, but schools rarely did so. In the early 1890s, superintendents of off-reservation schools were required to actively recruit students from the agency due to intense competition from local missionary and government boarding schools (Adams, 1995). Furthermore, efforts to remove Native American children from their homes and reservations were guided by financial incentives, as funding for Native American boarding schools was based on student enrollment numbers.

In 1891, legislation was enacted making school attendance mandatory for all Native American children, and in 1929, much of the authority to enforce attendance was

transferred to the states (Laurence, 1977). The legislation authorized the Commissioner of Indian Affairs “to make and enforce by proper means such rules and regulations as will secure the attendance of Indian children of suitable age and health at schools established and maintained for their benefit” (Adams, 1995).

This compulsory attendance law essentially made it legal for federal officers to forcibly remove Native American children from their homes and reservations (Native Americans in Philanthropy, n.d.).

However, after 1893, superintendents and Indian agents were prohibited from sending children to an off-reservation boarding school without obtaining “full consent” from parents or guardians (Adams, 1995). This was the same year Mount Pleasant Indian Industrial Boarding School opened in Michigan. According to Edwards (2017), students at Mount Pleasant were not subject to traumatic roundups and kidnappings that occurred earlier in the federal boarding school era. However, some people may recount different experiences of themselves or their descendants coming to Mount Pleasant. As revealed in a writer's note by Castanier (2023), the account describes his maternal grandmother and her three brothers being kidnapped and incarcerated at Indian boarding schools. The three brothers were taken to Mount Pleasant, while the grandmother was taken to a school ran by Catholic nuns. In the early years of Mount Pleasant, Native American parents and guardians were pressured into sending their children to school due to the socioeconomic conditions forced upon Native families by the government (Edwards, 2017). This was also common at other Native American boarding schools throughout Michigan.

### *Differences in Application and Enforcement*

Authorities employed various methods to enforce the removal of Native American children from their homes and reservations. Initially, the compulsory attendance law facilitated this process by allowing agents and officers to forcibly remove children without parental or guardian consent (Mejia, n.d.). However, when the requirement for full parental or guardian consent to send children to off-reservation boarding schools was introduced, other enforcement methods were used. Outlined in the *Rules for the Indian School Service* by the Office of Indian Affairs is an excerpt from the law:

The Secretary of the Interior may, at his discretion, withhold rations, clothing, and other annuities from Indian parents or guardians who refuse or neglect to send or keep their children of proper school age in some school during a reasonable portion of each year. (U.S. Department of the Interior, Office of Indian Affairs, 1898)

Families could not endure the harsh consequences of having rations, clothing, or annuities withheld. Consequently, most were forced to send their children away, as they

could not provide for their basic needs without these provisions (Clarke Historical Library, n.d.-a). Even without the federal government withholding provisions, many families lived in poverty, enabling agents to easily recruit students because the families could not care for their children adequately.

The policies of the U.S. government resulted in forced relocations that severely disrupted Native American economies and traditional lifestyles, leading to widespread poverty and economic hardship. For many families, children were sent to Native American boarding schools as a last resort so children could escape the extreme poverty on reservations (Clarke Historical Library, n.d.-b). Additionally, parents and guardians believed their children would have a more prosperous life in boarding schools compared to the poor socioeconomic conditions on reservations caused by federal policies. Many Native American children attended boarding schools to escape hardship, as families on reservations could no longer provide for them. The tradition of tribes taking in orphans declined due to these economic struggles, leaving parents and guardians with little choice but to send their children to school for adequate clothing, shelter, and food (Booth, 2009). Mount Pleasant became seen by both the government and the community as a safety net for orphans and children whose parents could not support them, resulting in increased enrollment. During its operation, nearly half of the Native American children in Michigan received part of their education at Mount Pleasant (Edwards, 2017). Regardless of their method of entry into a Native American boarding school, former students and descendants describe varied accounts and emotions about their experiences of being taken away from their families.

### *Case Studies or Specific Examples*

Hundreds of Anishinaabe children in Michigan were forcibly removed from their Tribal communities against their will and sent to boarding schools located hours from their homes. **P11**, an Ojibwe/Oneida Tribal citizen, was removed from **P11** just before turning six. Similarly, in September 1955, **P11**, at age six, was escorted by the sheriff and government agents to the Holy Childhood School in Harbor Springs. **P11**, now **P11**, emphasized that families had no say in this forced separation, as the federal government and the Catholic Church sanctioned it (Stebbins, 2021).

**P11**, a Sault Tribal citizen from Sault Ste. Marie experienced a tumultuous upbringing marked by alcoholism and abuse. Being sent to Harbor Springs in the second grade offered relief from this chaos until the sixth grade. Despite the school's strict conditions, **P11** valued the structure it provided, which created a sense of safety compared to the home environment (Stebbins, 2021).

**P11**, an elder from the **P11** Band, attended the Holy Childhood of Jesus Catholic Church and Indian School in Harbor Springs from age five until nearly completing eighth grade.

In the summer of 1955, a government agent and Jesuit priest had visited **PII**'s grandparents' home to enforce a program that had been in place since 1844, allowing the government and the Catholic Church to remove Native children from their families for assimilation purposes (Korkzan, 2024).

During this period, all Native children in Watersmeet, Michigan, were taken away; older children were sent to Baraga and younger ones to Harbor Springs. **PII** described the initial process as dehumanizing, recalling how they baptized all the Native children together, likening it to "branding cattle." **PII** characterized the experience as a form of government-sanctioned imprisonment (Korkzan, 2024).

**PII**, a member of the **PII** Tribe, shared that both her parents attended the Native American school in Mount Pleasant. **PII** described this period as "very depressing" for families, as officials would come in and take the children. **PII** recounted that **PII**'s mother's community lived in fear when White people appeared, worrying they would be taken away (Ziibiwing Center, 2008).

## **Experiences in Boarding Schools in Michigan**

This section discusses boarding school creation, daily life and schedule, harsh discipline and abuse, treatment by staff, relationships with peers, uninhabitable conditions, cultural identity, and the impact of trauma. It should be noted that some Native American children in Michigan were sent to other schools outside of the state, such as Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. In a letter from General Richard H. Pratt to Congressman Byron M. Cutcheon dated May 29, 1889, he requested Michigan send Indian children, especially girls, to Carlisle (Pratt, 1889). It is suspected that because of the waterways in Michigan, children could be sent to Pennsylvania in more affordable ways.

### **The Beginning of the Boarding Schools**

Since initial contact between Native American Peoples and European explorers, there has been a barrage of traumatic events inflicted on Tribal groups and communities. European Americans held very negative perceptions of Indigenous ways, appearance, and beliefs. They also felt that the Native American people stood in the way of progress and advancement across the United States, and it soon became their mission to eradicate Native Americans through any method, beginning with extermination and resource destruction. Europeans realized that tribes relied on the land for their sustenance, so they destroyed these resources in abundance. Europeans also deployed military forces to exterminate Native people from existence, but the government began to realize that the cost of extinguishment was getting too high.

Brunner (2024) summarized that the United States gave plots of land to Indigenous heads of households to separate them from their homelands and tax the land they were given, far from where they were initially located, which was often disorienting.

The U.S. government thought it could teach Native American people how to be more assimilated to the European American ways of living by forcing them to abandon their culture and beliefs. In 1819, Congress developed and passed the Civilization Fund Act to establish money to “civilize” Indigenous people through agriculture and education. It was hoped that the “Indian problem” would disappear, and many Indigenous people would become more like European Americans—individualized, ambitious, and educated—more like their White counterparts (Brunner, 2024). This extended into education for young Indigenous children. Many religious mission schools had started educating and Christianizing children. However, it was difficult for their methods to stick when students went home daily to their traditional ways. This was interpreted as a problem to the process of “civilization” and assimilation until General Henry Pratt was able to assimilate a group of Indigenous prisoners.

### *New Method of Assimilation*

The idea of teaching Native American children away from their homelands became the new method of assimilation for the United States and instigated the Native American boarding school system. There are countless incidences of trauma that impacted Native American Peoples throughout the age of colonization, but the assimilation that occurred in U.S. and Canada Native American boarding schools made its lasting traumatic mark on children and their families. While experiences varied among the schools, the intent was the same: to remove all cultural aspects from each child, including clothing, language, long hair, traditional beliefs, and cultural and personal identity. There were 18 treaties conducted between the U.S. government and Michigan tribes that established provisions for education for Native American children in and around the state. The following schools have been identified by the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition (The National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition, n.d.) in the geographically defined State of Michigan:

- Assinins Orphanage (1843–1956)
- Baraga Chippewa Boarding and Day School (1884–1902)
- Catholic Otipemisiwak Boarding School (1883–1888)
- Holy Childhood of Jesus School (New L’Arbre Croche Mission School) (1829–1983)
- Holy Family Orphanage (1915–1981)
- Mackinac Mission School (1823–1837)
- Mount Pleasant Indian Industrial Boarding School (1893–1934)

- New Mission House (Grove Hill Seminary) (1848–1866) (Northern Michigan University, 2024)

The DOI identified several schools in Michigan that may also have been boarding schools and warrant further study. These are located in Appendix B. Descriptions of select boarding schools are provided in Appendix C. For context, a comparison of religious-run boarding schools across U.S. regions is located in Appendix D. The intent of these boarding schools was much like other states, with a focus on manual labor, discipline, and education, preparing Native students to live and work in a White society. Notably,

... the reparation of Indian youth for their duties, privileges, and responsibilities of American citizenship is the purpose of the governmental plan of education. This implies training in the industrial arts, developing the moral and intellectual faculties, the establishment of good habits, the formation of character, and preparation for citizenship. (U.S. Department of the Interior, Office of Indian Affairs, 1898, p. 3)

Native American children were often forcibly taken from their homes or sent by their parents so they could have food and shelter. However, the *Meriam Report* documented that while food was more available at the schools than at some children's homes, shortages still made it more difficult to feed every child. It was documented that the Mount Pleasant School had egregiously limited funding for food (Clarke Historical Library, 1918).

During the crucial early childhood years, when essential learning and development take place, these children were taken from their parents and relatives—the very people who play a significant role in shaping a child's personal and cultural identity. Thus, the Native American boarding school system's intent to assimilate children came with devastating psychological and social consequences impacting the core of family relationships. The U.S. government stipulated that children must be taken from their families and be away from them consistently for them to be fully assimilated into European American ways of living. A passage in *Rules for Indian School Service* illustrates this concept:

The superintendent shall use all proper means within his power to retain pupils in continuous attendance at the school during the entire year, except when the school is closed for vacation. Visits of pupils to their homes should be as brief and infrequent as possible. (U.S. Department of the Interior, Office of Indian Affairs, 1898, pp. 9–10)

In one day, the U.S. government took everything the child knew to define themselves: family relationships, cultural identity, hair, language, and name. All was replaced with a new and foreign way of life, which was taught to Indigenous children as the better or

right way of living, sending a clear message to the child that all they knew was wrong, bad, and or “savage.”

By the time the Mt. Pleasant school was built, Native Americans had been defeated in war, suffered from devastating epidemics, forced off their lands, deprived of traditional hunting grounds, obligated to a capitalistic lifestyle, and, as a consequence, scattered throughout Michigan. The school was simply the next step in the colonial process (Balabuch, 2010, p. 76).

### **Daily Life and Schedule**

Upon arrival, Tribal clothing was removed, and bodies were bathed with the purpose of removing vermin. It was recommended by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA):

For destroying vermin, use a mixture of equal parts of kerosene and olive oil (or lard) and teach the children that the person must be absolutely free from vermin. The boys should be compelled to keep their hair short. It will save time, trouble, and dirt. (U.S. Department of the Interior, Office of Indian Affairs, 1901, p. 196)

Their hair was cut to a distressingly short length as many tribes honored their families with their hair, and cutting it meant they were mourning. An Indigenous boy, Standing Bear, remembers when his hair was cut, “It hurt my feelings to such an extent that the tears came into my eyes” (Adams, 1995, p. 102). While hair was viewed so strongly by Indigenous tribes, it was a mark of savagery to White societies. A man who attended the Holy Childhood of Jesus School recalls how when the children arrived, they would force them to strip out of their clothes and wash themselves from head to toe. “The nuns telling us to wash to get that color off. We didn’t know what that meant because we were washed, we were clean. They told us to keep going until you get that brown off you” (NBC News, 2021).

### ***Children Stripped of Cultural Identity***

Along with having their hair and clothing removed, each child’s name was taken away if it was too difficult to pronounce, and they were then given English names that were easier for the teachers and school officials to remember and pronounce. Along with their names, tribes, and blood quantum (i.e., definition of Native American status by fraction of Native American ancestry, a nonscientific process) were often documented to indicate where they were from. The children’s original names were often bestowed upon them with great honor from elders, so this was another attack on their personal and familial identity.

A complete record of all children transferred from the reservation must be kept by the agent, which record should show names, parents or guardians, tribe, age, date of transfer, and by whom, and for what school collected.

Should a child return to the reservation, the date of return and physical condition at the time must be noted on this record. (U.S. Department of the Interior, Office of Indian Affairs, 1898, p. 6)

Many survivors recall how their daily lives were controlled by bells chiming to signal it was time to start and stop everything (Adams, 1995). Students were expected to march at all times in single-file lines, much like at a military camp. The Mount Pleasant Indian Industrial Boarding School records and testimonies indicate that students would have yearlong marching competitions to see who could best fall in line on the way to their destinations (Balabuch, 2010). Students' entire lives were regimented from the time they woke up until they went to bed; even their sleep was regulated. Table 1 shows the daily bell schedule from Mount Pleasant (Clarke Historical Library, 1918).

Table 1. Daily schedule for students of the Mount Pleasant Indian Industrial Boarding School

Morning Activities	Time
<b>Rising Bell and Reveille</b>	<b>5:30 a.m.</b>
<b>Assembly Call</b>	<b>6:25</b>
<b>Breakfast Bell</b>	<b>First 6:30, Second 6:45</b>
<b>Work Whistle</b>	<b>7:25</b>
<b>Industrial Departments in Session</b>	<b>7:30–11:30</b>
<b>Physical Training, Large Girls</b>	<b>8:00–8:30</b>
<b>School Bell</b>	<b>First 8:30, Second 8:45</b>
<b>Breathing Exercises</b>	<b>10:00–10:10</b>
<b>Recall School and Work Whistle</b>	<b>11:30</b>
<b>Assembly Call</b>	<b>11:55</b>
Afternoon and Evening Activities	Time
<b>Work and School Whistle</b>	<b>12:55 p.m.</b>
<b>Industrial Departments in Session</b>	<b>1:00 and 5:00</b>
<b>School Bell</b>	<b>1:15</b>
<b>Breathing Exercises</b>	<b>2:30–2:40</b>
<b>Recall School Bell</b>	<b>4:00</b>
<b>Athletics and Physical Training, Large Boys</b>	<b>4:00–5:00</b>
<b>Assembly Call</b>	<b>5:15</b>
<b>Supper Bell</b>	<b>5:25</b>
<b>Band Rehearsal</b>	<b>6:00–7:00</b>
<b>Physical Training, Small Girls</b>	<b>7:00–8:00</b>
<b>Study Hour Bell</b>	<b>7:00 and 7:15</b>
<b>Recall Study Hour Bell</b>	<b>8:15</b>
<b>Physical Training, Large Girls</b>	<b>8:15</b>
<b>Roll Call, Small Boys, and Girls</b>	<b>8:30</b>
<b>Taps and Lights Out</b>	<b>9:15</b>

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*Six o'clock in the morning. Our breakfast comes around. A bowl of mush and molasses. Was enough to knock you down. Our coffee's like tobacco juice. Our bread is hard and stale, and that's the way they treat you at Mt. Pleasant Indian Jail. -Former resident (Littlefield, 1989, p. 437)*

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Schools in what is now known as Michigan were established under the guise of providing Native American children with a foundation to work in the trades for U.S. companies and industries. Boys learned farming, tailoring, barbering, and carpentry and were told it would help them provide for their families. Girls were taught how to be “good housewives” through trades like laundry, cooking, cleaning, and sewing. Education was described by many children as being minimal and a means of producing more individuals in the working class to benefit the Americans in power (Littlefield, 1989). The schools primarily used manual labor to supplement the lack of funding from the U.S. government and the poor conditions of the schools (Newland, 2024).

Indigenous children were able to send or receive letters from their families if it was deemed appropriate. Schools often monitored all letters and would only send communication that was positive for the school, so children’s families would only see that aspect of the boarding school experience. The *Rules for the Indian School Service* indicated that:

It shall be the duty of superintendents and acting superintendents of Indian schools to receive and control all mail matters addressed to pupils of their respective schools who are minors and to withhold the same from delivery where, in their opinion, it contains unmailable or otherwise improper communications or articles. All mail matters so retained shall be promptly turned over to the postal authorities. Other improper communications shall be returned to the writer or forwarded to the Indian office for further disposal. (U.S. Department of the Interior, Office of Indian Affairs, 1898, p. 10)

As such, Indigenous children could not communicate any negative, harmful, or toxic experiences to their parents and relatives.

### **Harsh Discipline and Abuse**

Throughout oral testimonies of historical and social research, survivors indicated that when children did not follow the rules, spoke their own language, or resisted instruction, they were harshly disciplined. Punishments varied between the boarding schools, but in Michigan, many survivors remembered corporal punishment methods like beatings,

kneeling for hours, starving, solitary confinement, and choking. A survivor remembered a teacher at one of these schools saying, “the rod is not spared, and the child is not spoiled; the plan is to reward the good Indians and thrash the bad ones until they can see the beauty of goodness” (Rubenstein, 1976, p. 158). According to several sources, many children in the Michigan Native American Boarding Schools (MiNABS) resisted the rules and structure of their daily routines. As a result, they were harshly disciplined for their actions. Teachers treated children very punitively if they did not follow the rules.

One student in a Michigan school recounted a time when he was forced to eat the vomit of another student who could not eat her food. He remembered how the other student could not eat the cornmeal because it was clumpy. He reacted to her vomiting, so the nun made him eat the vomit and the rest of the cornmeal she had not eaten (NBC News, 2021). Another student recalled his experience with the treatment at Holy Childhood in Michigan.

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*You were there to be disciplined and educated. They did that to us. They certainly educated us disciplined us ... a lot of kids died there. A lot of kids thrived there. But for a kid like me, it nearly killed me ... it was structured religious ceremony ritual. Then, you would learn how to be a soldier of God. -Former MiNABS student (Brunner, 2002, p. 75)*

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Many children were punished very harshly for wetting their beds, which is commonly a symptom of trauma (Alfano, 2020; Humphreys et al., 2009). A student at Holy Childhood recalls how children were humiliated for wetting the bed.

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*They would be drug by their hair or forced to stand out on the fire escape outside and wrap their wet, soaked sheets around them, you know, even if it was wintertime ... We would say quick, make your bed, and throw the towels on them to soak up the urine. We had a sign language where we could look at each other and agree and disagree. - Former MiNABS student (Brunner, 2002, p. 67)*

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### **Treatment by Staff and Peer Relationships**

Some students ran away from the Native American boarding schools to resist the unfair, harsh practices, or returned home due to homesickness or after receiving word that a

family member had fallen ill. Many stories recount how schools were able to apprehend the students and force them to return to school, after which they were met with cruel and humiliating punishments. Students ran away from all the boarding schools in Michigan and from other boarding schools throughout the country (Adams, 1995). The way schools managed runaways varied. Schools would engage police to find the children who had fled. However, if they ran away more than a few times, the school would not try to find them and would let them stay at home (Balabuch, 2010). When runaway students were carrying money, the apprehending officers or Indian agents would return the money to the school with the student. If the student was not returned, monies were sent to the reservation where the child resided for deposit in the bank of the owner of said money (U.S. Department of the Interior, Office of Indian Affairs, 1913).

### *Indian Children Resistance*

In 1891, three Kiowa boys ran away from the boarding school at Anadarko, presumably in response to harsh punishments handed out by one of the teachers. Their destination was a Kiowa camp some thirty miles from the school. Before reaching the camp, however, a severe blizzard struck, and all three boys were later found frozen to death (Adams, 1995, p. 228). Considering the bitter cold of Michigan, it is likely that this type of scenario occurred when students ran away and may be uncovered through the current study or other investigations.

Native American children at schools throughout the country resisted in other ways as well. Students were highly innovative while resisting the structure and rules used to control them. Some children devised ways of still practicing their Tribal customs. At Mount Pleasant school in Michigan, children would sneak into the basement during the late hours of the night and host their powwows, so they could relate to one another and hold onto their culture. Another example of resisting authority was that many children would steal food from the school to have later, or they would even forage in the nearby forests (Balabuch, 2010).

Additionally, children started numerous fires. At Mount Pleasant, one student named PII set fires in three different locations—the primary building, the laundry room, and the girls' dormitory. The largest fire destroyed the primary building and was claimed to be one of the biggest fires, among many, in the Native American boarding schools in the United States. PII was charged and sent to a reform school (Balabuch, 2010).

Not all acts of resistance were as destructive. A student at the Holy Childhood School recalled how she wore ripped pantyhose to church on Sundays, and the nuns would never catch her (Brunner, 2021, 2024).

Students also resisted by speaking their Tribal languages and forming close friendships. The Native American boarding schools in Michigan took children from different tribes in

Michigan, surrounding states, and even Canada. Many friendships were formed between children in and out of their tribes. These friendships served as sources of comfort for the children when they experienced feelings of loneliness or homesickness and were a means of coping with the often-difficult school circumstances. Additionally, many survivors recall how they were able to speak their Tribal languages with their friends without the school officials knowing. Children united to protect one another from teachers or even from other students and coped using humor. Boarding schools had peer groups or cliques and gangs that formed. Many students made lifelong friendships during their boarding school years as they were all in the same difficult circumstances away from their families and homelands. Conversely, some students treated others negatively as they learned about violence from the school officials. Some boys formed gangs to establish hierarchies among the ages (Lomawaima, 1994).

### **Uninhabitable Conditions**

It was common to see a cemetery at boarding schools. These types of letters were often sent from the school superintendent to the parents:

Dear Sir:

It is with a feeling of sorrow that I write you telling of the death of your daughter **PII**. She was not sick but a short time, and we did not think her so near her end. On the evening of March 30th, I was at the girls' building and the matron informed me that **PII** had gone to bed not feeling well. I went up to her room with the matron and found her in bed with what seemed a bad cold ... She had quite a fever for several days and then seemed to improve but did not rally as she ought to have done, and the doctor made a careful examination and said that she was, without doubt, going into quick consumption ... Last Wednesday I was called away to Minneapolis and ... I was very much surprised upon my return Saturday evening to find she was dead, as the doctor had given us no information except she might live for a number of months. (Clarke Historical Library, n.d.-b, "Health" section)

The superintendent closed his letter by expressing his sympathy and noting, "Had we known that she was not going to live but so short a time, we would have made a great effort to have gotten you here before she died" (Clarke Historical Library, n.d.-b, "Health" section).

### **Loss of Cultural Identity**

It cannot be understated how these acts of abuse, loss of identity, and separation from family contributed to the profound loss of cultural identity that each Indigenous child in the boarding schools in Michigan must have felt. Native Americans from Haudenosaunee (Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca), Huron/Wyandot,

Anishinaabek (Ojibway, Odawa, and Potawatomi), Menominee, Dakota, Mesquakie, Sauk, Ho-chunk, Kickapoo, Mascouten, Miami, and Shawnee (Tanner, 1987, p. 2) lived in the area now known as Michigan. Cajete (1994) indicates that prior to European contact, Native people had been thriving and living their Tribal and cultural ways in their respective homelands.

What is called education today was, for American Indians, a journey for learning to be fully human. Learning about the nature of the spirit in relationship to community and the environment was considered central to learning the full meaning of life. (Cajete, 1994, p. 43)

### *Three Fires Confederacy*

The Three Fires Confederacy, also known as the Anishinaabek, was formed by three closely related tribes: the Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi. These communities lived collectively in long, rectangular homes, where families shared food, history, and the responsibility of educating their children. Among the Ojibwe, generosity, wisdom, and humility were considered marks of high leadership (Rosentreter, 2013). As Rosentreter (2013) and Cleland (1992) describe, the tribes of Michigan lived by deeply rooted communal and spiritual values:

- No man had the right to determine another man's fate.
- All things, including goods, labor, and food were shared.
- No creature was superior to any other; all creatures are part of the great web of life.

### *Colonial Disruption of Indigenous Values*

These values were not just cultural beliefs; they were the foundation of Indigenous identity and community life. The process of colonization directly dismantled these principles:

- *Determining another's fate*: Colonizers imposed control over Native lives, especially through policies like forced boarding school attendance, violating the belief that no one should determine another's destiny.
- *Sharing and communal living*: European American ideals of individual land ownership and capitalism replaced Indigenous communal systems, eroding the practice of shared resources and mutual care.
- *Equity among all creatures*: Boarding schools, and other colonial systems, instilled a hierarchy that placed European Americans above Native people, educationally, culturally, spiritually, and socioeconomically.

### *Boarding Schools as Instruments of Cultural Erasure*

Boarding school policy was one of the most devastating tools of colonization used against Native American children and families. The goal of Native American boarding schools, as explicitly stated by Richard H. Pratt, founder of the flagship Indian boarding school, Carlisle Indian Industrial School, was to “kill the Indian in him, and save the man.” This ideology reflected a broader colonial belief that Native identity needed to be destroyed to assimilate Indigenous people into White American society.

Pratt’s vision emerged from his time as a soldier relocating Native prisoners of war from the Oklahoma Territory to Florida. He invited locals to teach the prisoners English and immerse them in White American culture, believing that isolation from Tribal life would lead to assimilation (Kliewer, Mahmud and Wayland, n.d.). In an 1892 speech, Pratt reinforced this violent ideology:

A great general has said that the only good Indian is a dead one... In a sense, I agree with the sentiment, but only in this: that all the Indian there is in the race should be dead.

### *Enduring and Pervasive Effects*

While the goal of fully erasing Native identity was not realized, the impact of boarding schools is profound and lasting. The cultural, psychological, and spiritual damage inflicted on Native children and families continues to shape the lived experiences of Indigenous communities today. The legacy remains pervasive in contemporary struggles for cultural revitalization, healing, and justice.

### *Disruption of Family and Cultural Bonds*

The first wound was inflicted by forcibly removing children from their families. As attachment theorists Ainsworth (1982) and Bowlby (1969, 1982) explain, children develop their worldview through the emotional bonds and teachings of their parents. For Native children, this included learning cultural practices, spiritual beliefs, and communal values. Children learn and develop through the teachings of their parents, which form the way they see the world (Ainsworth, 1982; Bowlby, 1969, 1982).

Boarding schools were used to deliberately erase Indigenous identity and replace it with ideals of individualism, land ownership, and Christianity over Native spiritual traditions.

Upon arrival at boarding schools, children were stripped of personal markers of identity: clothing, hair, language, and names. A survivor of Holy Childhood boarding school recalled:

*“So, why even try once you got out of there? You’re doomed anyhow,” he recalls thinking. “They told us, ‘You might as well forget about it. God doesn’t love Indians.’ So, we believed them. You know, after 12 years, you’ve got to believe something.” -Stebbins, 2021*

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### *Disruption of Traditional Roles and Lifeways*

The traditional roles of men, women, and two-spirit people (those who have taken on the roles and identities of the opposite biological sex) within Native communities and families were also disrupted. Many survivors struggled to reintegrate into their communities, having been taught to reject their cultural values. As Tsethlikai (2011) notes, family codes, rituals, traditions, and responsibilities are guided by the culture that the parent belongs to and believes in. Boarding school survivors grew into adulthood without meaningful teachings or memories that would have been created within their Tribal homes. As a result, a Native American child who attended boarding school had limited experiences to aid in their development of self and cultural identity. A participant in the Road to Healing project, led by Secretary Deb Haaland and Assistant Secretary Bryan Newland, shared:

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*The important years of bonding with your parents and getting loved and hugged on daily is vital to child health, growth, and emotional well-being. I did not get that. We didn’t get that. There were no hugs, no encouragement, no praise. -MiNABS survivor/descendent (Newland, 2024, p. 85)*

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### **Impact of Trauma**

The conditions within the Native American boarding schools and the experiences many students endured were deeply traumatic. These institutions disrupted every aspect of childhood and child development of emotional, psychological, cultural, and spiritual milestones. The long-term effect of this trauma is well documented and continues to manifest.

### *Psychological and Emotional Consequences*

Haskell and Randall (2009) identify that a childhood shaped by neglect, deprivation, abuse, and complex trauma can result in presentation of psychological problems such as:

- Low self-esteem
- Persistent sense of unworthiness
- Difficulty forming and maintaining relationships
- Extreme emotional responses
- Heightened sensitivity to stress
- Self-destructive behaviors, including substance abuse and self-harm
- Internalized oppression

The symptoms and experiences are not isolated to the survivors of boarding schools; they often manifest as intergenerational and affect families and communities long after the original trauma occurred. Duran and Duran (1995) emphasize that forced severance of cultural identity and the trauma of boarding schools caused many survivors to internalize the values and behaviors of their oppressors. This internalization is often manifested in harmful dynamics within families and communities, as survivors struggle to reconcile their cultural heritage with what they experienced and with what they did to survive the boarding school experience. Evans-Campbell (2008) further documents how these experiences contribute to intergenerational and cumulative trauma, impacting not only boarding school survivors, but also their descendants and the broader community.

### *Intergenerational Trauma*

Upon returning home, many boarding school survivors carried with them the trauma they endured. Without access to safety, comfort, and cultural grounding, survivors often developed a maladapted sense of self and distorted perception of others. Haskell and Randall (2009) note that survivors frequently viewed adults as unsafe or threatening, having been conditioned to expect physical and emotional abuse. This is evidence of a disruption in the ability to form secure attachments and offer emotional support to others. As a result, many struggled to become sources of comfort or safety for their own children and community members.

### *Public Health Implications*

Intergenerational trauma has been linked to a range of public health concerns prevalent in many Native American communities (Running Bear et al., 2019), including:

- Substance use disorders
- Suicide

- Family discord
- Domestic violence
- Physical maladies

A 2018 study found that Native Americans who attended boarding schools had a 44% higher count of chronic physical health conditions than those who did not attend boarding schools (Running Bear et al., 2017). Newland's (2024, p. 56) findings underscored the long-term physical toll of boarding school trauma on former attendees and revealed that survivors were significantly more likely to experience:

- Cancer (3 time more likely)
- Tuberculosis (2 times more likely)
- High cholesterol (95%)
- Diabetes (81%)
- Anemia (61%)
- Arthritis (60%)
- Gall bladder disease (60%)

In addition to these public health implications, emerging research suggests that trauma experienced by Native American boarding school survivors may have contributed to epigenetic changes, which predispose future generations to physical and mental health challenges. Yehuda and colleagues (2016) highlight how trauma can alter gene expression with potential influences on the health outcomes of their descendants.

### **Political and Policy Context**

The political and policy structures that governed Native American boarding schools were instrumental in shaping their function and impact. Federal and state legislation not only enabled these institutions but also dictated their assimilationist goals.

#### ***Federal Legislation***

Federal policies such as the General Allotment Act of 1887 and the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862 played a significant role in supporting schools like the Carlisle Indian Industrial School. However, many Michigan tribes, including the Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi, were exempt from the General Allotment Act due to earlier treaties such as the Treaty of Washington (1836) and the Treaty of Detroit (1856). Similarly, the Seneca Nation and other members of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy were exempt due to the Treaty of Canandaigua (1794).

#### ***Implications for Current Understanding***

Historical context is critical for understanding the extent of state involvement in the boarding school system and its long-term consequences. While federal policies often

receive primary attention in discussions of Indian education, Montana's example demonstrates that state-level decisions and constitutional provisions also shaped the educational experiences of Native children.

Understanding Montana's historical role provides a framework for assessing how other states may have similarly contributed to the boarding school system—and how they might now participate in reparative policy development, data transparency, and community-led healing efforts. Therefore, this report:

- Highlights the role of state governments in facilitating and legitimizing assimilationist education policies.
- Underscores the need for state accountability in truth and healing initiatives, especially in states like Montana where constitutional and administrative structures supported boarding school operations.
- Informs contemporary policy analysis, particularly in evaluating how historical state actions continue to influence Native education systems, Tribal-state relations, and reparative justice efforts.

### **Direct Student Experience**

The firsthand experiences of students who attended Indian boarding schools are essential to understanding the full impact of these institutions. Student accounts provide insight into the daily routines, academic expectations, living conditions, and disciplinary practices that shaped the lives of Native children.

Notably, their experiences were not uniform. While the experiences of MiNABS students shared many similarities with those in other regions, differences in policy, geography, and Tribal affiliation significantly influenced the nature of their schooling. For example, in Montana, the Holy Family Mission and School operated under both state and federal directives, including constitutional provisions and funding mechanisms that prioritized religious instruction and cultural assimilation.

This historical context reveals that state-level governance played a direct role in shaping the boarding school experience. The involvement of entities like the Montana Bureau of Child Protection and the inclusion of Native education in the state constitution (Montana Constitution, 1972; Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services [DPHHS], n.d.) demonstrate that assimilationist policies were not only federally driven but also embedded in state structures.

### *Implications for Understanding Student Experience*

Recognizing the influence of state-level policy helps us:

- Contextualize student experiences within broader systems of governance and control.

- Identify regional variations in how boarding schools operated and how students were treated.
- Understand the layered impact of federal, state, and religious institutions on Native identity formation and community health.

A perspective that acknowledges state-level policy influence is essential for accurately assessing the long-term effects of boarding schools and for informing truth-telling, healing, and policy reform efforts that are responsive to both national and local histories.

### *Education and Daily Routine*

In both the Michigan and non-Michigan Native American boarding schools, the core curriculum focused on gender-specific vocational training, academics, and religious instruction for the religious-run schools, and on assigned daily chores. The schools shared similar curricula focused on industrial and domestic training, with boys being taught agriculture and carpentry and girls learning domestic skills, cooking, and sewing (Balabuch, 2010; Harding, 2001; Littlefield, 1989; Lomawaima, 1987). Similarly, the daily routines were highly regimented and structured. They included bell ringing, which directed students to march in formation between meals, classes, and work, allowing very limited free time (Lomawaima, 1987, 1994). Both Carlisle and Mount Pleasant operated a similar outing program based on an apprenticeship model where Native students were assigned to work for predominantly White families. Both schools used the outing program to exploit students for their labor. Littlefield (1989, p. 431) describes, “rigid discipline was appropriate for producing the kinds of dispositions desirable in a cheap labor force: obedience, punctuality, and orderly habits.” However, unlike Carlisle, Mount Pleasant did not have their students sent to work for White families or on farms during the summer. Rather, the outing program was used in the school’s year-round curriculum (Harding, 2001).

### *Living Conditions*

Students at both the non-Michigan and Michigan schools experienced overcrowded dorms, lack of privacy, inadequate nutrition, poor medical care, and lack of proper clothing for cold winters, which led to high disease rates and student mortality. At Carlisle, about 200 students died while at school; however, the number is very likely higher given the number of unmarked graves and also that some graves were relocated elsewhere on the Carlisle campus (Fear-Segal 2006; Robbins, 2017). Thomas Indian School also experienced student mortality rates, with “12 of 56 children dying in 1864” (Stahlman, 2022, p. 122). Chilocco also struggled with overcrowding until new dormitories were constructed in 1930.

### *Disciplinary Practices*

Across the Native American boarding schools, strict rules with corporal punishment were enforced. Carlisle used a combination of harsh physical punishment and public shaming for students with infractions (Fear-Segal, 2006; Gere, 2005). Students who attempted to run away from Carlisle were confined to a guard house. Thomas Indian School also employed severe corporal punishment (LaFrance, 2014). Chilocco used a demerit system, so based on the number of rule violations accrued, it resulted in additional manual labor, reduced food, or confinement. Michigan's Holy Childhood of Jesus School and Mount Pleasant used harsh disciplinary methods, too. At Mount Pleasant, students who were caught speaking their Native language were subjected to physical punishment and public shaming.

## **Previous Research Findings**

This section provides the federal policy context of American Indian boarding schools, a detailed description of boarding schools in Michigan, and the influence of treaties and other political forces on their development. Specifically, it contains:

- A timeline of the development of boarding schools, focusing on important events, policies, or reports that shaped how boarding schools were theorized, legitimized, funded, and organized.
- A discussion of the major federal policies that shaped boarding schools.
- Specific details about Indian Trust Monies and the role of the DOI regarding boarding school funding.
- A summary of all treaties in Michigan that had educational provisions to demonstrate the important role of treaties in shaping Indian educational policy.
- An analysis of which Michigan treaties mentioned specific boarding schools.
- A description of the historical context of each boarding school in Michigan.

### **Timeline of U.S. Indian Boarding Schools**

The Native American boarding school experience in Michigan took place within the backdrop of U.S. federal laws, policies, and initiatives. Understanding this background helps us understand the Michigan experience. The following is a timeline summary of the establishment of Indian boarding schools.

#### *1787 Northwest Ordinance*

This ordinance covered governance of all U.S. territories north of the Ohio River (which includes what is now the State of Michigan). The document stated, "Religion, morality, and knowledge, being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind,

schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged" (Confederation Congress, 1787).

#### *1788 U.S. Constitution Ratification*

The commerce clause (Article I, Section 8, Clause 3) recognizes tribes as distinct political entities from states and foreign governments. The supremacy clause (Article 6, Clause 2) recognizes treaties as the supreme law of the land.

#### *1789 Assignment of Indian Affairs to the Department of War*

The placement of Indian Affairs within the Department of War influenced the overall policy and approach to Indian relations.

#### *1805 Establishment of the Territory of Michigan*

Established January 11, 1805, President Thomas Jefferson signed a document separating Michigan from Indiana Territory and establishing it as its own territory. Detroit was named the capital. The goal for the territory was to make it a state by increasing its population. The Northwest Ordinance allowed a territory to apply for statehood once it had 60,000 residents.

#### *1819 Indian Civilization Fund Act*

Appropriated \$10,000 annually to be used at the discretion of the U.S. president to employ people to instruct Indians on agriculture, writing, and math. These funds were spent through "benevolent societies" that had or were planning to establish Indian schools (Prucha, 1986).

#### *1823 Johnson v. Mc'Intosh*

The Supreme Court affirmed the doctrine of discovery, which gave European nations an exclusive right to extinguish the Indian title of occupancy, either by purchase or conquest (Reinhardt et al., 2020).

#### *1824 BIA*

The BIA was created within the Department of War (DOW) and still exists today, although it now sits within the DOI.

#### *1831 Cherokee Nation v. Georgia*

The Supreme Court stated in dicta that tribes are "domestic dependent nations," initiating the federal trust doctrine.

**1832 *Worcester v. Georgia***

The Supreme Court affirmed that tribes are “distinct, independent political communities retaining their original natural rights” where state law can have no force.

**1849 *BIA Transfer to the U.S. DOI***

Transferring the BIA from the DOW to the DOI signaled a shift in the federal approach to Indian relations—from a military approach to a civilian management approach.

**1869 *Board of Indian Commissioners (Ulysses S. Grant) Peace Policy***

This document supported an assimilation approach (over a termination approach), which was chosen for economic and not moral reasons. It had two goals: to replace corrupt government officials, known as the “Indian Ring,” with religious men nominated by churches to oversee the Indian agencies on reservations; and to Christianize the Native tribes and eradicate their culture and religion, primarily through the removal of the children from reservation settings (Shelton et al., 2019).

**1871 *Indian Appropriations Act***

Stated that the United States would no longer acknowledge or recognize any American Indian nation as a treaty making entity (Canby, 2009).

**1883 *Congressional Authorization of a Superintendent of Indian schools***

Thomas J. Morgan, a professional educator, appointed the first superintendent of Indian schools. He began the initial study plan for the Indian school system (U.S. Department of the Interior, Office of Indian Affairs, 1883).

**1887 *General Allotment Act***

This act stated that individual rather than communal ownership of land was imposed on Indian reservations throughout the country, undermining the integrity of Indigenous societies while providing a legal pretext for divesting Native people of approximately two-thirds of the property still in their possession (Shelton et al., 2019).

**1891 *Morgan's Settled Indian Policy***

Commissioner of Indian Affairs Thomas Jefferson Morgan introduced a plan for the Indian school system that he called “a settled Indian policy” (Shelton et al., 2019).

**1894 *Indian Appropriations Act***

Congress made it illegal for any government agent or employee to withhold rations to influence parents to grant consent for their children's attendance at out-of-state schools.

*1897 Circular Issued by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs*

This circular outlined new rules for employees regarding situations where students left schools without permission. Agents were permitted to arrest and return students. The rules applied to parents and guardians "harboring" students or failing/refusing to "deliver" the student. Agency police were empowered to arrest and punish any person who may hinder the agents in their duty.

*1898 Circular Issued by the Acting Commissioner of Indian Affairs*

This circular advised on the changes to rations for the Indian School Service.

*1898 Rules for the Indian School Service (Office of Indian Affairs)*

This booklet was published to describe the rules and regulations that all Indian school employees must follow. These rules were to align the activities of the Indian school employees with the Indian school service's express purpose—to prepare Indian youth for the duties, privileges, and responsibilities of American citizenship.

*1899 Adoption of Congress Regulations*

Congress adopted regulations concerning education in Indian territory.

*1899 Circular Issued by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs*

This circular acknowledged an increase in off-reservation school attendance and urged efforts to similarly increase attendance at on-reservation schools by filling "each school, boarding and day ... to the limit of its capacity during the first quarter of the new fiscal year." It also discouraged certain practices reportedly used to secure attendance at off-reservation schools when parents were unwilling to let their children enroll. These practices included promising to pay the parents money for their consent and promising that students would return during vacation periods; encouraging singing and teaching music in schools, primarily for the purpose of encouraging patriotic sentiments in students; and discussing English speaking and instruction.

*1900 Circular Issued by the Acting Commissioner of Indian Affairs*

This circular described the policy of giving students "thorough industrial training" at all schools where possible.

*1901 Circular Issued by the Acting Commissioner of Indian Affairs*

This circular repealed the "Browning Ruling," which had ruled that Indian parents had no right to designate which school their children attended.

*1902 Circular Issued by the Acting commissioner of Indian Affairs*

This circular required that no pupil should be enrolled at a non-reservation school for less than a three-year term but specified a preference for enrolling pupils for a four- to five-year term. The document stated that, "No promise must be made to any parents or others that pupils enrolled will be returned home during the vacation period, and in no case will you hereinafter permit any pupil to return home during vacation without special permission of this Office, and full data must be submitted with your request showing the necessity for such return."

*1902 Circular Issued by the Acting Commissioner of Indian Affairs*

This circular stated that the desired effect "is to grant latitude" to parents in school selection but "not to permit whimsical or capricious persons to defeat the education of their children by frequent unwanted changes." Also, that parental consent must be "given freely and voluntarily," but that if parents wished to change the schools their children attended, they must "appear in person" before the Indian agents and superintendents to give a "voluntary statement of their wishes." The document further stated that Indian parents "will not be granted the right to send their children off the reservation to schools except by [the Indian agents' and superintendents'] consent, and [the parents] must be satisfied that the school selected is a well-conducted, reputable institution."

The circular requested that superintendents fill out a form identifying the "degree of Indian blood possessed by the pupils" enrolled in their respective schools. The form was separated into reservation and non-reservation sections and included spaces for "full blood Indian pupils," "3/4 Indian blood pupils," "1/2," "1/8," and "1/16 or less." It also had a space for "[number] of pupils whose parents have taken allotments or who themselves have taken or are entitled to allotments."

The circular provided guidance on teaching agriculture. It directed Indian agents and superintendents to discontinue the reported practice of "transmitting letters written by pupils ... to their parents under the penalty envelopes of the government, addressed to such parents." The document explained that the Postmaster General had been informed of the practice and that "the continuance of the custom will be held as a violation of the postal regulations."

*1903 Circular Issued by the Acting Commissioner of Indian Affairs*

This circular reported on health conditions in Native populations, detailing that tuberculosis was "widespread among the Indians" and that the prevalence was due to lack of cleanliness and failure to properly dispose of sputum, overcrowding in dormitories, unsanitary conditions in school buildings, admission of tubercular and

otherwise unhealthy pupils. The document described the "causes [as] referable to the home life of the Indians [including] insufficient and improperly prepared food, intermarriage, excesses, uncleanliness and accumulated filth and other unhygienic conditions which exist." The circular reported that chronic eye and skin diseases are due to "strumous tendencies" and "neglect of simple conditions."

#### *1903 Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs*

This document indicated that children living traditionally on an Indian reservation should be enrolled in a boarding school. Conversely, those Indian children not living in a Tribal community and who were, in fact, living in a White community should not be enrolled in a boarding school. This is a clear indication that the boarding school was understood as an instrument of assimilation, not education.

#### *1908 Circular Issued by the Acting Commissioner of Indian Affairs*

To prevent Indian children from receiving distribution of lands, superintendents of non-reservation schools were asked to make a list of pupils, particularly the orphans, enrolled in the school from specific reservations and include name, age, sex, name of father (both White and Indian name), name of mother (both White and Indian name), home residence, and other identifying information.

Regarding regulations for the transfer of pupils to non-reservation schools, superintendents were no longer permitted to send collecting agents into the field for the purpose of inducing parents to send their children to their respective schools. Power and authority to arrange all transfers requested by parents living on a reservation was vested in the U.S. Indian agents and superintendents in charge of agencies.

The circular also outlined compulsory measures that should be taken to improve sanitary conditions at schools and on reservations. It described a campaign to start at each school regarding the detection of tuberculosis sufferers for special individual treatment and to establish camps for tuberculosis patients at the non-reservation schools. The document explained that pupils returning to school should have a thorough physical examination and children with continuous fever, progressive weight loss, significant cough, and other signs of decline were to be sent home.

#### *1909 Circular Issued by the Acting Commissioner of Indian Affairs*

The circular described cases in Phoenix of children who had infectious diseases when they were sent to White families to work after school. It stated that the campaign to end the use of double beds to improve sanitary conditions had been too slow and must take a more aggressive form. Violators of the policy were to be punished. School capacity was to be reduced to ensure that there would be "a single bed for each pupil and only one pupil for each bed."

The document described updates to the policy of permitting Indian parents to choose the schools to which their children are sent. Younger pupils—considered unsuitable for industrial or domestic programs in non-reservation boarding schools—were to be kept in day schools when they were within reach, in public schools if convenient, or in the reservation boarding schools. Non-reservation schools for pupils over fourteen years of age.

*1909 Circular Issued by the Acting Commissioner of Indian Affairs*

This circular requested information regarding the extent of dancing on Indian reservations and in Indian schools: "Do you think it would be possible by persuasive means to get the Indians to give up old-time dances which interfere with their progress?"

*1910 Circular Issued by the Acting Commissioner of Indian Affairs*

This circular stated that regular instruction was to be given to girls in cooking and boys in manual training. When school had enough pupils to justify the employment of special teachers for these subjects, "it should be done."

The circular reduced the length of the school year to nine months.

*1911 Circular Issued by the Acting Commissioner of Indian Affairs*

This circular reiterated the regulation that, "as a protection against smallpox, the physical is required to vaccinate all Indians, employees, and other persons residing at the agency, except such as have already had the disease or are immune by reason of recent successful vaccination".

*1912 Act of August 24, 1912 (Pub. No. 335)*

This act featured the following statement:

That no part of this appropriation, or any other appropriation provided for herein, except appropriations made pursuant to treaties, shall be used to educate children of less than one-fourth Indian blood, whose parents are citizens of the United States and the state wherein they live, and where there are adequate free school facilities provided and the facilities of the Indian schools are needed for pupils of more than one-fourth Indian blood.

(Language from the Act of August 24, 1912)

*1912 Circular Issued by the Acting Commissioner of Indian Affairs*

This circular detailed precautionary measures against the spread of trachoma, a bacterial eye infection, including the supply of individual towels, lockers, beds, bedding, boiling of clothes, running water for bathing purposes with showers preferred over baths, fumigation of schoolbooks, and quarantine of acute cases.

*1914 Circular Issued by the Acting Commissioner of Indian Affairs*

This circular stated that superintendents must produce a copy of the course of study for the academic, agricultural, and industrial work to be performed, following article 78 of *Rules for the Indian School Service*, 1913:

Unless a course of study is outlined by the commissioner of Indian Affairs, each Indian school shall adopt a course of academic instruction as nearly similar as practicable to that provided for the public schools of the state wherein such Indian schools are situated, adapting the grades, however, to the larger amount of industrial instruction required in Indian schools and to the capabilities of Indian pupils. Because of the large amount of industrial training in Indian schools, pupils are not expected to complete a grade in the time ordinarily taken for the same grades in public schools. (Language from a circular issued by the acting commissioner of Indian Affairs in 1914)

The circular also addressed reports of too few toothbrushes at certain boarding schools in violation of Circular No. 526, which stated that each pupil in school must have a toothbrush marked with the pupil's individual number and placed in a suitable rack in the lavatory with regular teeth brushing schedules.

*1917 Commissioner of Indian Affairs Declaration of Policy*

Issued April 17, 1917, this prohibition did not apply to Indian students already enrolled in a school until their term of enrollment has expired:

Elimination of ineligible pupils from Government Indian Schools: In many of our boarding schools, Indian children are being educated at government expense whose parents are amply able to pay for their education and have public school facilities at or near their homes. Such children shall not hereafter be enrolled in Government Indian schools supported by gratuity appropriations, except on payment of actual per capita cost and transportation. (Language from the Commissioner of Indian Affairs Declaration Policy)

*1921 Snyder Act*

This act authorized Indian Affairs to operate programs for the benefit and assistance of American Indians and Alaska Natives throughout the United States.

*1924 Circular Issued by the Acting Commissioner of Indian Affairs*

This circular identified the goal of bringing closer contact between the Indian home and school. It directed superintendents to arrange at least one day per month when parents could visit and tour the school and observe the children at work.

**1924 Indian Citizenship Act**

This act of Congress made American Indians U.S. citizens.

**1928 Meriam Report: The Problem of Indian Administration**

This report (Brookings Institution, 1928) summarized the conditions of Indian peoples, including an investigation of Indian boarding schools. It critiqued boarding schools for separating young children (up to grade 6) from their families, providing substandard nutritional and health conditions, and requiring half-day labor. It also recommended an educational approach that was adapted to the tribes. This report influenced subsequent federal policy and tenor.

**1929 Circular Issued by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs**

This circular stated that children weakened at any time were to receive special care and attention and not be put on work details requiring arduous or heavy labor.

**1929 Circular Issued by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs**

This circular established the requirement to weigh students regularly in schools.

**1931 Circular Issued by the Director of Education**

This circular recommended that children not be retained at school for the purpose of a month's intensive drill on a few facts and skills that they had failed to acquire during the regular school year.

**1933 Board of Indian Commissioners Disbandment**

The Board of Indian Commissioners was disbanded by executive order.

**1934 Indian Reorganization Act**

Intended to revise the assimilation policies (Shelton et al., 2019), much of this statute's provisions involved Tribal lands. One section described indefinitely extending the trust status of American Indian lands, with the federal government serving as trustee. This statute also encouraged Indian tribes to create Tribal governments styled after the federal three- branch system, Tribal constitutions, and corporate charters to manage Tribal economic operations.

**1934 Circular Issued by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs**

This circular was to be given the widest, most effective publicity and treated "as an instruction superseding any prior regulation, instruction, or practice" and included the following directive:

No interference with Indian religious life or ceremonial expression will hereafter be tolerated. The cultural liberty of Indians is, in all respects, to be

considered equal to that of any non-Indian group. It is desirable that Indians be bilingual—fluent and literate in English and fluent in their vital, beautiful, and efficient Native languages ... Violations of law or the proprieties, if committed under the cloak of any religion, Indian or other, or any cultural tradition, Indian or other, are to be dealt with as such ... The fullest constitutional liberty, in all matters affecting religion, conscience, and culture, is insisted on for all Indians. In addition, an affirmative, appreciative attitude toward Indian cultural values is desired in the Indian Service. (Language from a circular issued by the commissioner of Indian Affairs in 1934)

#### **1934 Johnson-O'Malley Act**

This act allowed Native students to enroll in public schools (Reinhardt et al., 2020).

#### **1935 Circular Issued by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs**

This circular clarified that when an Indian child needed glasses and personal or family funds were unavailable, the school support fund would be applicable if the child was enrolled in a boarding school.

#### **1941 Circular Issued by the Director of Education**

This circular discussed training in trades needed for the war effort offered by the Indian Service.

#### **1950 Order Issued by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs**

This order stated that student laborers for whom no formal trainee or apprenticeship programs had been initiated were exempt from the minimum wage policy.

#### **1953 Public Law 280**

This law transferred federal jurisdiction over law and order on Indian reservations to individual states and House Concurrent Resolution 108, which called for the end of federal services to Indians. Little time was wasted implementing the policy (U.S. Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, Special Subcommittee on Indian Education, 1969). By 1954, 10 termination bills were introduced, with six passing (U.S. Senate Committee, 1969).

#### **1969 "Indian Education: A National Tragedy—a National Challenge"**

Commissioned by the Special Subcommittee on Indian Education within the Senate's Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, this report documented "an appalling litany of abuse, inefficiency, and fraud" throughout the assimilation attempts vis-à-vis Indian education (Shelton et al., 2019).

### *1965 Economic Opportunity Act*

This act gave Native Americans the opportunity to participate in and control their programs. The act created “Community Action Programs,” which involved 105 reservations in 17 states by the end of the 1960s.

### *1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act*

This act required consultation with tribes regarding education and provided grants to local programs.

### *1975 Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act*

This act allowed tribes to contract with the federal government to operate programs serving their Tribal members and other eligible people. The law created a mechanism for Indian tribes to contract with the federal government to provide their own educational services, formerly overseen by the United States.

### *1994 Tribal Self-Governance Act*

This act established a permanent program within the DOI to allow federally recognized tribes to negotiate funding agreements with the federal government.

## **Federal Policy That Shaped Native American Boarding Schools**

Following the Civil War, a massive trans-Mississippi migration would lead to large-scale military conflict with many tribes. The Homestead Act of 1862 offered free government-owned land (160 acres) to any settler who had not engaged in armed struggle with the federal government. The settler could claim full title to the land once it was lived on for five years, and the homestead contained improvements like constructing barns, smokehouses, or root cellars.

The scale of subsequent conflicts with tribes in the Indian Wars led some Americans to call for reform in Indian Affairs through a new Indian policy. The group “Friends of the American Indians,” as it would eventually be called, sought assimilation policies over conflict to solve the “Indian problem.” Education quickly became a central component of this new policy. The Friends of the American Indians advocated for the abolition of reservations and the training of Tribal youth in vocational skills. The idea of educating Native Americans had roots in treaties from the 1850s. During this period, treaties routinely included a “six to sixteen clause,” promising a schoolhouse and schoolteacher for Native American children between the ages of six and sixteen.

Multiple studies have suggested that more than 147 of the 371 American Indian treaties entered into by the United States contained educational provisions (Reinhardt, 2004). For most of the 19th century, Congress had also routinely appropriated money for a

"Civilization Fund" under the Civilization Fund Act of 1819. A year prior to the passage of the act, James Monroe made the following argument before Congress:

Experience has clearly demonstrated that independent savage communities cannot long exist within the limits of a civilized population. To civilize them and even to prevent their extinction, it seems to be indispensable that their independence as communities should cease and that the control of the United States over them should be complete and undisputed. (Woolley & Peters, n.d.)

### *Educating Native American Students*

Societies such as churches used the government funds from the Civilization Fund Act to establish day schools for Native American children run by missionaries. The funds were in the amount of \$10,000 annually. Day schools were located mostly on reservations and did not have housing for students. Children attended school during the day and returned to their communities at night. Mission schools could be allocated funds because the government had no other mechanism for educating the Native population. Therefore, these schools were the main educational institutions for Native children in the mid-1800s.

Notwithstanding, the federal government's role was minor in the early years of mission schools. By 1825, resources were being provided to 38 church schools; only seven percent of this support came from the government, while six percent came from the tribes themselves (Bill, 1987). Early treaty agreements and the Civilization Fund enabled a more voluntary transformation of Native societies than later policies in that tribes enjoyed a degree of authority. For example, before assimilation policies, schools and missions were often founded with tribes' involvement or at their behest. The later assimilation policy advocated by the Friends of the Indians was comprehensive and compulsory (Clarke Historical Library, n.d.-a.).

In 1832, Congress created the commissioner of Indian Affairs position. Early commissioners lauded assimilation efforts. Commissioner L. Lea stated in 1850 that Native people must "resort to agricultural labor or starve." During this period, the government began extensive programs in agriculture and manual training in an attempt to "civilize" Native people (Bill, 1987).

### *Funds Allocated for Schools*

Increases in funding allocations for building school facilities were slow to start. For example, Congress appropriated only \$100,000 in 1870 to start building school facilities. Congress started annual appropriations in 1876 (Bill, 1987), and by 1900, \$3M had been appropriated annually for Native American boarding school education.

Thomas Jefferson Morgan, appointed commissioner of Indian Affairs in 1889, vigorously supported the educational agenda created through the General Allotment Act of 1887, also known as the Dawes Act (General Allotment Act, 1887). The legislation endorsed the Native American boarding school model developed by Richard Henry Pratt at Carlisle into government policy. The General Allotment Act (1887) states:

And if any religious society or other organization is now occupying any of the public lands to which this act is applicable for religious or educational work among the Indians, the Secretary of the Interior is hereby authorized to confirm such occupation to such society or organization, in quantity not exceeding one hundred and sixty acres in any one tract, so long as the same shall be so occupied, on such terms as he shall deem just; but nothing herein contained shall change or alter any claim of such society for religious or educational purposes heretofore granted by law. (General Allotment Act, 1887, § 5)

The same year, John D.C. Atkins, commissioner of Indian Affairs, ordered banning Native languages from being spoken or taught in mission schools. All mission- and government-run schools on reservations were mandated to provide English-only instruction. (U.S. Department of the Interior, Office of Indian Affairs, 1887).

The 1888 Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs stated that the government was supporting 233 Native American schools, of which 126 were boarding and 107 were day schools (Secretary of the Interior, 1888). Of the 126 boarding schools, the BIA directly controlled 74, and 49 were conducted under contract with the government. The commissioner of Indian Affairs initially appointed boarding school employees from nominations made by Indian agents or other superintendents (Secretary of the Interior, 1888). The June 29, 1888, Appropriations Act gave the superintendents greater control to make hiring decisions directly (U.S. House of Representatives, 1889). Another key federal position in boarding school administration was the role of inspector of Indian Schools, which was created by Congress in 1882 (Prucha, 1986; U.S. Department of the Interior, Office of Indian Affairs, 1882).

Upon appointment as commissioner of Indian Affairs in 1889, Morgan announced:

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*When we speak of education of the Indians, we mean that comprehensive system of training and instruction which will convert them into American citizens, put within their reach the blessings which the rest of us enjoy, and enable them to compete successfully with the white man on his own ground and with his own methods. -Thomas Jefferson Morgan, appointed commissioner of Indian Affairs (U.S.*

*Department of the Interior, Office of Indian Affairs, 1898, p. 100).*

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### ***Expansion of More Boarding Schools***

To accomplish his goals, Morgan expanded the number of off-reservation Native American boarding schools from seven to 19. Morgan controlled activities within these schools through a detailed volume of rules. The 1890 *Rules for Indian Schools* explicitly established "preparation of Indian youth for assimilation into the national life" as the schools' overall objective. Over the course of eight years, Morgan assumed that Indians would receive two years of intensive English language training and the equivalent of a sixth-grade education. An 1892 revision of the rules added a ninth year of study and opened the door for kindergarten classes. The revision also specifically included efforts to promote Christianity by including memorization and recitation of the Lord's Prayer and the Beatitudes, the Psalms, and the Ten Commandments in the curriculum.

Although Morgan had created a primary school system, he consistently argued for more advanced courses. Morgan disagreed with the day's popular wisdom regarding the ability of Native Americans to learn. Morgan believed Native Americans were capable of significant intellectual achievement and argued that simply training them to be good farmers was insufficient.

When Native Americans resisted Morgan's program, he responded quickly and harshly. In 1892, he wrote to the Secretary of the Interior, to whom he reported, that while he preferred reasoning with Native American parents, he had also, "wherever it seemed wise, resorted to mild punishment by the withholding of rations or supplies, and, where necessary ... directed agents to use their Indian police as truant officers in compelling attendance." Further explaining himself, Morgan wrote:

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*I do not believe that Indians ... people who, for the most part, speak no English, live in squalor and degradation, make little progress from year to year, who are a perpetual source of expense to the government and a constant menace to thousands of their white neighbors, a hindrance to civilization and a clog on our progress have any right to forcibly keep their children out of school to grow up like themselves, a race of barbarians and semi-savages. -Thomas Jefferson Morgan, appointed*

*commissioner of Indian Affairs (Clarke Historical Library, n.d-a)*

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### ***Lowering Educational Expectations***

In 1901, Estelle Reel, head of Indian education, concluded that her predecessors' efforts had failed in accomplishing the basic goal of assimilation. To achieve this objective, Reel favored vocational education over academics. The goal, in Reel's words, was to make Native Americans "self-supporting as speedily as possible" (Clarke Historical Library, n.d-b, "Vocational Education 1901-1928" section). Reel believed that "literary instruction should be secondary, and industrial training of primary importance in the system of Indian education" (Clarke Historical Library, n.d-b, "Vocational Education 1901-1928" section). The 1901 curriculum, in contrast to those found in versions, did allow for teaching Native American art forms, particularly basket making. The motive for these courses, however, was economic rather than cultural. Reel acknowledged that there was both a practical and collectible market for these products. Thus, basket weaving skills could help Indians become self-supporting (Clarke Historical Library, n.d-b.).

Reel's adoption of a curriculum that lowered expectations for Native American students did not go unchallenged. Former Indian Commissioner Morgan was outraged. In 1902, he wrote:

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*Every child born into the Republic is entitled to claim as his birthright such kind and degree of education as will fit him for good citizenship. The Indian child has a right to demand of the government, which has assumed responsibility for his training, that he shall not be hopelessly handicapped by such an inferior training as from the very beginning dooms him to failure. -Thomas Jefferson Morgan, former commissioner of Indian Affairs (Clarke Historical Library, n.d-b, "Vocational Education 1901-1928" section).*

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Despite criticism, Reel continued in her post until 1910, pursuing with vigor her new curriculum (Clarke Historical Library, n.d-b.). Commissioner of Indian Affairs William Atkinson Jones sent a letter to superintendents of federal reservations and agencies on January 11, 1902, suggesting they force Native men to cut their hair by withholding rations and employment (Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1902). While this BIA order did

not apply to off-reservation boarding schools, the order had been enforced by BIA school personnel.

### *The Meriam Report Findings*

The 1928 *Meriam Report* was a survey of the social and economic conditions of the American Indians conducted by the Brookings Institution and written by Louis Meriam of the University of Chicago (Brookings Institution, 1928). The report criticized the harsh conditions in boarding schools and called for reforms, including improved standards and more humane treatment of Native children. The report influenced subsequent legislation, including the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, and served as a benchmark for evaluating federal Indian education policy.

Two of the report's major findings were that 1) Native people were excluded from the management of their affairs, and 2) Native people were receiving poor quality services (especially health and education) from public officials who were supposed to be serving their needs. The report fell short of calling for the closure of boarding schools because of the remote locations of many tribes that would prevent them from attaining education elsewhere. The report did recommend a change in the BIA curriculum (Brookings Institution, 1928).

The report also attacked the age level of the BIA boarding school children, recommending that boarding schools be reserved for older children and that pre-adolescent children not be enrolled in boarding school. The proper atmosphere or environment for a school was also identified as a community school concept. Another criticism was that the vocational training was outmoded and not realistic to meet the needs of the work world. Trades studied in the curriculum were vanishing in the workplace and were not taught at a sufficient skill level to enable students to gain employment. Even if the training had been adequate, it was not preparing the student for a job located on or near reservations. Training did not encourage the student to return to the reservation, where skills and human resources could be used for the benefit of the Tribe (Brookings Institution, 1928).

Between 1928 and 1968, the U.S. Senate and other federal bodies continued to reference the *Meriam Report* as evidence of systemic failure in Native education. However, later Senate reports were more limited in scope. By the 1950s, Native leadership had become increasingly politically active, recognizing that meaningful change in education would require Tribal control and self-determination.

### *Attempts to Include Native Culture into the Curriculum*

The New Deal period of the 1930s in Indian Country was underscored by the *Meriam Report*. After Franklin Delano Roosevelt was elected president in 1932, John Collier

was selected as commissioner of Indian Affairs. As commissioner, Collier was able to carry out the recommendations made in the *Meriam Report* (Brookings Institution, 1928). He appointed William Beatty (BIA) as director of Education. Beatty was instrumental in establishing a link between schools and student's homes. He attempted to introduce Native culture into the curriculum but was largely unsuccessful after pushback from local schools (Bill, 1987). While the policy on banning Native languages was changed, in practice, bureau personnel continued to dissuade speaking Native languages in practice. Moreover, although some attempts were made to produce bilingual curriculum materials at schools like Haskell Institute in Kansas, books and resources were limited, and teachers frequently lacked familiarity with Indigenous languages (Beatty, 1953).

The Johnson-O'Malley Act passed on April 16, 1934, is an important piece of legislation. The act authorized the Secretary to contract with states or territories for the education, medical attention, agricultural assistance, and social welfare of Indians in the state (Johnson-O'Malley Act, 1934). Funds made available from this act were designed to assist in reducing boarding school enrollment and to place Native students in public schools. The act provided a mechanism to aid public schools in educating Native Americans rather than setting up separate schools (Johnson-O'Malley Act, 1934).

### **A Termination Movement**

In the post-World War II era, a shift in Beatty's educational program reflected the rise of the termination movement. Termination stressed eliminating the reservation system and moving Natives to urban areas. Beatty responded to this idea by encouraging vocational education, which he had earlier discouraged. He believed vocational training would give skills to American Indians that they could use when they left the reservation and moved to urban centers. Despite the policy reforms of John Collier's administration, termination would once again result in Native children being taken away from their homes and placed in off-reservation boarding schools. For example, Navajo children were educated at Chemawa Boarding School in Oregon (far from their Native homelands in what is now Arizona), and Northwest tribes were sent to such schools as Chilocco and Concho boarding schools in Oklahoma.

### **Legislation Related to Native Education**

A broad range of studies, reports, and legislation related to Native education and directed toward improving the American Indian educational system began in the 1960s. Among these were:

- The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of April 11, 1965
- The Economic Opportunity Act of 1965

- A joint study of the Departments of the Interior and Health, Education, and Welfare, 1966
- The Coleman Report of 1966
- Formation of the National Indian Education Advisory Committee, 1966
- Senate Subcommittee on Indian Education, 1967
- Presidential messages of 1968 and 1970
- Havighurst National Study of Indian Education, 1970
- The Indian Education Act of 1972

All of these efforts, coupled with the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and the War on Poverty of the Johnson Administration, acknowledged the need for American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) access to education.

The Economic Opportunity Act of 1965 gave American Indians the opportunity to participate in and control their programs. The act created “Community Action Programs,” which involved 105 reservations in 17 states by the end of the 1960s. The initiative for the design of Native education called the Rough Rock Demonstration School on the Navajo Reservation was headed by the Office of Economic Opportunity. Rough Rock became a symbol of Native participation and control, thereby becoming a forerunner for Native participation in educational decision-making (Bill, 1987, p. 25). One of the architects in the design of the school, Dr. Robert Roessel, outlined the concepts that were to guide Rough Rock’s education process:

- Native people would never give schools their wholehearted support until they were involved significantly as adults in decision-making and given a measure of control.
- English must be taught as a second language to Native children, not regarded as something they could learn through mere exposure.
- The school should be responsible not only for educating Native children but also for assisting in the development of local communities through extensive adult education opportunities and other means.
- The schools should help transmit to the young the cultures of their parents; Tribal elders should be used by schools, for instance, to teach traditional materials (Bill, 1987).

Native education, despite the new directions and forward thrust, was found to be a failure nationally (U.S. Senate Committee, 1969). The Committee on Indian Education, part of the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare of the United States Senate 91st Congress, First Session, issued the landmark 1969 *Kennedy Report* (U.S. Senate Committee, 1969). Initially chaired by Robert Kennedy and later by Senator Edward Kennedy, the committee compiled seven volumes of testimony by educators and other

education experts on the achievement of Native American education. Their conclusion was an indictment of American Indian education in the United States (U.S. Senate Committee, 1969). The report further concluded that the land policy of the 1887 General Allotment Act:

Was directly related to the government's Indian education policy because proceeds from the destruction of the Indian land base were used to pay the costs of taking Indian children from their homes and placing them in federal boarding schools—a system designed to dissolve the Indian social structure. (U.S. Senate Committee, 1969, p. 12)

Between 1928 and 1968, the U.S. Senate and other federal bodies continued to reference the *Meriam Report* as evidence of systemic failure in Native education. However, later Senate reports were more limited in scope. By the 1950s, Native leadership had become increasingly politically active, recognizing that meaningful change in education would require Tribal control and self-determination. The last Native American off-reservation industrial boarding school in the U.S. closed its doors in the late 20th century. The specific closure date varied across different institutions, but most closed during the 1970s and 1980s, while some remained open longer. For example, the Fort Sill Indian School in Oklahoma, which operated from 1871, closed in 1980, while the Phoenix Indian School in Arizona shut down in 1990. These closures marked the end of an era of federally enforced assimilation through education, though the legacy of trauma and cultural disruption remains.

The history of Native education in Michigan is unique, compared to other states, because it is the only instance where the federal government has entered into an agreement whereby the state has accepted full responsibility for providing for Native education without further cost to the federal government (Comstock, 1934). Like tribes in other states, Michigan tribes retain those aspects of sovereignty, including the education of Tribal citizens, which have not been abrogated by treaty or an act of Congress. Although the State of Michigan is legally obligated to provide Indian education within the state, it has never provided any education services specific to the obligations set forth by the treaties other than the Michigan Indian Tuition Waiver (Reinhardt, 1998). Since 1972, the federal government has reintroduced federal Indian education programs within the State of Michigan.

There are at least 149 treaties between the United States and Tribal nations containing specific educational provisions (Reinhardt, 2015). Depending on how treaty terms are interpreted, it could be argued that there are even more. Out of the 149 treaties, 29 include the Anishinaabe Three Fires Confederacy collectively or individually (Reinhardt, 2015), and at least 20 are relevant to tribes currently within the geographical borders of Michigan (Reinhardt 2004, 2015).

### **Indian Trust Monies and the DOI**

Native American boarding schools were funded through several sources, including proceeds from the cession of Native land through treaties (Newland, 2022). In addition, the DOI used the monies of individual Native Americans held in trust (when they deemed the individuals not capable of managing their own money) to fund the Indian boarding schools. In fact, between 1845 and 1855, 95% of the cost of the federal Indian boarding school system was paid for through individual Indian trust funds (Newland, 2022).

This misuse of Indian trust fund monies has continued to contemporary times as evidenced by the *Cobell v. Salazar* (2009) case—a class action lawsuit claiming that the government failed to manage Indian trusts properly. The case claimed that the federal government had collected “billions of dollars from farming and grazing leases, timber sales, oil, and gas production on Indian lands, which was supposed to have been dispersed to the Indian owner” (Native American Rights Fund, n.d., “FAQ From Indian Trust Beneficiaries” section, “How much money are we talking about?” paragraph.). However, the government kept no record of such disbursement. In response to this lawsuit, the federal government agreed to a \$3.4 billion settlement.

In the early 20th century, in South Dakota, the Sioux sued Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Francis E. Leupp, aiming to stop the payments from their Indian Trust account to the Catholic Indian Bureau to fund Catholic schools on the Rosebud Reservation. They argued that the payments illegally depleted their trust funds and were in violation of the Indian Appropriations Acts (Vile, 2024). The U.S. Supreme Court ruled against the Sioux in *Quick Bear v. Leupp*, 210 U.S. 50 (1908), stating that the payments to the Catholic Indian Bureau were not in violation of the Indian Appropriations Acts and because, although public funds could not be used for religious education, Sioux trust funds were not public funds (*Quick Bear v. Leupp*, 1908).

### **Treaties in Michigan with Educational Provisions**

Monetary and non-monetary provisions for education are included within the corpus of treaties between the United States and Anishinaabe tribes (Reinhardt, 2004). The 12 Anishinaabe treaties that include schools, with the associated educational provisions, are listed in the next section. As noted, these provisions include the provision of schools and education for payment for land cessions, provisions for agricultural and blacksmith training, funding that can be used for schools, and funding that must be used for schools and education. It should be noted that after 1849, when Indian Affairs was transferred from the Department of War to the DOI (Newland, 2022), the educational provisions in treaties were more detailed, elaborate, and prescriptive.

The treaties demonstrate a more pronounced focus on Indian education and reflect the national emphasis on providing targeted education to Native American children to support the transition of Indian people to a self-sustaining agricultural lifestyle that required less land (U.S. Senate Committee, 1969). The language in these treaties also reflects the continued so-called spiritual nature of education as an instrument of religious conversion and instruction and the administration of education by missionaries (Shelton et al., 2019). The following treaty information, including educational provisions, was obtained from the *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties* database maintained by the Oklahoma State University Libraries:

- Treaty with the Chippewa (1826)
- Treaty with the Ottawa, Etc. (1836)
- Treaty with the Chippewa (St. Peters) (1837)
- Treaty with the Chippewa (1842)
- Treaty with the Chippewa of the Mississippi and Lake Superior (1847)
- Treaty with the Chippewa (1854)
- Treaty with the Chippewa, Etc. (1859)
- Treaty with the Ottawa of Blanchard's Fork and Roche de Boeuf (1862)
- Treaty with the Chippewa of Saginaw, Swan Creek, and Black River (1864)
- Treaty with the Chippewa-Bois Fort Band (1866)
- Treaty with the Chippewa of the Mississippi (1867)
- Treaty with the Seneca, Mixed Seneca, Shawnee, Quapaw, Etc. (1867) (Kappler, n.d.)

The next section includes descriptions (with language taken directly from the original treaty) of each treaty's educational stipulations.

#### *Treaty with the Chippewa, 1826*

With a view to the improvement of Indian youths, it is also agreed that \$1,000 shall be appropriated annually to support an establishment for their education, to be located on some part of the St. Mary's River, and the money to be expended under the direction of the president. For the accommodation of such a school, a section of land is hereby granted.

#### *Treaty with the Ottawa, Etc. 1836*

In consideration of the foregoing cessions, the United States engaged to pay the Ottawa and Chippewa nations the following sums, namely ... \$5,000 per annum for the purpose of education, teachers, schoolhouses, and books in their own language, to be continued for 20 years and as long thereafter as Congress may appropriate. It is also agreed to support two farmers and assistants and two

mechanics, as the president may designate, to teach and aid the Indians in agriculture and the mechanic arts.

*Treaty with the Chippewa (St. Peters), 1837*

The provisions and tobacco to be delivered simultaneously with the goods and the money to be paid, which time or times, as well as the place or places where they are to be delivered, shall be fixed under the direction of the president of the United States ... if, at the expiration of one or more years, the Indians should prefer to receive goods instead of the \$9,000 agreed to be paid to them in money, they shall be at liberty to do so. Or should they conclude to appropriate a portion of that annuity to the establishment and support of a school or schools among them, this shall be granted to them.

*Treaty with the Chippewa, 1842*

In consideration of the foregoing cession, the United States engages to pay the Chippewa Indians of the Mississippi and Lake Superior annually \$2,000 for the support of schools for the Indians party to this treaty.

*Treaty with the Chippewa of the Mississippi and Lake Superior, 1847*

It is agreed that whenever the Chippewas of the Mississippi shall agree as to the schools to be established, and the places at which they shall be located, the number of blacksmiths and laborers to be employed for them, and shall request the United States to expend, from year to year, the annual payments remaining unpaid, in support of schools, blacksmiths, and laborers, the same shall be expended by the United States for such purposes; and that Chippewas of full or mixed blood shall be employed as teachers, blacksmiths, and laborers when such persons can be employed who are competent to perform the duties required of them under this and all former treaties.

*Treaty with the Chippewa, 1854*

In consideration of and payment for the country hereby ceded, the United States agrees to pay to the Chippewas of Lake Superior, annually, for 20 years, the following: \$3,000 for moral and educational purposes, of which last sum, \$300 per annum shall be paid to the Grand Portage Band, to enable them to maintain a school at their village.

*Treaty with the Chippewa, Etc. 1859*

At a suitable point within the said reservation, there shall be set apart for the establishment of a manual-labor school and educational and missionary purposes a quarter section of land, or 160 acres. The land so set apart, together

with the tracts which may be assigned to the members of said united bands, shall be in as regular and compact a body as possible and so as to admit of a distinct and well-defined exterior boundary, embracing the whole of them, and also any intermediate portions or parcels of land or water not included in or made part of the tracts assigned in severalty.

For the purpose of comfortably establishing the Christian Indians upon the lands which shall be assigned to them in severalty ... a sum not exceeding \$23,000 ... \$2,000 thereof shall be expended for the benefit of said united bands of Indians, in providing them with a schoolhouse, church building, and blacksmith shop, and necessary fixtures, and the residue of said joint fund, after deducting therefrom all the expenses incident to the negotiation of this treaty, the survey and assignment of the lands, the concentration of the Indians thereon, and all other necessary expenses, shall be invested in safe and profitable stocks, yielding an interest of not less than five per centum per annum; and said interest, as it becomes due, shall be applied, under the direction of the Secretary of the Interior, from time to time, for educational purposes, for the support of a blacksmith-shop, and such other beneficial objects as he may adjudge to be necessary and expedient for the general prosperity and advancement of the aforesaid bands of Indians in the arts of civilized life.

#### *Treaty with the Ottawa of Blanchard's Fork and Roche de Boeuf, 1862*

The Ottawa deemed this a favorable opportunity to provide for the education of their posterity, and feeling that they are able to do so by the cooperation of the United States, now, in pursuance of this desire of the Ottawa, after the selections and allotments herein provided have been made, there shall be set apart, under the direction of the Secretary of the Interior, 20,000 acres of average lands for the purpose of endowing a school for the benefit of said Ottawa; also one section of land, upon which said school shall be located, which section of land shall be inalienable, and upon which, and all the appurtenances and property for school purposes thereon, no tax shall ever be laid by any authority whatever.

Five thousand acres of said land may be sold by the trustees hereinafter named, the proceeds of which may be devoted to the erection of proper buildings and improvements upon said section for the reception of the pupils, and the residue of the school lands may, in like manner, be sold from time to time, as full prices can be obtained for the same. The money received, therefor, shall be loaned upon good real estate security to be improved farms in the county of the reservation, the same not to be a security for more than half the appraised value of the land as returned by the county assessor, and no land to be taken as security for such loan or loans which shall be encumbered in any manner, or the

title to which shall have been derived from or held by any judicial, administrator, or executor's sale, or by the sale of any person acting in a fiduciary capacity.

The security shall never be avoided on account of any rate of interest reserved, and the interest only shall be applied to the support of the school so that the principal sum shall never be diminished.

And to the end that the Ottawa may derive the greatest advantage from said school, the pupils shall be instructed and practiced in industrial pursuits suitable to their age and sex, as well as in such branches of learning as the means of the institution and the capacity of the pupils will permit.

And it is hereby expressly provided and agreed that the children of the Ottawa and their descendants, no matter where they may emigrate, shall have the right to enter said school and enjoy all the privileges thereof, the same as though they had remained upon the lands by this treaty allotted.

*Treaty with the Chippewa of Saginaw, Swan Creek, and Black River, 1864*

So soon as practicable after the ratification of this treaty, the agent for the said Indians shall make out a list of all those persons who have heretofore made selections of lands under the treaty of August 2, 1855, aforesaid, and of those who may be entitled to selections under the provisions of this treaty, and he shall divide the persons enumerated in said list into two classes, viz: "competent" and "those not so competent."

Those who are intelligent, and have sufficient education, and are qualified by business habits to prudently manage their affairs shall be set down as "competents," and those who are uneducated, or unqualified in other respects to prudently manage their affairs, or who are of idle, wandering, or dissolute habits, and all orphans, shall be set down as "those not so competent."

The United States agrees to issue patents to all persons entitled to selections under this treaty, as follows, viz: To those belonging to the class denominated "competents," patents shall be issued in fee simple, but to those belonging to the class of "those not so competent," the patent shall contain a provision that the land shall never be sold or alienated to any person or persons whomsoever, without the consent of the Secretary of the Interior for the time being.

The United States agrees to expend the sum of \$20,000 for the support and maintenance of a manual-labor school upon said reservation provided that the Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church shall, within three years after the ratification of this treaty, at its own expense, erect suitable buildings for school and boarding house purposes, of a value of not less than \$3,000, upon

the southeast quarter of section nine, township fourteen north, of range four west, which is hereby set apart for that purpose.

The superintendent of public instruction, the lieutenant governor of the State of Michigan, and one person to be designated by said missionary society shall constitute a board of visitors, whose duty it shall be to visit said school once during each year and examine the same and investigate the character and qualifications of its teachers and all other persons connected therewith, and report thereon to the commissioner of Indian Affairs.

The said Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church shall have full and undisputed control of the management of said school and the farm attached thereto. Upon the approval and acceptance of the school and boarding-house buildings by the board of visitors, the United States will pay to the authorized agent of said missionary society for the support and maintenance of the school the sum of \$2,000 and a like sum annually thereafter, until the whole sum of \$20,000 shall have been expended.

The United States reserves the right to suspend the annual appropriation of \$2,000 for said school, in part or in whole, whenever it shall appear that said missionary society neglects or fails to manage the affairs of said school and farm in a manner acceptable to the board of visitors aforesaid; and if, at any time within a period of 10 years after the establishment of said school, said missionary society shall abandon said school or farm for the purposes intended in this treaty, then, and in such case, said society shall forfeit all of its rights in the lands, buildings, and franchises under this treaty, and it shall then be competent for the Secretary of the Interior to sell or dispose of the land hereinbefore designated, together with the buildings and improvements thereon and expend the proceeds of the same for the educational interests of the Indians in such manner as he may deem advisable.

At the expiration of 10 years after the establishment of said school, if said missionary society shall have conducted said school and farm in a manner acceptable to the board of visitors during said 10 years, the United States will convey to said society the land before mentioned by patent in trust for the benefit of said Indians.

In case said missionary society shall fail to accept the trust herein named within one year after the ratification of this treaty, then, and in that case, the said \$20,000 shall be placed to the credit of the educational fund of said Indians, to be expended for their benefit in such manner as the Secretary of the Interior may deem advisable.

It is understood and agreed that said missionary society may use the schoolhouse now standing upon land adjacent to the land hereinbefore set apart for a school farm, where it now stands, or move it upon the land so set apart.

*Treaty with the Chippewa-Bois Fort Band, 1866*

In consideration of the foregoing cession and relinquishment, the United States agrees to and will perform the stipulations, undertakings, and agreements following, that is to say: The United States will, as soon as practicable after the setting a part of the tract of country first above mentioned, erect thereon, without expense to said Indians ... one schoolhouse, to cost not exceeding \$500; and, the United States will expend annually for and in behalf of said Bois Forte band of Chippewas, for and during the term of 20 years from and after the ratification of this treaty, the several sums and for the purposes following, to wit: for one school-teacher, and the necessary books and stationery for the school, \$800, the chiefs in council to have the privilege of selecting, with the approval of the Secretary of the Interior, the religious denomination to which the said teacher shall belong; for instructions of the said Indians in farming, and the purchase of seeds, tools, and, for that purpose, \$800.

*Treaty with the Chippewa of the Mississippi, 1867*

In further consideration for the lands herein ceded, estimated to contain about 2M acres, the United States agrees to pay the following sums, to wit: \$5,000 for the erection of school buildings upon the reservation provided for in the second article; \$4,000 each year for 10 years, and as long as the president may deem necessary after the ratification of this treaty, for the support of a school or schools upon said reservation, \$6,000 each year for 10 years, and as long thereafter as the president may deem proper, to be expended in promoting the progress of the people in agriculture and assisting them to become self-sustaining by giving aid to those who will labor.

*Treaty with the Seneca, Mixed Seneca and Shawnee, Quapaw, Etc., 1867*

Of the amount to be paid to the Quapaw for the lands ceded by them in the fourth article of this treaty, the sum of \$5,000 shall be paid to them upon the ratification of this treaty to assist them in re-establishing themselves at their homes upon their remaining reservation; and the balance of said amount shall be invested as a permanent fund at five percent interest, payable per capita, semi-annually.

If the Osage mission school should be closed so that the school fund of the Quapaw cannot be used for them to advantage at that institution, the said fund shall remain in the Treasury of the United States until such time as it can, under

the direction of the Secretary of the Interior, with the consent of the chiefs, be used to advantage in establishing a school upon their reservation.

The children of the tribe between the ages of six and 18 shall be entitled to be received at said institution and to be subsisted, clothed, educated, and attended in sickness, where the sickness is of such a nature that the patient promises a return to study within a reasonable period; the children to be taught and practiced in industrial pursuits, suitable to their age and sex, and both sexes in such branches of learning, and to receive such advantages as the means of the institution will permit; these rights and privileges to continue so long as any children of the tribe shall present themselves for their exercise. And the Secretary of the Interior and the senior corresponding secretary of the American Baptist Home Mission Society shall be members ex officio of the board of trustees, with power to vote in person or by proxy, it being the special intention of this provision to furnish additional supervision of the institution, so that the provisions of this article may be carried into effect in their full spirit and intent.

### **Michigan Native American Boarding Schools Created from Treaties**

All Native American boarding schools in Michigan that received federal government support were connected to treaty-based educational obligations. The nature of this relationship varied depending on the specific school. Therefore, the precise link between treaties and each Native American boarding school in Michigan requires further investigation to determine whether the schools were day schools, boarding schools, or both. As a starting point, Table 2 provides a summary of the current understanding of how these schools relate to treaties, either explicitly including schools or implying general support for education, along with notes on areas requiring additional study. Included in the summary are the Catholic Indian School in Detroit, the Sugar Island Day School, Bradley Mission, Neppessing Day School, Longwood Day School, and likely schools located in or near Keweenaw Bay Indian Community and Lac Vieux Desert Band.

**Table 2. Treaties linked to Michigan Indian boarding schools**

Treaty	Linked Michigan Schools	Further Study Required
Treaty with the Wyandot, Etc., 1817	Catholic Indian School in Detroit	Determine whether the school was also a boarding school.
Treaty with the Ottawa, Etc., 1821	Unknown	Determine which school this treaty may be linked to and whether it was a boarding school.
Treaty with the Chippewa, 1826	Sugar Island Day School	Determine whether the school was also a boarding school.

Treaty	Linked Michigan Schools	Further Study Required
Treaty with the Potawatomi, 1826	Unknown	An accounting of the expenses from the educational fund established by this treaty may reveal that the funding was used to support one or more schools.
Treaty with the Chippewa, Etc., 1827	Unknown	Determine if these funds were used to support Native American schools.
Treaty with the Potawatomi, 1828	Unknown	Determine if these funds were used to support Native American schools.
Treaty with the Chippewa, Etc., 1833	Unknown	Determine how this one-time cash payment was invested and how the funds were used.
Treaty with the Ottawa, Etc., 1836	Unknown	Determine which schools were established and or supported by this treaty.
Treaty with the Chippewa (Detroit), 1837	Unknown	Determine how the funds were used and if any amount was used to support Indian schools in Michigan.
Treaty with the Chippewa (St. Peters), 1837	Unknown	Determine if the funds from this treaty were ever used to support a school(s).
Treaty with the Chippewa, 1842	Likely schools located in or near Keweenaw Bay Indian Community and Lac Vieux Desert Band	Determine which schools were established and supported by these treaty funds.
Treaty with the Potawatomi Nation, 1846	Unknown	Clarify how the funds were used and which schools were supported.
Treaty with the Ottawa and Chippewa, 1855	Although it is unclear which schools were established or supported by this treaty, it is evident that they were in Michigan, as the treaty was made with the "Ottawa and Chippewa Indians of Michigan, parties to the treaty of March 28, 1836" (Kappler, n.d., p. 727).	Determine schools established or supported by this treaty, as well as the entanglement of the United States with churches.
Treaty with the Chippewa of Saginaw, Etc., 1855	Neppessing Day School, Longwood Day School	Identify the names of the schools located at Jordan and Isabella, Jordan and Lincoln, and Nottawa Township.
Treaty with the Chippewa of Saginaw,	Bradley Mission	Determine the extent of support actually provided.

Treaty	Linked Michigan Schools	Further Study Required
Swan Creek, and Black River, 1864		

## Conclusion

A preliminary assessment of Native American boarding school history in Michigan is essential due to the profound losses of identity, family, and culture that Native American communities have endured across generations. The MiNABS study is a preliminary examination of how the Native American boarding school system was implemented in Michigan, focusing on five key sites and extending to broader contexts, such as the conditions, experiences, and operations of these schools, including the state's role, enrollment processes, and financial mechanisms.

This study aims to understand the history and ongoing impact of boarding schools in Michigan on Native American children and families. Another goal of the study is to foster collaboration with tribes to advance healing and reconciliation for survivors and their descendants. This essential work will reveal the tragic legacy of MiNABS and its continued impact on Native American families, guiding efforts toward healing and reconciliation.

The history of Native American boarding schools in Michigan is deeply enmeshed within the broader colonial policies of the United States. There were 18 treaties conducted between the U.S. government and Michigan tribes that established provisions for education for Native American children in and around the state. Despite the treaties that promised education, the boarding schools ultimately served as a mechanism of colonization, with the explicit goal of assimilating Native children into Euro-American society, often through coercion and force.

The 12 treaties about educational provisions for the Anishinaabek remind us of the complexities of the history of colonization. The provisions promised schools and vocational training in exchange for land cessions; however, they also laid the foundation for a system prioritizing assimilation over education. The Native American boarding school experience in Michigan is unique, as it was the only instance where the federal government entered into an agreement whereby the state accepted full responsibility for providing Native education without further cost to the federal government. Despite these arrangements, Michigan tribes, like others across the country, retained aspects of sovereignty, including the education of their citizens.

Throughout the era of colonization, countless incidents of trauma were inflicted upon Native American Peoples. The intergenerational trauma caused by U.S. and Canadian

Native American boarding schools continue to cause suffering in Native communities. It is essential to acknowledge that boarding schools are intended to steal children's cultural identity and sever their ties to language, traditions, and family. During their formative early childhood years, many Native American children were forcibly removed from their parents and relatives—the very individuals who would have shaped their personal and cultural identities.

The schooling provided at the boarding schools was minimal, often focusing more on manual labor than academic learning, and designed to benefit those in power. The lack of government funding led schools to exploit child labor, contributing to poor conditions and widespread abuse, both physical and sexual, that caused lasting harm to many students—harm that followed students home and still resonates in their communities.

Tragically, many children never returned home from Native American boarding schools in Michigan, leaving their families with profound and unresolved grief. The intergenerational trauma caused by Native American boarding schools in Michigan has resulted in poor public health outcomes, including substance use disorders, suicidality, and domestic violence.

The Native American boarding school policy represents a devastating phase of the colonization process inflicted upon Native American children and their families. Although the colonizers did not fully succeed in their mission to "kill the Indian and save the man," the impact of the Native American boarding schools continues to reverberate through Native communities. Understanding this history is crucial for acknowledging the profound suffering endured and guiding ongoing efforts toward healing and reconciliation.

This landscape analysis of Native American boarding school history within Michigan has revealed significant insights, yet several gaps remain. To clarify the roles of federal and state governments, researchers need to further study several key areas related to federally funded and operated Native American boarding schools in Michigan. First, researchers should investigate the connections between schools guaranteed by treaties and those that were established, including both government-run and government-supported boarding schools. Additionally, the history of private Native American schools in Detroit that received federal funding should be explored in greater detail to understand the government's involvement with private schools. Finally, a deeper analysis of financial support mechanisms is necessary to determine the extent and impact of federal and state government contributions to these schools.

Additional gaps include exploring the relationship between day schools and the boarding schools established to explore differences and similarities in how the schools were created and organized and students' experiences. Furthermore, researchers need

to investigate the exact opening dates of some boarding schools for a better historical context. Addressing these gaps will help generate a comprehensive understanding and advance efforts toward healing and reconciliation.

## **MiNABS Study Findings**

### **Introduction**

Building on the national context of Native American boarding school history and its enduring impacts, this study turns its focus to the State of Michigan, where the legacy of these institutions remains deeply embedded in Tribal communities. The Michigan Native American Boarding School (MiNABS) Study, initiated by the Michigan Department of Civil Rights (MDCR), is a preliminary landscape analysis that examines how the boarding school system was implemented across the state, with particular focus on eight key sites (Assinins Orphanage, Baraga Chippewa Boarding and Day School, Catholic Otchippewa Boarding School, Holy Childhood of Jesus School, Holy Family Orphanage, Mackinac Mission School, Mount Pleasant Indian Industrial Boarding School, and New Mission House). This state-specific inquiry seeks to understand the unique historical, legal, and operational dimensions of Michigan's boarding schools, including the roles of federal and state governments, enrollment processes, and financial mechanisms.

Michigan's boarding school history is distinct in several ways. Notably, it is the only state where the federal government entered into an agreement that transferred full responsibility for Native education to the state without further federal cost. This arrangement, while framed as a fulfillment of treaty obligations, ultimately facilitated the expansion of assimilationist policies under state control. Despite these agreements, Michigan tribes retained inherent sovereignty, including the right to educate their citizens and preserve cultural knowledge.

The MiNABS study is grounded in collaboration with Tribal communities and guided by principles of data sovereignty, cultural accountability, and truth-telling. It seeks to document the conditions and experiences of Native children in Michigan's boarding schools, while also identifying gaps in historical records and policy analysis. These include the relationship between day schools and boarding schools, the role of private institutions receiving federal support, and the financial structures that sustained these systems.

This research is not only historical—it is healing centered. By illuminating the specific ways in which boarding schools operated in Michigan, and the lasting harm they caused, this MiNABS study may serve as a contribution to broader efforts of

reconciliation, justice, and cultural restoration. The following section outlines the methodological approach used to conduct this study in partnership with Tribal nations and community partners.

## Objectives

This study was originally commissioned to examine governmental involvement in the Native American boarding school system in Michigan as well as the historical impact on Native Peoples. The initial research questions guiding the effort were:

**Question 1:** What was the impact of the Native American boarding schools in Michigan?

**Question 2:** What was the role of the State of Michigan in the federal and church-contracted Native American boarding school system?

Following the development of the Study Plan and in close collaboration with the Tribal Advisory Group (TAG), the scope of the study was significantly modified. At the time of this change, the original study had already been conducted. The revised objectives shifted the focus from historical analysis to a more community-centered, healing-informed approach. This change required a recontextualization of the study findings to align with the new priorities, which emphasized lived experiences, intergenerational impact, and actionable insights for policy and practice.

## Revised Study Objectives

### Objective 1: Collect the Stories of Survivors and Descendants

To inform curriculum development, legislative action, and service delivery, the study sought to elevate the voices of Survivors and Descendants of Michigan Native American boarding schools. Key questions included:

- How do the stories of Survivors and their Descendants illustrate their experiences within the Michigan Native American boarding schools?
- How can these narratives be used to improve K-12 curricula?
- How can they inform post-secondary education in fields such as law enforcement, behavioral health, medical, and legal programs?
- How can Survivor and Descendant narratives guide legislative initiatives and healing-centered practices within human services departments?
- How can these stories contribute to broader reconciliation efforts, including formal apologies, acknowledgements, and the allocation of federal or state funds to support healing (e.g., counseling for Native communities in Michigan and for Survivors and Descendants wherever they reside)?

### **Objective 2: Understand Community Perceptions**

This objective focused on understanding how Michigan Native communities perceive the boarding school experience and its legacy:

- What historical significance and lasting impact do Michigan Native American boarding schools have on Native communities?
- To what extent do generational differences influence the understanding of these impacts within Native communities in Michigan and among Survivors and Descendants?

### **Objective 3: Assess Contemporary Impact**

The study also explored the ongoing effects of the boarding school legacy on Michigan Native communities:

- How does this legacy continue to influence health, behavioral outcomes, economic conditions, and educational attainment?
- How do individual perspectives intersect with broader discussions about cultural preservation, language revitalization, and the need to address intergenerational trauma?
- How do the intergenerational effects of boarding schools continue to shape the lived experiences of affected communities?

### **Conclusion**

The shift in study objectives from a historical and governmental analysis to a community-driven, healing-centered inquiry reflects a meaningful evolution in the priorities of the Tribal Advisory Group and the State of Michigan. While the original study provided foundational insights, the revised objectives allowed for a reframing toward reporting findings as not only historically informative but also responsive to the needs of Native communities today and into the future. The study Request for Proposals is located in Appendix A.

Table 3 lists the tasks requested by the Michigan Legislature, followed by a delineation of those addressed by the study. Most, but not all requests of the Legislature, due to time and resource constraints were addressed.

**Table 3. Michigan legislature tasks and status**

Legislative Task	Status	Notes
1. Determine the number of Native American children forced to attend boarding schools in	Not Addressed	Incomplete or inaccessible

Michigan, and the number who were abused, died, or went missing.		records; significant archival and testimonial gaps.
2. Document the long-term impacts on Native American children and their families.	Addressed	Addressed through surveys, truth sharing, talking circles, and qualitative analysis.
3. Locate, analyze, and preserve records in coordination with the federal Indian Boarding School Initiative.	Addressed	Preliminary archival review conducted; full coordination and preservation work requires more support.
4. Interview Survivors, family members, and a cross-section of Tribal representatives and experts to understand impacts of Native child removal policies.	Addressed	Completed through questionnaires, interviews, and multiple consultations and talking circles.
5. Provide a final report with findings and recommendations to be shared with the public and the State of Michigan.	Addressed	This report fulfills that requirement.

## Methods

### Approach

A participatory Indigenous research approach was used to respect oral traditions, Tribal sovereignty, and healing-centered engagement. Community members were invited to shape the study design, data collection, and recommendations. To honor the knowledge shared, the Anishinaabemowin terms *Dibaajimod* (“one who tells a story”) and *Dibaajimodag* (multiple storytellers) are used throughout.

A Tribal Advisory Group (TAG) was established at the outset, composed of seven members including Tribal leaders, boarding school experts, and specialists in repatriation, trauma, and behavioral health. The TAG met nine times, guiding the study design, reviewing tools, and shaping data collection and analysis. Meetings were structured with agendas, notes, and decision matrices. The Study Plan developed and approved by the TAG is located in Appendix E.

Two formal Tribal consultations were held, one prior to data collection and for the purpose of reviewing the final report. These in-person, hybrid sessions provided critical feedback and led to a significant shift in study orientation and then reporting. Tribal representatives requested confirmation of consent and participation and

emphasized the need for a healing-centered approach. MDCR facilitated the sessions and guided changes aligned with Tribal priorities.

Due to the absence of Tribal Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) in Michigan, ethical oversight was provided through Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), Memorandum of Agreement (MOA), and Tribal resolutions. Most Tribes opted for the latter while two Tribes signed an MOU or MOA. All but one federally recognized Tribe in Michigan agreed to participate.

### **Data Collection Summary**

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the legacy and ongoing impacts of Native American boarding schools in Michigan, a multimethod data collection approach was employed. This included all activities outlined in Table 4. Guided by the TAG, these efforts were designed to promote trust, healing, and respectful engagement while honoring the lived experiences of Dibaajimodag.

**Table 4. Data collection methods**

<b>Data Collection Method</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Purpose/Indigenous Research Alignment</b>
Tribal Consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Two formal hybrid sessions were held—one before data collection to obtain feedback on the study plan, and one to obtain feedback on the final report.</li> <li>Tribal consultations ensured Tribal leadership involvement, promoted transparency, and honored government-to-government engagement.</li> </ul>	Ensured Tribal leadership involvement, transparency, and government-to-government engagement. Guided healing-centered shift in study orientation.
Tribal Advisory Group (TAG)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A seven-member group of advisors convened nine times during the study to guide study design, review tools, and provide feedback on emerging findings.</li> <li>Each meeting lasted up to 90 minutes and included structured agendas, summary notes, and a decision/action tracking matrix.</li> <li>From January to August 2025, KAI was instructed to pause engagement with the TAG, while the contract was being reviewed.</li> </ul>	Centered Tribal expertise and sovereignty. Ensured community-led decision-making and relational accountability.
Key Informant Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Three key informant interviews were conducted to obtain insights</li> </ul>	Informed study focus and coding categories. Elevated lived experience

Data Collection Method	Description	Purpose/Indigenous Research Alignment
	<p>regarding data collection and dissemination.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• These interviews informed the questionnaire and the survivor truths interview guide.</li> <li>• Persons in the following positions were interviewed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Little Traverse Bay Tribe Chairperson</li> <li>◦ National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition</li> <li>◦ Oral History Program Co-Director</li> <li>◦ Bay Mills Indian Community Elder</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	and emphasized truth-telling as a path to healing.
Talking Circles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Three community engagement sessions (talking circles) were held across Michigan in Baraga, Harbor Springs, and Novi to gather input from Survivors and Descendants on study priorities and the use of findings, fostering ownership and community direction.</li> <li>• A fourth talking circle was canceled due to withdrawn participation.</li> <li>• On average, the talking circles were attended by 15–25 Dibaajimodag and lasted for over an hour. Fieldnotes were taken, but the sessions were not recorded.</li> <li>• Trauma-informed resources and cultural support were offered at each event.</li> </ul>	Fostered community ownership, relational accountability, and trauma-informed engagement. Honored oral traditions and prioritized participant safety and autonomy.
Boarding School Survivor & Descendant Questionnaires	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two surveys gathered categorical and open-ended responses about the boarding school experience from Dibaajimodag, each survey designed to capture the experience of survivors and their descendants.</li> </ul>	Enabled broad participation and community voice. Supported data sovereignty and honored lived experience through mixed-methods design.
Survivor and Descendant Truth Sharing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• With informed consent, Survivors and Descendants voluntarily shared their stories through audio or video recorded interviews.</li> <li>• This process supported community resilience and the sharing of lived experiences through oral storytelling.</li> </ul>	Honored oral tradition and truth-telling. Supported healing, intergenerational knowledge transfer, and cultural continuity.

Data Collection Method	Description	Purpose/Indigenous Research Alignment
Archival Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sessions generally lasted 45 to 90 minutes.</li> <li>A targeted review of Tribal, church, and federal records examined Michigan's historical involvement in the boarding school system.</li> <li>Records accessed from multiple repositories.</li> <li>Research questions focused on Michigan's role and the verifiability of claims given archival gaps.</li> <li>All documents collected were provided to the State.</li> </ul>	Reclaimed historical narrative and addressed archival erasure. Supported Indigenous data sovereignty and accountability to truth.

The Boarding School Survivor Questionnaire can be found in Appendix F. The Descendant Questionnaire can be found in Appendix G. In addition, the interview instrument and protocol were used to facilitate Survivor and Descendant truth sharing is included in Appendix H.

### **Eligibility and Recruitment**

#### *Boarding School Survivor Questionnaire*

Dibaajimodag included individuals and families of those with lived experiences in Michigan Native American boarding schools. KAI worked with Tribal nations to identify and promote the questionnaire in their respective Tribal networks to achieve a robust sample. KAI also worked closely with the MDCR point of contact to develop and administer a communication campaign to obtain a representative sample across the state. This included dissemination on Tribal websites, and creation of culturally appropriate talking points about the questionnaire and the project. Hard copies of the questionnaire were made available through designated Tribal points of contact. These included self-addressed, stamped envelopes for returning the complete questionnaires to KAI. An “opt-in conversation” option supported Dibaajimodag who were uncomfortable completing or unable to complete the questionnaire online or on paper.

### **Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for the Online Boarding School Questionnaires**

To ensure the study focused on Survivors and Descendants or Other Impacted Individuals of Michigan Native American boarding schools, inclusion and exclusion criteria were established for two online questionnaires; the Michigan Native

American boarding school Survivors questionnaire and another for Descendants or Other Impacted Individuals. These criteria were developed to identify eligible Dibaajimodag based on several areas, including minimum age requirement, Michigan Native American community affiliation, self-identification as a Survivor or Descendant or Other Impacted Individual. Those who did not provide informed consent were excluded from participation. Below are lists of the inclusion and exclusion criteria for each questionnaire.

### **Inclusion Criteria**

- At least 18 years old.
- From a Michigan Native community.
- Self-identifies as a Survivor, Descendant, or Other Impacted Individual of the Michigan Native American boarding schools or another Native American boarding school outside of Michigan.
- Has access to reliable internet connection (via computer, tablet, or smart phone) to complete the questionnaire.
- Willing and able to spend approximately 30 minutes completing the survey.
- Reviews and agrees to an informed consent prior to beginning the questionnaire.

### **Exclusion Criteria**

- Under the age of 18 years.
- Not from a Michigan Native community.
- Does not self-identify as either a Survivor or Descendant of a Michigan Native American boarding school or another Native American boarding school outside of Michigan.
- Does not provide informed consent.

### ***Survivor Truths***

The purpose of the Survivor truth sharing is to honor the lived experience of the Survivors (and their Descendants) of Michigan Native American boarding schools. Survivors' truths, recorded with consent, were used to create video archives and amplify the voices of those impacted by Native American boarding schools. Additionally, the truths were analyzed to understand themes, address study objectives, and inform recommendations for reparations and healing.

Dibaajimodag included individuals and families of those with lived experiences regarding Michigan Native American boarding schools who were comfortable having their stories audio or video recorded to become a part of the archival record. Recruitment for Survivor truth sharing was primarily through snowball sampling

techniques. For instance, attendees of talking circles and Dibaajimodag who received the boarding school Survivor questionnaire had the option to connect with a KAI facilitator for an in-person truth sharing session or via Zoom to share their experiences at Michigan Native American boarding schools. Once a potential Dibaajimod expressed interest in sharing their truth, a member of the KAI research team reached out via email, phone, or text based on the Dibaajimod's preferred method of contact to schedule a truth sharing session. If email was the preferred communication method, they received a maximum of two emails inviting them to schedule a testimonial session. If there was no response, they received a maximum of two texts or phone calls. This approach aimed to make sure Survivors and Descendants did not feel pressured or coerced into sharing their truths. Truth sharing sessions generally lasted between 45 and 90 minutes.

### **Informed Consent and Confidentiality**

Informed consent (Appendix I) was obtained from all Dibaajimodag before collecting any data. The informed consent statement explained that they have the right to refuse or end their participation at any time, and that they could also refuse to answer any question or section. All Dibaajimodag received information about confidentiality procedures and the contact information of the project director. Prior to the truth sharing, KAI facilitators read the informed consent statement at the beginning of each data collection activity (and it was displayed on screen during virtual data collection activities). Dibaajimodag were given the opportunity to provide oral consent (which was recorded) or written consent. For those who had their truths recorded, KAI shared their videos with them to review to confirm that they continued to provide consent to use their video and testimony. Those who revoked their consent had their data removed from the final study results and the video summary of the truth-telling. KAI added this consent confirmation step after learning from a Dibaajimod that they were uncomfortable sharing their truths after viewing the video of their truth. Consent is a continuous process, and seeing one's truth on video can be emotional. As such, adding this consent confirmation step is an important way of acknowledging the difficulty of truth-telling.

Those who completed the questionnaire were required to read through an informed consent section and sign prior to completing the survey. This consent form described the purpose of the survey, confidentiality, and the potential risks and benefits and provided links to the project trauma resources tool kit, which contained resources specific to each Michigan Tribe, along with state and national resources to support emotional wellness.

### **Analysis**

MDCR's MiNABS RFP defined the scope of research as "a preliminary and exploratory assessment of Michigan's boarding school history" that "will identify unexplored areas and unanswered questions that will require additional time, funding and resources."

Qualitative analysis was conducted to honor and interpret the truths shared by Survivors and Descendants and Other Impacted Individuals, while quantitative analysis was applied to the closed-ended questionnaire responses to identify patterns and trends. Additionally, archival research provided historical context and enriched the analysis by documenting the boarding schools as represented within historical records. Each type of analysis is detailed in the following sections.

### *Qualitative*

As part of our commitment to honoring the voices of those most impacted by the boarding schools, our approach to analyzing the Survivor and Descendant truths and qualitative questionnaire responses was rooted in an Indigenous framework. Rather than approaching the analysis through a western Eurocentric lens that prioritizes detachment and individual-centered methods, we sought to center the voices of the Dibaajimodag—those who shared their lived experiences—while also weaving their contributions into a collective narrative. This collaborative approach acknowledges that knowledge is not only held by individuals but is shared across communities, generations, and histories.

We acknowledge the lived experiences shared by Survivors, their Descendants, and Other Impacted Individuals, are not simply data points but stories that hold deep significance for reporting traumatic experiences and for creating a pathway to healing. While conducting thematic analysis, we used inductive and deductive coding to identify themes in the data and created a process that was inclusive and respectful of Indigenous ways of knowing and being, allowing for a deeper, more relational understanding of the complex trauma experienced by Survivors, Descendants, and Others Impacted Individuals (e.g., spouses, cousins) of the boarding school system. To ensure a comprehensive and reflective analysis, we shared the preliminary results with our TAG. This collaborative step facilitated ongoing reflexivity and knowledge gathering, allowing for valuable feedback that enriched the interpretation of the data. Dibaajimodag experiences are interconnected, and by sharing them collectively, we are not only answering the research questions but also contributing to the larger narrative of the Native American boarding school experience.

Dibaajimodag are co-creators of knowledge that expands the historical record about the boarding schools enabling the results and recommendations of this study to be rooted in community agency and Indigenous knowledge systems. The aim of our

analysis was to uncover themes from the data and present the findings in a manner that reflects the interconnectedness of the community and the relational nature of knowledge.

### **Quantitative**

Quantitative analysis was performed on the closed-ended questions from the questionnaires. Descriptive statistical methods, including range, frequency distributions, percentages, and measures of central tendency (mean, median, and mode), were used to summarize and interpret the data.

### **Archival Review**

Within this “preliminary and exploratory” scope defined by MDCR, research consultants Dr. Veronica Pasfield, Leora Tadgerson, MIS, and Dr. Martin Reinhardt fulfilled the RFP’s call by conducting a preliminary historiographic review of relevant published works, digitized primary source documents, and “preliminary” (a.k.a. “discovery-level”) review of primary source archival material for relevant schools in Michigan.

The consultants’ research was guided by the following research questions:

- What was the role of the State of Michigan in the federal and church-contracted Native American boarding school system?
- What claims can be archivally verified given the challenges of missing, destroyed, and sequestered boarding school and related records?

Archival records, correspondence, and documents were accessed at the following repositories: the National Archives & Records Administration at Chicago; the National Archives & Records Administration in Washington, DC; the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions (BCIM) records at the Raynor Library, Marquette University, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

In addition, Dr. Pasfield visited the Archives of Michigan and sought the guidance of research center staff to do a “discovery-level” assessment of records there to identify “unexplored areas and unanswered questions that will require additional time, funding, and resources,” as requested in the MDCR RFP and rearticulated during in-person consultations with MDCR and Tribal representatives in Petoskey, Michigan.

The Archives of Michigan *may* hold records with relevance to future, deeper study of this topic, depending on what Tribes and the State decide are areas of interest and how they wish to conduct that research. But for a “preliminary and exploratory assessment,” no immediate or core records were identified by Dr. Pasfield or

Archives staff that had not already been reviewed by Dr. Pasfield at other records repositories (see above). More specifically, the foundational records that met the MDCR's Scope of Work that are held by the Archives of Michigan were redundant to or copies of material held by federal and/or Catholic-focused archives (see above).

Dr. Pasfield's research expertise focuses on Mt. Pleasant Indian Industrial Boarding School and broader federal Indian policy, particularly as it pertains to Indian education. For this study, Dr. Pasfield drew from her existing research spanning her doctoral dissertation research at the University of Michigan's Program in American Culture from 2009 to 2013; her post-doctoral research funded by the Oral History Association and the National Endowment for the Humanities in 2022 to 2023; and her 2022 to 2024 research related to church-contracted boarding schools and broader Department of the Interior (DOI) policy initiatives. This last research phase included research related to Michigan's Catholic Indian boarding schools via records held by Marquette University and the National Archives in Washington, D.C. Dr. Pasfield also conducted research specifically for this study in the archives mentioned above.

Leora Tadgerson conducted original research for this study, focusing on the newly digitized correspondence records of the BCIM at Marquette University. Tadgerson reviewed the correspondence of Catholic Indian school personnel in Michigan, with a focus on the years 1927 to 1932. Additional materials reviewed included periodicals describing boarding school living conditions in Michigan from firsthand accounts of Catholic missionaries from the *Indian Sentinel*; digitized federal circulars from the DOI instructing how to staff and run Indian school service entities; and a historic perspective of Anishinaabe life from a firsthand Ojibwe perspective in an 1860s publication now found in the Library of Congress.

The chosen timeframe of 1927 to 1932 marks two monumental shifts in federal Indian policy that led to the State of Michigan assuming the responsibility for Indian education. In 1927, the DOI commissioned the Brookings Institution to conduct a survey of conditions at Indian agencies and schools, commonly known as the *Meriam Report* (Brookings Institution, 1928). Published a year later, this report exposed profound hardship, neglect, and abuse, and influenced the diminishment of off-reservation Indian industrial boarding schools such as Mt. Pleasant Indian Industrial Boarding School. In 1933, new Commissioner of Indian Affairs John Collier mandated a shift in federal Indian education policy away from off-reservation boarding schools and toward attendance at public schools near Indian communities. Mt. Pleasant Indian school was one of the institutions closed due to this policy shift.

Given the “preliminary and exploratory” Scope of Work requested by MDCR, Dr. Pasfield was not able to do deep archival research of Michigan’s earliest Indian boarding schools, such as the mission schools of the 1830s and later. A historiographic review of published literature was pursued. The core research request of the MiNABS Study was to identify the role of the State of Michigan in the federal and federally funded mission Indian boarding school system. Thus, Dr. Pasfield offered an overview of the role of treaty-era Indian boarding schools in Michigan and how they contributed to the larger dispossessive project of the establishment of a settler-colonial political economy and the development of the State of Michigan.

Beyond that, Dr. Pasfield’s research concentrated on the transition period when federal Indian policy began to move Indian education programs into public state school systems nationally, including in Michigan, from 1924 to 1934. In 1934, the DOI closed Mt. Pleasant Indian Industrial Boarding School and signed an agreement with Michigan Governor William Comstock. The Comstock Agreement transferred ownership of the Mt. Pleasant school campus and buildings to the State of Michigan, as well as the responsibility for educating Indian children in Michigan schools. The scope of Dr. Pasfield’s research was designed with two primary objectives: first, to provide historical context for Collier’s 1933 decision to close Mt. Pleasant Indian School, and second, to document the federal-to-state transition in education responsibilities, including the interplay among federal, state, and local personnel.

The researchers reviewed a broad array of records, including correspondence between DOI and State of Michigan personnel; BIA/Indian Service personnel and Michigan school district staff; DOI contracts with Michigan Indian Catholic boarding schools; correspondence between Michigan Catholic Indian boarding school staff and other personnel engaged in Native American schools in myriad ways; federal circulars from the DOI, periodicals of firsthand accounts of the evangelization of Native Americans by Christian missionaries; and a firsthand account of Anishinaabe “civilization” from Ojibwe George Copway (Kah-ge-ga-gah-bowh).

## **Survivor Survey Results**

A total of 30 respondents participated in the survey. Nearly all responses (29 of 30) came from recruitment at community events. Respondents varied in the number of years they attended an institution, with the most common durations being 3 years (22%), 6 years (19%), and 1 year (15%). Three responses did not specify the number of years attended.

The average age of enrollment was 7.3 years (standard deviation [SD] = 3.75), with three respondents not providing this information. When asked whether enrollment was a family choice, 47% indicated it was, 13% said it was not, and 40% were unsure. Two respondents reported being forced out of the institution they attended.

Perceptions of staff and teacher quality (Figure 1) were predominantly negative, with 55% rating staff and teacher quality as "poor." Smaller proportions rated it as "fair" (9.1%), "good" (14%), or "very good" (14%), while 9.1% marked "not applicable," and eight participants did not respond.

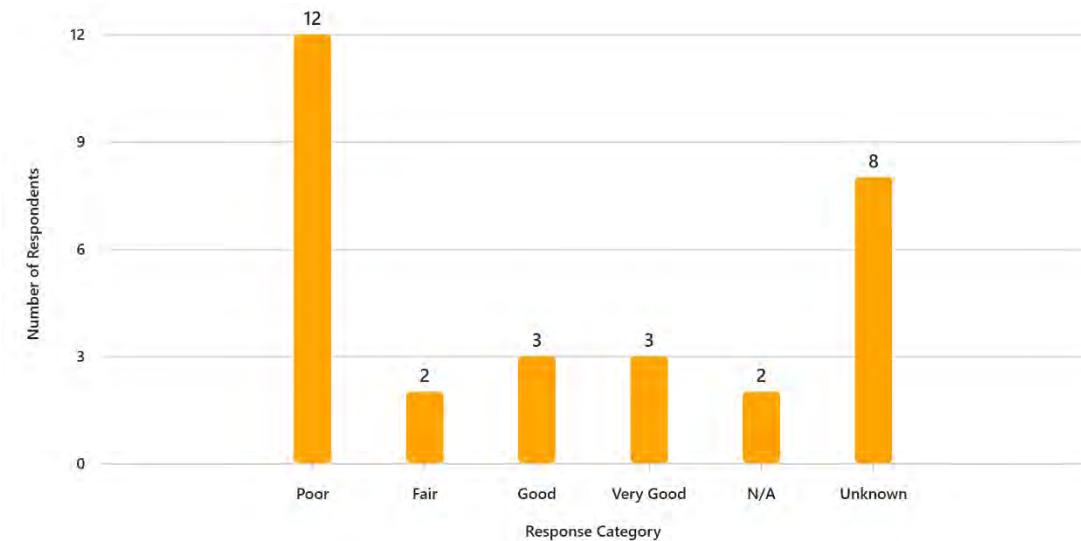


Figure 1. Reported quality of teachers and staff

Regarding cultural inclusion, only 6.7% of respondents reported that Tribal language was allowed, while 63% said it was not, and 30% were unsure. Similarly, only 13% said traditional practices were allowed, compared to 60% who said they were not, and 27% were unsure.

Long-term health impacts were reported by 73% of respondents, while 10% reported no impacts, and 17% were unsure. Awareness of deaths related to the institution was noted by 14%, with eight participants not responding to this question.

When asked about treaty obligations, 27% believed they were upheld, 32% said they were not, and 41% were unsure. Most respondents (96%) reported being Tribally enrolled, though six responded "unknown." A secondary Tribal enrollment was reported by 22%, with seven responding "unknown."

Transportation to the boarding school was primarily by bus (75%), followed by car (18%) and other methods (7.1%). No respondents reported traveling by train. In total, 48% of

respondents attended for 4 or more years, 33% for 2–3 years, and 19% for 0–1 years. Perceptions of educational quality (Figure 2) were largely negative, with 44% describing it as "horrible" and 12% as "poor." A smaller number rated it as "fair" (24%), "good" (8%), or "exceptional" (12%).

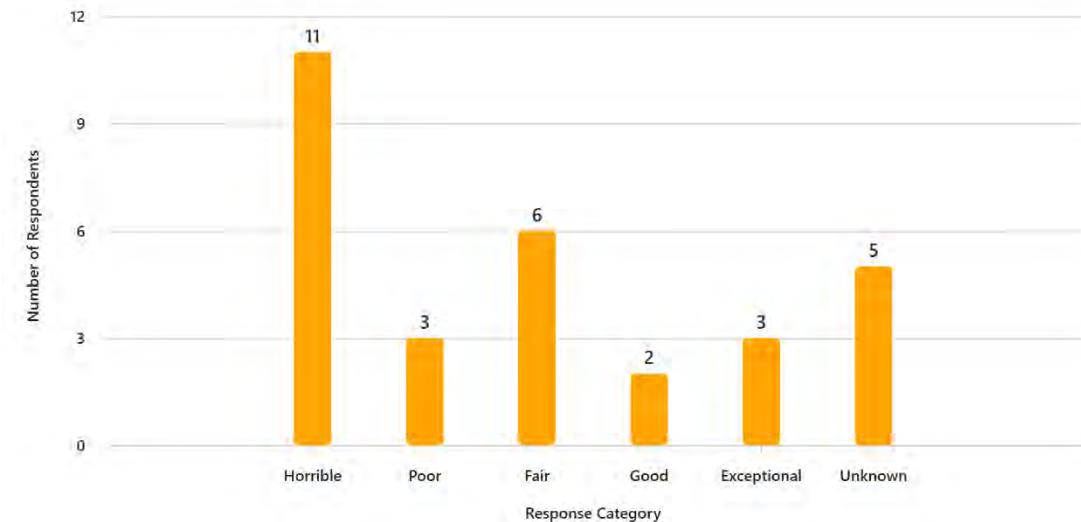


Figure 2. Reported quality of education

Treatment at the institution (Figure 3) was similarly rated poorly, with 56% describing it as "horrible" and 16% as "poor." Only 4% rated their treatment as "good," and 8% as "exceptional."

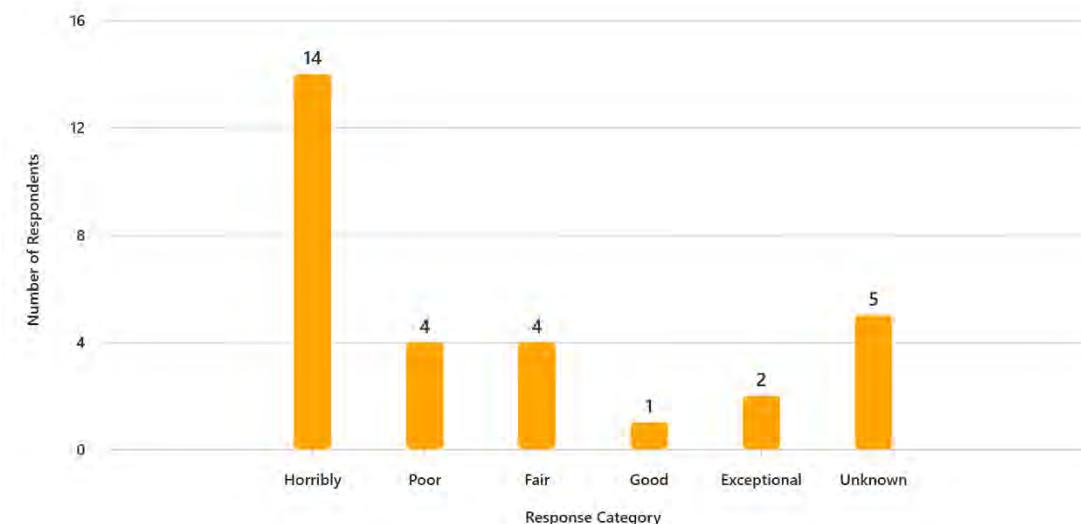


Figure 3. Reported treatment while attending boarding school

Food quality (Figure 4) received mixed reviews: 35% rated it as "poor," 35% as "good," 17% as "very good," and 8.7% as "excellent."

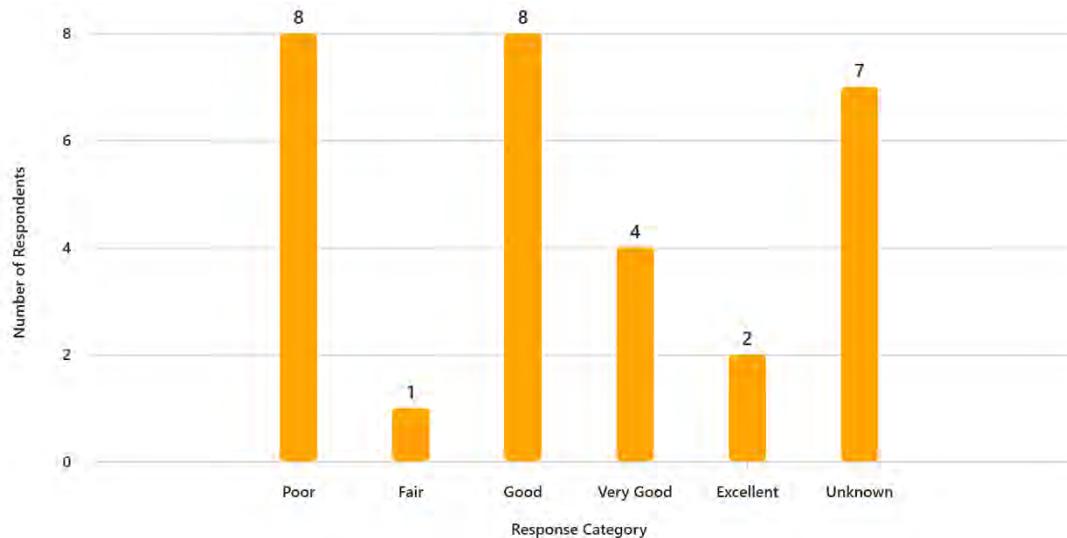


Figure 4. Reported quality of boarding school food

Health care quality (Figure 5) was predominantly rated as "poor" (57%), with smaller proportions rating it as "fair" (4.3%), "good" (22%), "very good" (8.7%), or "excellent" (8.7%).

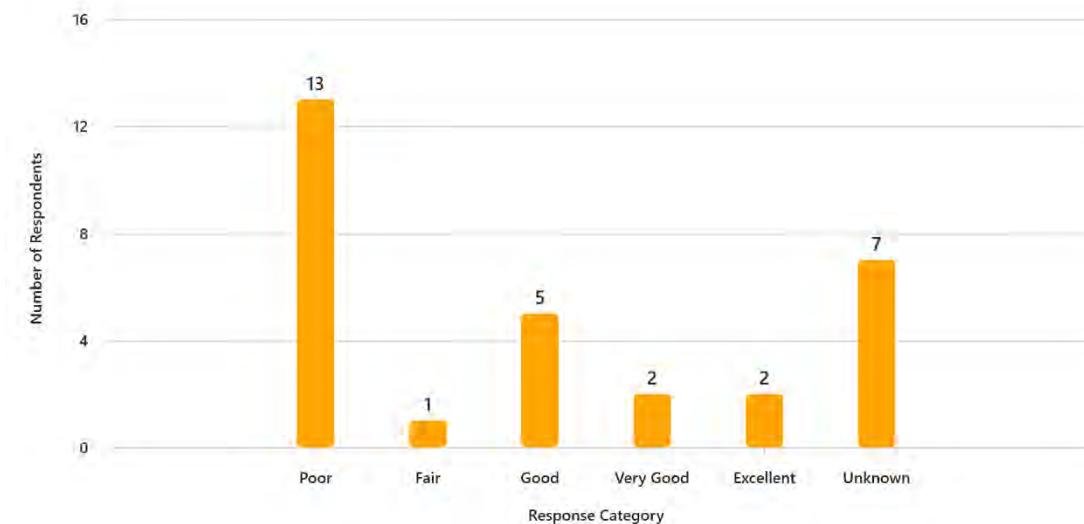


Figure 5. Reported quality of boarding school health care

Cleanliness and safety (Figure 6) were more positively rated, with 38% marking "excellent" and 29% as "good."

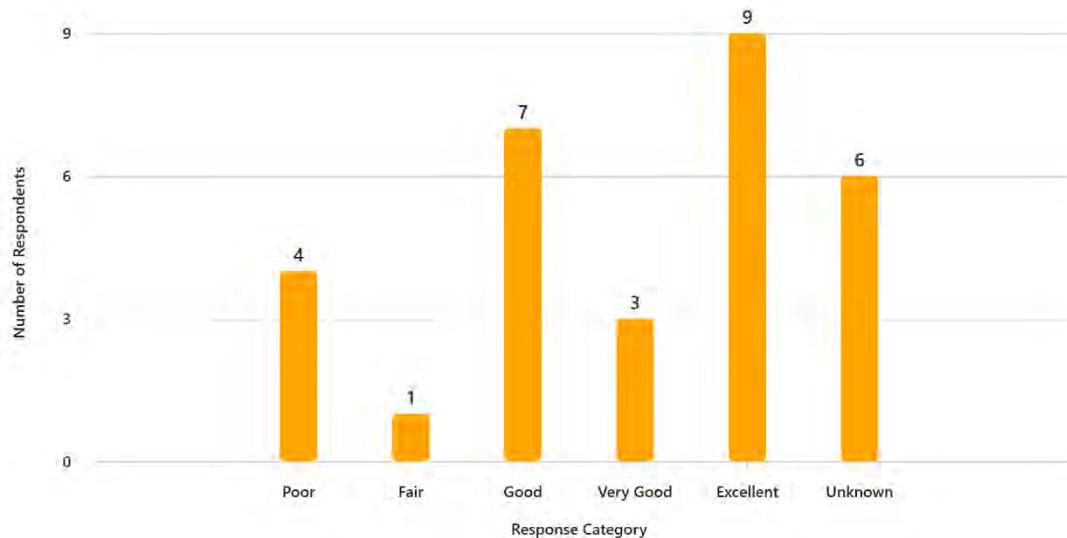


Figure 6. Reported quality of cleanliness and safety

Regarding how respondents left the institution, 48% graduated, 13% went home and did not return, 8.7% switched to public school, and 22% were unsure. Another 8.7% selected "other."

## Descendant Survey Results

A total of 165 respondents participated in the Descendant survey, which reflects secondary reporting—that is, perceptions and recollections shared by Descendants of boarding school survivors rather than direct, subjective experiences from Survivors themselves. This distinction is important, as Descendant accounts may be shaped by intergenerational transmission of trauma, family narratives, and cultural memory, rather than firsthand experience.

Respondents varied in the number of years they reported their relative attended boarding school, with an average of 6.28 years ( $SD = 3.49$ ). Twenty-eight respondents did not report this information. The average age of enrollment reported for relatives was 7.76 years ( $SD = 2.80$ ), with eight participants not answering this question.

When asked whether their relative's enrollment was a family choice, 45.5% indicated it was not, 20.0% said it was, and 34.5% were unsure. A small number (5.1%) reported their relative was forced out of the institution, while 53.2% said they were not, and 41.7% were unsure. Nine participants did not answer this question.

Perceptions of staff and teacher quality were overwhelmingly negative: 100% of respondents who answered this question rated the quality as "poor." Fifty participants did not answer this question.

Regarding cultural inclusion, only 1.4% reported that Tribal language was allowed, while 83.8% said it was not, and 14.9% were unsure. Similarly, only 0.7% said traditional practices were allowed, compared to 88.4% who said they were not, and 10.9% who were unsure.

Awareness of deaths related to the institution was reported by 30.6% of respondents, while 69.4% said they were not aware. Thirty-one participants did not answer this question.

When asked about treaty obligations, 24.0% believed they were upheld, 34.9% said they were not, and 41.1% were unsure. Thirty-two participants did not answer this question.

Most respondents (95.5%) reported being Tribally enrolled, with only six indicating they were not. Thirty-two participants did not answer this question.

According to Descendants, transportation to the institution varied: 49.0% traveled by car, 26.2% used other methods, 15.2% traveled by train, and 9.7% walked. Twenty 20 participants did not answer this question.

Perceptions of the quality of education were largely negative: 80.5% rated it as "horrible," 10.6% as "poor," 7.3% as "fair," and 0.8% as "exceptional." One response was out of range. Forty-two participants did not answer this question.

Treatment at the institution was rated poorly by most respondents: 80.8% placed their relative's treatment in the lowest category ("poor"), 15.8% rated it as "good," 0.8% as "very good," and 1.7% as "excellent." One response was out of range, and 45 participants did not answer this question.

Food quality received predominantly negative ratings: 82.7% rated it in the lowest category ("poor"), 14.5% as "good," 1.8% as "very good," and 0.9% as "excellent." Fifty-five participants did not answer this question.

Cleanliness and safety were predominantly rated as "poor" (68.4%), followed by "fair" (17.3%), "good" (9.2%), and "excellent" (3.1%). Two responses were out of range, and 67 participants did not answer this question.

Health care quality was also rated negatively: 82.0% rated it as "poor," with smaller proportions rating it as "fair" (14.0%), "good" (3.0%), and "excellent" (1.0%). Sixty-five participants did not answer this question.

When asked how their relative left boarding school, 15.2% reported their relative graduated, 14.4% said they switched to public school, 8.3% said they went home and did not return, and 19.7% selected "other." The largest proportion of

respondents (42.4%) were unsure. Thirty-three participants did not answer this question.

## Braided Knowledge: Truths, Themes, and Literature

Survivors of boarding schools in Michigan and their Descendants are the rightful keepers and sharers of their truths about the psychological, communal, and intergenerational sequelae that followed. While many members of the research team are Indigenous, and several are Descendants of boarding school Survivors, we understand that the narratives we share on these pages belong to the people who shared their truths with us and their communities. Therefore, we are using a collaborative story work approach in presenting the results of the study to ensure Dibaajimodag voices are heard and preserved, while challenging narratives that have historically silenced them.

Our approach recognizes story work as a process of collective truth-telling, healing, and empowerment intended to reshape how history is remembered and how justice is pursued for Native communities in Michigan. We developed an ecological model (Figure 7) inspired by Bronfenbrenner's (1979) framework, which examines human development through the interplay of proximal processes—direct interactions within immediate environments such as family and school—and distal influences shaped by broader societal systems and policies. This approach helps organize our findings and highlights the dynamic relationships between individual, relational, and systemic factors. The Survivor is in the center of our model, and we share their results first, followed by contextual information related to their truths to not overshadow the Survivors' voices. The surrounding layers expand outward, beginning with those who are closest to the Survivor, such as Descendants, family members, and the Tribe, who have experienced the most direct impacts of the legacy of the boarding school system. The subsequent layer highlights the role of community organizations and systems that influence Survivors and their families, including schools, churches, and the prison and child welfare systems. Moving outward, we address the specific location of this study, focusing on the State of Michigan. Finally, the outermost layer examines the federal and state policies that established the boarding schools, the responsibility of government agencies, and other policies or legislative actions, including those that could contribute to reparation and healing.

While the ecological model provides the organizing framework of the findings, the layers of the model are not discrete spheres of influence, demonstrating the extensive impact of the Native American boarding schools in Michigan. It is important to note that federal and state policies permeate every layer of the model,

shaping not only the systems and institutions surrounding the Survivors but also having a profound and direct impact on the children themselves, their experiences within the boarding schools, and the intergenerational consequences that followed.



Figure 7. Ecological model

The approach to sharing our findings draws from the structure of a braided essay, weaving the voices of Survivors, Descendants, and Other Impacted Individuals with contextual insights from the broader scholarly literature. This method allows us to create a more complete and complex narrative, where knowledge shared by the Dibaajimodag are contextualized and supported by scholarly research. When available, archival evidence is incorporated to provide additional historical context, though such evidence was not readily available for every theme or layer within the model. By weaving these elements together, we build a nuanced and trustworthy account of the boarding school legacy, one that honors the Survivors' and their families' truths while situating their experiences within a broader historical and social framework. We begin with the Survivors to ensure their voices guide and inform the subsequent sections, honoring their central role in the broader narrative of healing, reconciliation, and justice.

### **Boarding School Survivors**

We begin describing our findings by centering the voices and lived experiences of the Survivors who were the most impacted by the boarding school system. The truths Survivors and Descendants shared are fundamental to understanding the

legacy of boarding schools. The uncensored truths shared provide insights into the traumas experienced, as well as the strengths of Survivors, their families, and Native communities in Michigan.

The findings are organized into the major themes that emerged that most directly impacted the Survivors: **Native American Identity Erasure**, where attempts to strip away language, culture, and Native identity were commonplace; **From Honor to Shame**, describing the shame felt for being Native American; **Little Protectors, Big Burdens**, demonstrating how children were often forced to shoulder adult responsibilities including protecting their siblings and peers; **Abuse**, physical, emotional, and sexual, which was pervasive and systemic; **Death in Boarding Schools**, describing known and suspected student deaths; **Regression Due to Trauma**, describing how Survivors' development were disrupted; **Induced Family Vulnerability**, referring to the boarding schools' role in weakening family structures and connections; and **Exploitation of Child Labor**, describing how children were made to perform strenuous or tedious work under the guise of education.

Each of these themes represents a thread in the story of Survivor experiences, woven together to help form an understanding of the direct impact of the boarding school system on the Survivor.

### *Native American Identity Erasure*

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*There was one time where we were sharing with each other and talking about things, and she said that she had her hair washed when she first got to school with kerosene. ... I said, "Mom, that's not normal." And she's like, "You're right. That's not normal." But that's what they did to children at boarding schools is they washed their hair with kerosene. They washed them with lye soap to try to lighten their skin, and they called them dirty Indians. -*  
TD12

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There were many instances where both Survivors and Descendants referred to the devastating impacts that boarding schools had on Native American identity as the schools' goals were intentional in removing all aspects of students' identity, including family connections, culture, beliefs, and language. Descendants shared

that in the boarding schools, girls had their hair cut uniformly short to the ears with bangs, while boys' heads were shaved. Federal circulars instructed Indian service workers to carry this action out, or the student (as well as families) would face consequences. "Employment, supplies, etc., should be withdrawn until they do comply and if they become obstreperous about the matter a short confinement in the guardhouse at hard labor, with shorn locks, should furnish a cure" (Jones, 1902). One Descendant recalled that their mother was also forced to learn English, facing physical punishment—her hands struck with a stick—if she spoke her Native language. The majority of Descendants (84.1%) reported that their relatives were not able to speak their Native language at the boarding schools, some (15.2%) reported that they were unsure about this, and only a few (0.7%) reported their relatives were able to speak their own language at the boarding schools.

One Survivor recognized that prior to going to the boarding school, she felt proud to be Native American but due to the experiences and the trauma she experienced, she no longer felt that way and was "messed up for years and years and years" as a result. Family and culture help to shape identity, as they create expectations, emotional responses, and interactional ways in which children see themselves in life experiences (Cassidy & Shaver, 1999). Many Survivors recognized that they were not taught how to cope and handle different feelings they were having overall. Others talked about how they kept quiet and hid their true feelings, fearing ostracization and getting in trouble. As such, children in boarding schools had to change who they were in ways that took away from their cultural and emotional identity. One Survivor remembered this in her home.

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*I totally could relate to that, where you grow up in a home that doesn't show emotions. And some of it too is the emotions are so big. And with my mom, I mean, it wasn't until I think I've heard my mom tell me she loves me three times in my life, but we've been able to work through that. And so, it has made me always very, I don't trust, it takes me a while. -TS06*

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It was also recognized that when any evidence of Tribal ways, language, or home life was shown, harsh retribution came from teachers, priests, and nuns at the boarding schools. The message each child internalized was that their cultural and familial identity was wrong, bad, and would cause traumatic experiences if they continued to practice Native ways. It was found that 77.8% of the Survivors were not allowed to practice their cultural ways as a result of attending the boarding schools.

Further, 89.6% of Descendants and Other Impacted Individuals indicated that they were not allowed to practice their cultural ways.

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*So, I think he was in that school exposed to a lot of bad behaviors, bad ideas about his own identity. He was taught that Indian people were subhuman, that he should strive to be a White person or act like White people, and I think they had a big impact on him. -TD07*

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Another Survivor recalled their difficult experiences of their Tribal identity in school.

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*Because in the political, social, economic, religious world, there was always this forced influence that they wanted us to dress like them and talk like them, and walk like them and work like them, and pretty much follow the crowd. And we always put on these masks, this mask for today and this one for tomorrow. So, we felt we could meet maybe some of their expectations and be accepted. I know one of the difficult things in my life was trying to be accepted, even among my youthful classmates, but I remember a textbook they were reading from in our early years of history. It was a history class, and they read in there about heathen savages and the bloodthirsty pagans. That wording was in those books. When they read one of those words, all the classes, the classmates would turn and look at me. -TD05*

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The derogatory language reportedly used by teachers, priests, nuns, matrons, and school officials—such as “dirty Indians,” “subhuman,” “savages,” and “bloodthirsty pagans”—likely influenced how Survivors viewed themselves and their sense of self-worth. Research indicates that children with a poor sense of identity often experience feelings of alienation and a belief that they are undeserving of love (Levy & Orlans, 2014). Furthermore, this research highlights that individuals with poor attachments and a shame-based identity frequently perceive themselves as “flawed, unlovable, and bad” (Levy & Orlans, 2014, p. 368).

*Students who survived school together became extended family. The students did still speak together at night in whispers ... a practice that continued into adulthood where the old ones would speak Anishnabekmow'in, but in whispers when we were supposed to be sleeping ... all the way into the 80s and 90s. -QD07*

Dibaajimodag reported that the boarding schools were designed for Native American identity erasure. That frequently took the form of forced religious conversion, which is talked about in detail within the Organizations and Systems layer of the ecological model. The letter to Father Erkens at Holy Childhood Mission (Figure 8), states, "The Association's special interest is converting pagan children" (Welsh, 1931). Such explicit messaging likely contributed to students being labeled with derogatory terms like "bloodthirsty pagans," as previously described.

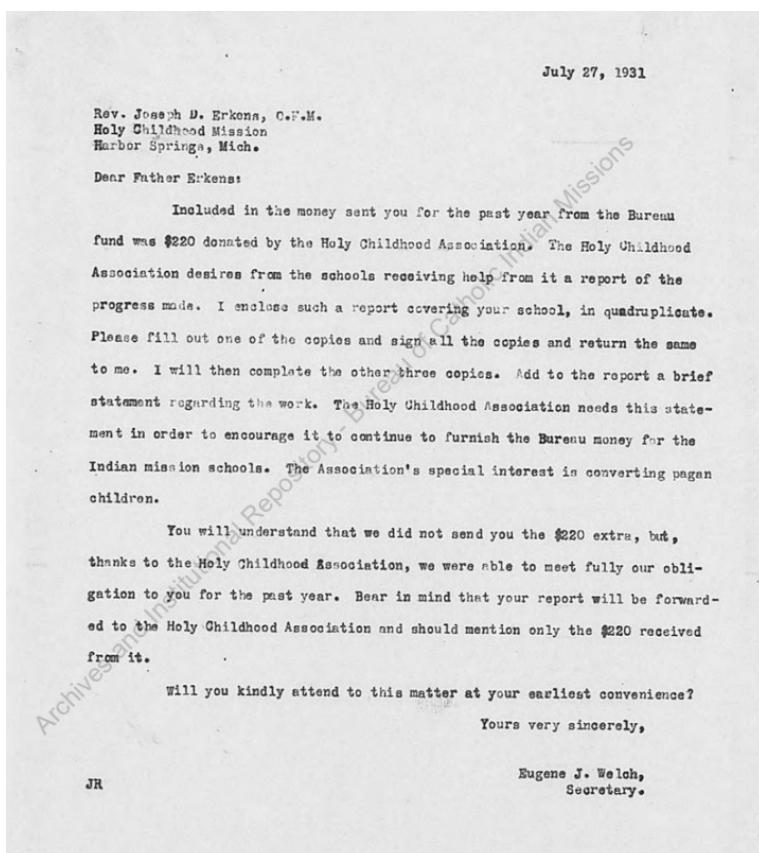


Figure 8. Letter from Eugene J. Walsh to Rev. Joseph D. Erkens, 1931

The next image (Figure 9) provides evidence that students were prohibited from speaking their Native languages at the boarding school, which was also described by Dibaajimodag and contributed to Native American Identity Erasure. The image is from the 1898 *Rules for the Indian School Service* by the Office of Indian Affairs, which stated, "All instruction shall be in the English language. Pupils shall be required to converse with employees and each other in English" (U.S. Department of the Interior. Office of Indian Affairs, 1898, p. 25).

188. The grounds around the buildings must receive proper attention, in so far that agreeable designs in landscaping be improvised, diversified with flowers, shrubs, and trees, and swarded areas, producing pleasing and attractive surroundings.

189. Play grounds are more appropriately located in the background, so as not to mar the features of the grounds set apart for ornamental purposes.

190. Attention should be given to roads and approaches to the school site within the bounds of the reservation, with a view to giving them a pleasing appearance.

191. Roads should be systematically laid out and constructed and covered with available metaling. They should be kept well "rounded up," and be provided with gutters of cobblestone or other available material for proper drainage.

192. Heavy teaming should not be permitted over roads designed for carriage travel to the front of buildings.

PUPILS.

193. Employees are not allowed to have pupils in their rooms except by permission of the superintendent, for specified reasons.

194. Pupils should not be required to act as servants of the superintendent or employees. If a pupil, however, desires to render personal service, an arrangement to that end may be made under the sanction of the superintendent, provided that suitable remuneration, agreed upon beforehand, be given the pupil; and provided further, that the rendering of such service be not detrimental to the progress of the pupil in school work.

195. Pupils shall be encouraged to attend the churches and Sunday schools of their respective denominations, and shall be accompanied by employees detailed by the superintendent for that purpose. Pupils who can not thus be accommodated shall be assembled during some suitable hour for religious and ethical exercises of a strictly undenominational character.

196. School room exercises shall occupy not more than five hours of each of the five school days, and each pupil shall average not less than two hours' work in the school room daily.

197. Pupils shall be classified according to their capacity and scholarship, and be promoted from grade to grade, under such rules as may be prescribed by the superintendent of the school.

198. All instruction shall be in the English language. Pupils shall be required to converse with employees and each other in English. All school employees must be able to speak English fluently.

199. There shall be a general assembling of pupils and teachers once each day for appropriate exercises.

200. Pupils shall be gathered together each evening for reading, study, singing, or other suitable exercises, at the close of which they

Figure 8. Excerpt from *Rules for the Indian School Service*. 1898.

*From Honor to Shame*

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*Well, this is a good thing. We're doing this good thing for them. So not only is there that mental health stigma, but that for so long it was literally beat into them that this was a good thing, that they were reforming them. But when you look at it, you were taking children, and you were putting them in an environment that was created solely to erase*

*who they were. And so, I think that has a really long-lasting impact that creates a lot of shame, and substance abuse is something we see a lot in our communities. I know that mental illness and substance abuse thrive in isolation. They thrive in shame and people keeping quiet, so I think those schools were designed very well, very intentionally, to keep people in that cycle of shame. -TD04*

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As a result of the difficult experiences that Survivors had in the boarding schools, many indicated that they were taught to feel shame about themselves, as told by two Dibaajimodag.

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*My perception was that he always felt like he wasn't good enough because when he went to the school, that's what was drilled into him, that he wasn't good enough because of who he was. And so, there's letters that we have and journals that I have of my dad that he states, "I'm really trying to be a good boy," and "I did this and I'm making up for it and I really love you, mom. And I hope it doesn't take away your love for me." And so, there's letters that we see now that we didn't have until he passed away that we got that. – TD10*

*My mom still to this day blames herself for that. And there have only been maybe three or four times that we've ever even talked about it because there's such a hurt, and such a sadness and so much regret and shame that it's so big that you could cry for days. -TS06*

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As with the quote above, many Dibaajimodag describe how they or their family members were taught to feel shame for being “Indian” and how they carried their shame throughout their lives, making them feel like bad people or “sinners.”

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*They were marched in line and cut their hair and punished for speaking Indian or acting Indian. -TD9*

*My grandfather was ashamed to be Native. He had a hard time at work with racial slurs, often being paid less than*

*coworkers. My father is 3/4 but is White passing. He is also ashamed to be Native and I was not allowed to tell my friends in school I was Native. I did not know my grandfather was taken to the orphanage until I was a young adult. He carried a lot of shame with him. -QD65*

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Research recognizes the shame and self-hatred that many Survivors and Native American individuals have felt as a result of the traumatic acts of colonization forced upon them. Duran and Duran (1995, p. 29) state:

Once a group of people have been assaulted in a genocidal fashion, there are psychological ramifications. With the victim's complete loss of power comes despair, and the psyche reacts by internalizing what appears to be genuine power—the power of the oppressor. The internalizing process begins when Native American people internalize the oppressor, which is merely a caricature of the power actually taken from Native American people. At this point, the self-worth of the individual and/or group has sunk to a level of despair tantamount to self-hatred. This self-hatred can be either internalized or externalized.

Externalizing behaviors then become either positive or negative methods of coping with the feelings that arise from the self-hatred and shame that Survivors felt. Haskell and Randall (2009) state that for those very difficult feelings, an individual may attempt to relieve them by engaging in self-destructive ways of coping like unhealthy substance use, sexual impulsivity, or risk-taking behaviors. It is important to remember that in eradicating all Native ways, the schools took traditional methods of healing away from children. Nutton and Fast (2015) recognize that loss of control over their Native land and resources and banning traditional ways of healing increase the risk of substance use. A Descendent recalled their experience with substance use in their family.

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*So, she ended up getting out of the boarding school. She had a substance abuse problem, both alcohol and drugs, and there was a point where she was promiscuous and just trying to deal with the boarding school's normal was actually abnormal. So, those behaviors, she carried on with her in life to try to deal with the trauma that she experienced. She had two children, me and my brother. She got pregnant with my brother at 14, had him when she was 15. And right after, she got*

*pregnant with me. So, she had two children by the age of 16, and we were so unstable. We moved around a lot. She had, I'd say a mental illness. She carried around that PTSD. She would rage out sometime and then remedy it by drinking or doing drugs. -TD13*

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Dysfunctional coping can become an intergenerational pattern from Survivor to Descendant and then subsequent generations if more proactive and positive coping behaviors are not learned. Data indicates that statistically, Native Americans engage in unhealthy drinking behaviors and substance dependence or abuse higher than any other ethnic group in the United States (Kaliszewski, 2024); as demonstrated, this is directly linked to the legacy of colonization and the boarding schools.

#### *Little Protectors, Big Burdens*

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*My mother had a little sister, my aunt, and she protected her when she could. There're times that she told me that the nuns would come into her room and sexually molest her. And when those same nuns would look at my aunt, her younger sister, she would get up from the bed and tell them to take her, so that her baby sister wouldn't receive the same treatment. -TD13*

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The truths shared by Survivors and their Descendants reveal the crucial role of peer support and protective relationships among the children at boarding schools. Older students often took on nurturing, protective roles, offering comfort, guidance, and a semblance of familial care that the boarding schools actively tried to dismantle. Survivors shared that the older girls would protect the younger ones from the nuns; and that they could only "love and console each other when no nuns were around."

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*My mom just said if it weren't for other older Native girls who acted like a big sister she would have had a different experience. She said they protected her all the years there.*  
*-QD78*

*The food sometimes was so bad that my sister would eat the food I couldn't eat; she would eat it for me she always protected me when she could! -QS27*

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Many Descendants shared how the boarding schools instilled a sense of timidity and fear in their family members, leading to long-lasting emotional suppression and social withdrawal. The constant need to protect other children from harm may have led to hypervigilance as a survival mechanism. Chronic hypervigilance has been linked to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), cardiovascular issues, and other health disparities (van der Kolk, 2005).

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*I believe that my mom learned how to be timid and meek at boarding school to not draw attention to herself and therefore be punished. She has been a quiet and shy individual ever since, and who's to say it wasn't because of boarding school? Emotionally she constantly worried about her siblings, because she was older and helped take care of them at home. So, to not be able to interact with them at boarding school was really hard for her and had a tremendous impact. She was lonely and struggled. - QD80*

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Survivors expressed their desire to care for, protect, and connect with their siblings. The enforced separation of siblings—either through restricted communication or punitive responses to expressions of affection—deepened feelings of loneliness and loss.

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*I was quiet. My sisters were there, and I couldn't even see them or hug them. I hardly got to see them. -QS27*

*[My family member] was punished for sneaking a hug with her sister, had to sleep on cement floor, no blanket. -QD13*

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Friendships became essential survival mechanisms, providing emotional solace and mutual protection in an environment marked by abuse and neglect. These relationships were a testament to the resilience and adaptability of the children, who created informal networks of care to endure the trauma they faced.

*Mom spoke of another little girl she became fast friends with. They would help each other when they could and keep secrets for one another if the Nuns asked too many questions. -QD77*

*We're very supportive of each other. We had no adults to confide in. -QS21*

*I stuck with one person, her and I were there together for 5 years. Somehow, we were able to make it and make it out there. -QS25*

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Researchers have recognized that protecting others from harmful situations such as abuse disrupts the forming of healthy attachments, causes a heightened sense of responsibility in relationships, and leads to difficulty trusting others (Engelhardt, 2012; Haxhe, 2016). Additionally, children who take on the role of protectors may suppress their emotions as an attempt to manage the environment. They also may not be able to express feelings and develop healthy coping strategies (Schorr & Goldner, 2023; Solomon & George, 2011).

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*Forced to watch sexual acts, physical and mental abuse of him and his siblings. Getting dropped off at the cemetery on Halloween and other holidays. Being treated as less than. Having to choose between sticking up for his siblings and taking more abuse. -QD97*

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The boarding schools put children in a position where they felt the need to protect others from abuse—disrupting healthy development, which often led to emotional, relational, and cognitive challenges that persisted throughout Survivors' lives.

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*Although happy to be done, [I had] very little direction to move forward into. Also, anxiety over no longer being able to protect the smaller ones left behind. -QD67*

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## Abuse

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*I was the only one that wasn't raped, and I don't know why." - TS17*

*My great grandmother was beaten, punished, tortured, robbed of our heritage and this in turn robbed all of her children, grandchildren, etc. My grandmother was scared of small spaces because of my great grandmothers' terrible experiences. -QD01*

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When Dibaajimodag shared their experiences regarding staff at the boarding schools, abuse was the most mentioned word. The most common type of abuse was physical abuse, followed by sexual abuse, and emotional/verbal abuse. The Dibaajimodag talking about being abused for speaking a Native language, being left-handed, bedwetting, and incorrectly responding to school assignments, among many other perceived infractions. It is important to remember that even if the family members did not disclose certain types of abuse, that doesn't mean they didn't occur; longitudinal follow-up of adults with documented child abuse are likely to underestimate the occurrence in retrospective reports (Della Femina et al., 1990; Williams, 1995). The abusive acts that occurred within the boarding schools fall into categories of genocide and crimes against humanity, two of the four main crimes recognized in the Rome Statute, the International Criminal Court's founding treaty (International Criminal Court, 2024).

The subsequent quotes from Dibaajimodag add additional context regarding Survivors' treatment by staff at the boarding schools.

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*My uncle was left-handed and given electric shock to scare him from using it. When that didn't work, they broke it! He had to wear a sling to stop using it. Other kids were told to beat him, and he was often beaten up and knocked unconscious. He witnessed his friend dying and they carried his limp body out and buried it somewhere nearby the school. -QD51*

*My grandmother was tortured by being forced to kneel on rice, hold books at arm's length for hours, being beaten*

*with rods or even the heavy crucifix carried by clergy, and always the fear of being sent out back from which no one returned. She told me about the unmarked graves that sometimes were dug by the other children, in which those who attempted escape were buried. -QD11*

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Some Dibaajimodag linked the traumatic experiences they or their family members experienced to trauma reenactment behaviors and challenges in understanding appropriate behaviors. For instance, one Survivor described being molested by older children from the boarding school, while another recounted how a sibling, after leaving the boarding school, engaged in harmful behaviors, including molestation and rape. These accounts underscore the devastating ripple effects of systemic abuse, where unresolved trauma contributes to cycles of harm, highlighting the urgent need for trauma-informed support and culturally grounded healing initiatives.

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*I am deeply impacted by the experiences my family went thru [sic]. I've heard only nightmarish horror stories about the time they spent there, and they still have a difficult time talking about. I'm ashamed that such predators could ever be involved in the upbringing of our children. The lasting effects as a result of their various forms of abuse have deeply rooted predatory behavior in our communities, undermining our abilities as parents and left us with scars that we likely are never to recover from. This was never the way we were meant to live. -QD27*

*I think these boarding schools destroyed families and mental health for most of the people who were forced into them as children. The sexual and physical abuse those children experienced at the hands of supposed "People of God" was atrocious and the school staff should have been prosecuted just like any other war criminal. They were terrorists and murderers! Thank the Creator that boarding schools of this kind are a thing of the past! -QD77*

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The harm to child development from these types of abuse is well documented, including within the *Meriam Report*, written in 1928. The *Meriam Report* was

designed to be unbiased and although it occurred at the request of the federal government it was funded by the Rockefeller foundation.

Punishments of the most harmful sort are bestowed in sheer ignorance, often in a sincere attempt to be of help. Routinization is the one method used for everything, though all that we know indicates its weakness as a method in education. If there were any real knowledge of how human beings are developed through their behavior we should not have in the Indian boarding schools the mass movements from dormitory to dining room, from dining room to classroom, from classroom back again, all completely controlled by external authority; we should hardly have children from the smallest to the largest of both sexes lined up in military formation; and we would certainly find a better way of handling boys and girls than to lock the door to the fire-escape of the girls' dormitory (Brookings Institution, 1928, p. 382).

Overall, Descendants identified abuse as the most common reason their family members ran away from boarding schools. While most Dibaajimodag did not specify the exact type of abuse, when they did, physical abuse was most often mentioned as the reason children fled. One Descendant shared that her grandma said she ran away because "they beat us 'til we spoke White." Her grandmother escaped to Detroit to be with extended family. Descendants also recalled their family member expressing that they hated the way they were being treated. Apart from abuse, a desire to return to family or their community was the second most common reason for running away from boarding schools.

Both Survivors and Descendants recounted numerous instances of sexual abuse committed by staff members, including nuns and priests. One Descendant shared, "Some priests raped kids." Another stated, "The nuns sexually, physically, and emotionally abused my mother from 7–13 almost daily." A further account described, "Sexual and physical abuse took place at this location, and young children lost their lives. No one was ever held responsible or accountable.

The powerful effects on attachment, and therefore on personality development, of a child's early experiences are nowhere more evident than in the deeply disturbed social behavior of children who have been physically abused by a parent or who have spent their early years in an institution (Bowlby, 1982). Children who have experienced abuse or neglect are at increased risk of engaging in suicidal behavior and experiencing suicidal thoughts (Hardt et al., 2015; Jardim et al., 2018). In 2022, the suicide rate among non-Hispanic AI/AN people was 91% higher than the general population (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2024).

Descendants and Survivors shared their experiences of losing family members to suicide.

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*My grandmother had deep rooted shame. She had Survivors' guilt. She attempted suicide and was hospitalized. She recovered and reclaimed her life again. ... she was also a forgiving, caring and deeply spiritual woman. -QD11*

*I have friends in life that went to that same boarding school and committed suicide. -QS26*

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### *Death in Boarding Schools*

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*I remember a nun told this kid if he didn't behave himself, he would not go home and that's the last time I saw him. - QS02*

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Dibaajimodag provided context regarding causes of death among students in boarding schools. A total of 24% of Survivors and 27% of Descendants were aware of a student death while attending a Native American boarding school. The most reported cause of death was abuse and mistreatment, with "beat" being the most frequently mentioned term. Dibaajimodag described instances where students were beaten, with some left to die from injuries caused by the abuse.

The second most common cause of death reported was malnutrition or starvation.

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*Half my aunt and uncles were beating to death or starved to death in boarding schools. -QD108*

*A lot of students died of malnutrition, lack of healthcare, and the many forms of abuse that they endured. -QD52*

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Additionally, another cause of death reported was illness, most likely from a form of infectious disease, combined with a lack of proper care. For some Dibaajimodag, they did not recall the cause of death of students because they simply "disappeared" never to be seen again, they also mention cemeteries and burial

sites near the schools, leading to the assumption of those students dying and being buried.

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*My uncle said he was locked in a basement with a sick kid. [He] didn't realize he was dying but remembered seeing his limp body carried out and others saying he's buried somewhere nearby. He wants him found, that's his biggest plea! Thinks his name was PII but name isn't on records we found. Probably intentional. -QD51*

*I don't personally know any students who passed during their time in boarding school, but I have heard stories of students "disappearing" and never seen again. One can only assume, especially after hearing of the mass graves discovered in Cananda at their residential schools, that they may have died or were killed. -QD123*

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Many children did not survive due to the poor treatment and unsafe conditions at the boarding schools. In July of 2024, the DOI reported deaths of 973 children and identified 74 burial sites associated with federal Indian boarding schools from 1819 to 1969 (Newland, 2024). However, a yearlong investigation by *The Washington Post* documented that 3,104 students died, and 140 burial sites were associated with boarding schools between 1828 and 1970 (Hedgpeth et al., 2024). The U.S. government's investigation was restricted to federal records, leaving many children unaccounted for. Additionally, there were large discrepancies between the data from the DOI and *The Washington Post*, specifically with reports of deaths by school. For example, at Mount Pleasant Indian Industrial Boarding School, the DOI reported 1 child death, whereas *The Washington Post* reported 96 child deaths (Hedgpeth et al., 2024).

*The Washington Post* investigation also documented the cause of death for about 1,500 children. Three out of four deaths were attributed to infectious diseases such as tuberculosis, pneumonia, and the flu. All other reported deaths were labeled as accidents/injuries, with 99 reported as "suicide, accidental, and other." Additional categories of death included drowning (26), dying while running away (15), and poisoning (14) (Hedgpeth et al., 2024). However, more information is needed to fully understand the causes of deaths such as "accidental and other," which may require further investigation or clarification.

### *Regression Due to Trauma*

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*They beat them and strangled them - hurt my mom for wetting the bed. It makes me cry to think about that. -QD98*

*If caught bedwetting you'd have to sleep on floor covered with your piss blankets. -QD51*

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Many Survivors and Descendants discussed the incidences of bedwetting and subsequent punishments that would further exacerbate the trauma. For example, one Descendant's grandmother shared that "children who wet their pants were forced to wear their soiled underwear around their neck and stand in the hallway for hours." Research indicates that children who had experienced or witnessed traumatic events in the first four years of childhood had a higher likelihood of regressing and bedwetting (enuresis). Current research supports this prognosis by extending the possibility of bedwetting until the age of 9 for some children who experience or witness trauma (Douglas, 1973; Joinson et al., 2016). One Descendant reflected that their uncles were punished for wetting their beds and were embarrassed in front of the rest of the children for doing so. The Descendant believed that their uncles "wet their beds out of fear."

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*And so, the regiment that was there for the bedwetters was really bad. They were severely slapped up and beaten. I had a friend who was a bedwetter. I'd get up in the night and I'd go past her bed, wake her up, say, "Hey, you got to go bathroom. I'm going to the bathroom." And she'd say, "It's too late. I'm already wet. Or other times she'd get up and she would go, but in the morning her bed would be wet. I'd never understand what it was, why she wouldn't. ... So, in the morning when the nuns got up, she would check the beds, the bedwetters, she'd go check them off, and the bedwetters, they'd get slapped up again, dragged around by their hair, get out of bed, take care of this mess, get those clothes off, and get dragged around by their ears and by their hair. And she'd make them wash their sheets by hand and wash their pajamas and then put on their slippers and go on the fire escape and shake those clothes dry until*

*they dried, and they would be freeze-dried because it'd be wintertime. We went to school there September till May. So, the nights and early mornings are pretty cold, but they had to stay outside there. And their hands got so raw from being chapped, from shaking their sheets and jammies out, trying to shake them dry. And they had chapped lips. They were cold, they'd catch cold easy. But no matter what the nuns did, those kids could not stop wetting the bed, and we never understood that. So, the bedwetters really got it. -TS17*

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Additional research indicates that many ongoing psychological issues can cause bedwetting like stress, anxiety, emotional factors (e.g., low self-esteem or depression), and continuous trauma (Saba, 2023). It is understandable that with the amount of trauma a student in the boarding schools may have experienced and its impact on their concern for safety, students regressed and had difficulty controlling their bodies at night while they slept. A Descendant further described the trauma his relative must have experienced.

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*Sister Mary Perpetuella is a name I will never forget, not that I had any experience with her, but I can only imagine my uncle in piss-stained sheets standing in the cafeteria. That's it. That's the only clothing he had on as the other children walked by and made fun of him, and as the nuns and priests walked by and made fun of him. I can only imagine how terrible, emotional, mental [harm] that hurt him. I can only imagine the terror that the little children felt when they see their classmates die in front of them, multiple occasions, whether it was from the diseases that they had spread in that school and they weren't being treated, or whether it was inflicted by the staff kicking people. -TD7*

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One Survivor recalled:

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*Two of the nuns were cruel to two little girls. When they peed the bed, they were spanked with a brush. One*

*morning, the nun broke the hairbrush on the little girls' butt. -QS18*

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Survivors frequently described feelings of hatred directed at them by teachers and staff. For example, a Survivor shared:

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*They were nuns—very mean, hateful—and tortured and beat kids. We were known as dirty dumb savages daily; our minds were pretty messed up living in hell on Earth. -QS05*

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Another stated, “I believed they hated us racially and spiritually” (QS12). Some Survivors recounted that “darker-skinned” children endured worse treatment: “Darker Natives—you were the worst abused” (QS10). Fear-based motivation was also common: “Teachers were mean if you didn’t learn fast enough. Teachers would hit you on the hand with a ruler if you didn’t learn fast enough” (QS27). Lastly, one Survivor expressed their reluctance to revisit these memories: “I don’t care to relive this ordeal” (QS23).

### *Induced Family Vulnerability*

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*And she was protective because she initially believed that she had a good time there because she had three meals a day, she had stability, she had a place to sleep, she had warmth, she was clothed. She was away from the poverty and away from the alcoholism and the abuses that were happening at home, which I think is the case for a lot of families. -TD12*

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The repercussion of systematically forced family vulnerability weaves its way through several layers of the ecological model. Several Survivors shared with us or their family members that their experiences in boarding school were positive because it allowed them to have regular meals and respite from familial abuse and substance use disorders. However, the context here is critical, because familial abuse and substance use disorders are not inherent to Native Americans and were in fact caused by colonization, as described in the Anishinaabe Family Structure section below. Furthermore, before colonization Native American tribes had

cultural and economic wealth from their access to abundant natural resources (e.g., fish, wild rice, game, lumber, fresh water) and a thriving trade network.

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*My mother and her brothers were sent to boarding school because my grandparents couldn't afford to take care of all the kids at home. So, the older four siblings went to boarding school and the younger four siblings stayed home. -QD80*

*My grandparents believed that the boarding school provided a better education, resources, and opportunities than they could have provided on their own to my mom and three uncles. -QD27*

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### *Exploitation of Child Labor*

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*I had one family member who had two fingers amputated after they were crushed in the sprocket of a potato planter used in a potato field at the Indian boarding school, I can't imagine what other injuries Native American students endured while being forced into manual child labor. -QD27*

*[The boarding schools] were very clean as the students were the ones performing all chores. However, children were doing work of adults and sometimes they died. One while chimney sweeping that my grandmother remembered. This also happened with apprenticeships with some employers being known for their cruelty. -QD11*

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As mentioned in the literature review, the boarding schools in Michigan operated on the same ideals as most U.S. boarding schools by sectioning days with academic instruction and teaching trades and skills. Physical labor was expected of each child to reduce costs and to help with daily sustenance. The girls were taught how to do most domestic household tasks like cooking, sewing, ironing, and cleaning, while boys were taught farming, woodworking, shoemaking, tin smithing, etc.

*The nuns ran the school like a prison rather than an educational facility. There was hard labor involved in every school day. -QD91*

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The Descendants shared that their family members worked in the laundry and kitchen, in the yard, and cleaned the floors. One student talked about running industrial press machines that were heated by fire. The students were also sent out into the community to work on farms collecting eggs, milking cows, and doing other types of physical work. They shared that some of the children sent to work on the farms were as young as five years old. Other children went out to work as "apprentices" or to perform domestic labor for non-Native families.

A visitor to a boarding school in Oklahoma commented, "A glance at them working under compulsion, feeding pigs, washing dishes and scrubbing floors, revealed the saddest faces I ever saw," (Adams, 1995, p. 151). Similar conditions existed in boarding schools in Michigan.

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*Reading, writing, sewing, etiquette, and laboring skills as they were put to work as "apprentices." -QD11*

*They were responsible for large amount of forced child labor, regardless of their condition, health, or temperament. They used older children as models for how to behave that forced their compliance. -QD27*

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The *Meriam Report* (Brookings Institution, 1928, p. 376) bluntly describes the child labor conditions within the boarding schools: "The labor of children as carried on in Indian boarding schools would, it is believed, constitute a violation of child labor laws in most states." The economic contribution of students to the Indian boarding school system is unknown (Newland, 2022, p. 63).

#### **Immediate Relations: Descendants, Family, Friends, and Tribe**

In this section we share results related to the immediate relations of the Survivors including their families, friends, and Tribes. The findings are organized according to the major themes that emerged most directly impacted the Survivors: **Anishinaabe Family Structure**, including traditional structures before colonization; **Systematic Family Separation**, demonstrating the impact on the family members; **Loss of Traditional Parenting Knowledge**, highlighting that being raised in an institution contributed to loss of knowledge about not to parent; **Cultural Genocide**,

describing the systematic destruction of traditions, values, and language; **Induced Family Vulnerability**, referring to the boarding schools' role in weakening family structures and connection and the consequential intergenerational trauma; **Intergenerational Trauma**, highlighting how trauma can affect family dynamics and substance use for generations; **Resilience**, reminding of the strengths that remain regardless of the harm caused; and **The Path Toward Healing**, sharing the insights of how Survivors and their communities are already moving toward healing and their suggestions for the path forward.

Each of these themes represents a thread in the story of the impact of boarding schools in Michigan on the immediate relations of the Survivor. Woven together, they help form an understanding of the impact of the boarding school system on the families, friends, and Tribes of Survivors.

### *Anishnaabe Family Structures*

"And because 'the warm reciprocal affection existing between parents and children' was 'among the strongest characteristics of the Indian nature,' officials set out to eliminate it by dissolving Indian families" (*Haaland v. Bracken*, 2023, p. 299).

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*That's one of the things we have to teach them as they get involved and the fact is that the elders were the teachers and that's where you would learn from. And we had a saying in our band, I don't know if it's true for most of them, but that it wasn't the parents that taught the children the right way to behave and stuff. The parents only had to provide for them and feed them and love them. It was the aunts and the uncles that made them behave and learn the proper way of doing things. And then it was the grandparents that educated and brought the stories to life and told them all the histories and the way of learning and teaching that we went through. And this went on for thousands of years and they broke that chain. And it's very hard because to get those people back. ... They get that chain working back. But that's the best way to learn. If you can learn from your grandparents, it's a lot better and easier than sitting in a classroom with a bunch of other people. -TD09*

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Throughout this study Dibaajimodag made it clear that they wanted this report to demonstrate not only the harm that was caused by the boarding schools, but what was lost. The quote above demonstrates how intact Native American families honored children, the family structure, and education. Induced family vulnerability—stemming from policies of forced assimilation and cultural genocide—disrupted these traditions, leading to broken family structures and systemic poverty. These conditions contribute to an intergenerational cycle of substance misuse and familial abuse. It is essential for policymakers, social service providers, and the general public to understand that these dysfunctions are not traditional ways of Native American Tribes but are direct consequences of colonial policies and procedures.

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*They ruined our family structure, our connection and feeling of safety. We lost our language. They almost succeeded in killing the "Indian." -QD65*

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### *Systemic Family Separation*

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*And so, when the church came around and said, "it's best for you. ... You can't take care of your kids. It's best for you to send them to the boarding school." And so, they agreed to that because they wanted to do what was best. What they thought was the best for the children. So, they sent all of my aunts and uncles from my dad's side and all of his cousins all went to Harbor Springs Boarding School.*  
-TD10

*I was told the Catholic Church came to our reservation, told everyone there was going to be a community picnic, then stole all of the children of a certain age. Many were never seen or heard from again. -QD137*

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Many schools made it policy that a child would learn how to be “civilized” more effectively if they remained at the school year-round. A policymaker proclaimed that, “I am satisfied an Indian school should be kept in session the whole year in order that they children may be kept away from the savage influences which they encounter when they return to camp during the annual vacation,” (Adams, 1995, p. 35). As such, the year-round separation from family and culture was deliberate to

remove any Tribal influence on the child. Native American parents across the country resisted their children being taken away from them; the state and federal government responded with coercion, arrests, and withholding of rations and resources for Tribal communities (Child, 1998).

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*The BIA agents would come periodically and take every child over 6. We never knew when they would come, they came randomly to avoid people hiding their children. My grandmother and her cousin were taken together. -QD11*

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As discussed in the literature review, Native American children were often removed from their family's homes by force to intentionally civilize their "savage" ways. The policies for off-reservation residential boarding schools became standardized throughout the country so that more Native American children would assimilate into the European modes of life. Adams (1995, p. 59) states:

Slowly at first, and then with ever-increasing momentum, the idea was gaining force that Indian children needed to be removed from their Tribal homes for the assimilationist promise of education to be realized. Only by attending boarding school, policymakers were now convinced, could savage institutions, outlooks, and sympathies be rendered extinct. Only by attending boarding school could Indian youth, stripped bare of their Tribal heritage, take to heart the inspiring lessons of white civilization. The educational solution to the Indian problem truly appeared to be at hand.

By removing children from their parents and relatives, policymakers were responsible for creating devastating and traumatic separations that severed the bond between a child and their family that is necessary for healthy human development. Many Survivors and Descendants recalled childhood memories that reflected how boarding schools disrupted a Survivor's ability to feel positivity toward and love for their family members. A Descendant remembered:

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*She was just standing by the furnace stove we had in the dining room. And I just looked at her and I couldn't remember a time my mother had ever hugged me, and I started crying and she said, "What's wrong with you?" And I said, "I just wish I knew that you loved me." And she stood there, and I watched tears run down her face and her lip quivered, and she couldn't move or say anything. So, I went over to her, and I tried to put my arms around her, and she*

*was just like a board like this. She couldn't move. And again, I thought that that was something wrong with me, why she was like that. And I wound up going off to school, to college, to Lake Superior State that summer and I never came back home. -TD15*

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Duran and Duran (1995, p. 33) reported, "One of the most devastating policies implemented by the government were boarding schools, which were primarily designed to destroy the fabric of Native American life—the family unit." Descendants indicated that nearly half of their relatives were taken from their families between the ages of four and eight. Some Descendants recalled their family members being taken from their parents between infancy and three years old.

In disrupting the sacred bond between each child and their parents and relatives, the attachment with one another was broken. Attachment with a parent is critical, as it forms the foundation of how children see themselves and others in their lives, how they respond to new and stressful situations, and how they are taught their culture and coping behaviors to manage stresses (Ainsworth, 1982; Bowlby, 1982; Cassidy & Shaver, 2016). As a result of the separation from parents, many children develop insecure or broken attachment disorders which cause them to develop maladaptively, as they do not have a caring caregiver to guide them in their childhoods. Because Native American children in boarding schools were taken from their parents, they may have had an insecure sense of attachment. Ainsworth (1982) and Bowlby (1982) identify that, with an unstable caregiver or unsafe foundation of love and guidance, a child may develop an inability to attach in healthy ways to others. It is through a secure attachment that a child is helped to develop a positive and curious internal model of how to view others and interactions. Those with an unhealthy attachment may see the world negatively and fear new and stressful situations where they may possibly be hurt or abandoned (Levy & Orlans, 2014). Bowlby (1988, p. 55) recognizes that, "the child, and later the adult, becomes afraid to allow himself to become attached to anyone, for fear of a further rejection with all the agony, the anxiety, and the anger to which that would lead."

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*I think that for many families, it broke bonds from siblings going to school or from parents and their children. I think that's the case for many, many families. I know for my mom, from what I've learned, my grandparents passed away when I was young, so I didn't get to learn much from*

*them and have only learned a little bit from my mom telling stories about their relationships. But what I've learned is that they didn't have strong relationships, my mom with her parents initially, those came a lot later in life. And I think that's because she had the wherewithal to and the consciousness and the desire to mend those relationships in later life for her, for my mom. -TD12*

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Many Survivors and Descendants talked about how they had to break unhealthy patterns of separation that the boarding schools had imposed on their families across generations. With the removal from family and community, cultural separation also occurred, impacting whether or not a Survivor learned their cultural ways and whether they could teach those to their children.

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*[The boarding school] held me back, yep. Stunted my growth. And Emotions ... I just want to cry sometimes. Like, why ... I didn't even really say anything sad right now and I just want to cry. Looking out the window. Looking out the window and just thinking and hoping that your dad would come and get you, wondering what he's doing. Picturing the house, picturing them watching TV, picturing them cooking, making soup or feeding us. Just wishing and wanting it. But you're just stuck there, and you can't go anywhere. -TS08*

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### *Loss of Traditional Parenting Knowledge*

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*All the trauma in our family is tied back to boarding school. All the sexual abuse, mental health issues, alcohol abuse, violence, incarceration—all stems back to boarding school. How my Gram was "raised" in a boarding school directly impacted how she raised my mother. Luckily my mother saw that and decided to break cycles and chose not to raise me Christian and also protected me from any outside abuse. -QD57*

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Throughout this study, Survivors shared that they were never really taught how to be a parent and were only taught how to discipline in harsh, physically and emotionally abusive ways. This was not how Anishinaabe people parented their children prior to the boarding schools. One Dibaajimod shared, “I think the boarding schools created human beings who do not know *how* to parent beautiful Anishinaabe babies now” (QD54). Historically, children were seen as sacred beings in most Native American groups and raised to become a treasured member of each family who was able to carry on their histories, traditions, and spiritual ways. Children were the “center of Tribal life, provided with love, guidance, spirituality and ceremony,” (Sarche et al., 2009, p. 324). As the intergenerational transmission of knowledge, ways of relating to one another, and cultural loss continued from generation to generation, so did the loss of traditional parenting.

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*I think it continues to affect our family because the intergenerational trauma manifested in earlier generations, where my grandparents and mom did not develop positive coping skills. Because of that, they did not know how to appropriately raise children without substance use and abuse early on. It has caused her children, my siblings and I, to learn how to break cycles of abuse and learn positive coping skills to deal with trauma and negative feelings. We also still do not speak our Anishinaabe language fluently, we do not know all the ceremonies or all of our stories. – QD80*

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Research supports what Dibaajimodag shared about parenting: “[T]hey become the parents of the future, devoid of traditional understanding of what it meant to be Indigenous and what the responsibilities were for being a parent. They demonstrated these limitations by becoming parents without guidance and without direction” (Morgan & Freeman, 2009, p. 86). Additionally, attachment researchers state that how a parent communicates, soothes, teaches, and helps their child trust and regulate their emotions is evident in their cultural ways (Posada et al., 1995).

Chisholm (2017) further supports this concept by stating that “while the attachment cycle is universal, the beliefs that infants construct are inherently specific to their culture” (p. 286). As such, the traditional ways of Native American parenting were lost by many Survivors of the boarding school. Therefore, they could not be taught to their children. As a result, these lessons could not be passed down to their children’s children. Instead, they often transmitted the traumatic experiences they

had endured in the boarding schools, further extending the cultural loss in traditional parenting practices.

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*One of the things that I heard was for kids that attended these schools, they didn't have the benefit of the loving, nurturing relationship that you learn from your parents, and you only learn this strict sort of disciplinarian, and a lot of people chose not to have kids because they were afraid they would treat their kids the same way. And so, they were then denied the family unit of being a parent because they were afraid, they didn't want to do the same thing to their kids. -TD04*

*Because the stories that we don't know and assume in our head are things that when we were raised as children, the physical and emotional abuse was there, and sexual abuse was there that how does he know that this was the right way to parent? Why did he choose this? And to me it was because he didn't have his parents. He had the church, and he had the nuns and the priests, and that's how he learned that situation. Because he repeated the pattern that was done to him. And so that pattern then continued with his children. Even though my mom is White, she's very quiet and very submissive and didn't stop things that happened because he was very overt. My dad, everybody. ... If you say his name in the community, everybody loved my dad. Everybody knows my dad, everybody. ... Very charismatic, very outgoing. He was a leader, but they didn't know everything that went on behind closed doors. And the things that happened to us as children, there's four of us that, to me, the only answer that I have in my head is because that's what he knew. He did the best he knew. -TD10*

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### *Cultural Genocide*

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*Being isolated from her community and being stripped of her language and culture was negative for her. It affected our family to this day because we are now having to relearn and reconnect with the language and culture that was taken from our family during my grandmother's time in boarding school. -QD123*

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The intent of every boarding school was to take every aspect of Tribal culture away from each Native American child who attended. Captain Richard H. Pratt, who initiated federal-funded boarding schools, proclaimed, “All the Indian there is in the race should be dead. Kill the Indian in him, and save the man” (1892a, p.46). Pratt’s idea of civilizing Native Americans in boarding schools would prevent each child from returning to their Tribal homes and reverting “back to the blanket” (Pratt, 1892a). He believed that policymakers, teachers, and the American public would know the mission was completed if every cultural aspect was removed from each child and the “Indian problem” was no longer present. Because of these stated efforts to eradicate Native identity and culture, many Native American children and their families suffered and struggled to hold on to what they deemed sacred—their family and cultural identity.

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*Boarding school is the reason my family's culture, use of language and pride diminished. Depression and the way they parented their children and so forth affected everyone in my family. -QD141*

*My grandpa wouldn't teach his children about his culture and language. Told them it's a White man's world, and they must all live like White men if they want to survive. -QD15*

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Descriptions of losses in culture and family were pervasive throughout the questionnaire responses and truth sharing sessions. Many Survivors indicated the traumatic messages they heard from teachers, priests, and nuns about being Native American or more specifically, “being Indian.”

*[T]hey were given uniforms, and they were marched in line and cut their hair and punished for speaking Indian or acting Indian. I guess that was the big insult is you're acting like an Indian. -TD09*

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This did not only impact the child who was forced to attend the boarding school, it impacted their parents, relatives, and communities (Campbell & Evans-Campbell, 2011). *Rules for the Indian School Service*, from the Office of Indian Affairs (1898), supported the mandated separation of children from families, stating, "Visits of pupils to their homes should be as brief and infrequent as possible." Additionally, scholars identify that the loss of culture from generation to generation produces a phenomenon that many Native Americans in Michigan and across the United States experience as a new dysfunctional normal:

The decades of abuse of Native Americans in turn formulated what can best be described as hybrid family systems in which the traditional family system no longer existed. This trauma broke the systems apart, and a new negative and dysfunctional ideology was incorporated into the Native American family system (Duran & Duran, 1995, p. 34).

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*They were taught to ignore their Native heritage. They didn't even tell their kids they were Native till they were all adults.*  
-QD130

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Further, the premise of boarding schools became known across the country by the model at Carlisle Industrial Technical Boarding School where the Reverend J.A. Lippincott said at a commencement speech:

"Let all that is Indian within you die. ... You cannot become truly American citizens, industrious, intelligent, culture, civilized until the INDIAN within you is DEAD." Pratt was so impressed with the reverend's remarks that he immediately jumped to his feet to add the postscript: "I've never fired a bigger shot and never hit the bull's eye more center." (Adams, 1995, p. 274)

Native American children in boarding schools were systematically taught that their identities, cultures, and traditions were inferior or unacceptable. They were repeatedly told that improving their lives required abandoning their Native heritage. These persistent efforts to erase Native culture through assimilation had lasting psychological, cultural, and intergenerational impacts on Native communities, including those in Michigan.

*She tried to run from the abuse. She was little and scared, not allowed to speak the only language she ever knew, and beat for not understanding... –QD77*

*Whenever I saw photos of her, she always looked troubled. It is almost as if she had seen things that most others had not. Before boarding school, she was described as happy and outgoing, but that is far from what family members said she was like afterwards. I believe that her time in boarding school drained her spirit and made her regress into herself out of self-preservation. This self-preservation prevented her from sharing language and culture with her children, which is still impacting us today.*

*-QD58*

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### *Induced Family Vulnerability*

As the years progressed and Native American families were depleted of resources from the induced family vulnerability that colonization caused, Tribes would send their children in truckloads to the schools so they could be fed. This was often done as a last resort for Native American families who wanted their children to survive (Child, 1998). Scholars have found that boarding schools were sometimes preferred by students because the situation at home was difficult due to assimilation and economic policies.

Some boarding school students wish to escape problems on the reservation or at their reservation schools. Others wish to escape a home life that is not conducive to furthering their education. Some students grow up in families where drug abuse, alcoholism, and violence are common. At other times, students grow up in dysfunctional families with divorce, unemployment, and abusive or absent parents. (Trafzer et al., 2006, pp. 235)

The induced family vulnerability created public health concerns for many families who were Survivors of boarding schools. It was indicated by 75% of Survivors and 95.7% of Descendants that attending boarding schools negatively impacted their or their families' long-term mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional health. This impact is still seen today. Many Native American families in Michigan have higher rates of poverty than non-Natives; the poverty rate for Native Americans in Michigan is 20.41%, which is greater than the total Michigan rate of 11.7% and the U.S. average of 11.5% (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.-a; World Population Review, 2024; Zhu, 2024).

Currently, around 15.5% of Native Americans in Michigan are unemployed, compared to an average of 6.5% for Native Americans across the United States (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2024; U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.-b). The median earnings of Native Americans and their families are \$48,291 in Michigan, as compared to \$63,498 for total Michiganders and \$75,149 for the United States overall (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.-b; World Population Review, 2024).

Educationally, many Native Americans still fall behind other racial groups in Michigan and the United States. Reportedly, while 87.33% of Native Americans complete high school, those who complete a bachelor's degree is still lower than the national average at 13.12% (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.-b). In Michigan, 51.1% of people complete a bachelor's degree, compared with 54.3% for the United States overall (Michigan Department of Education, 2022). Furthermore, Native Americans continue to be underrepresented in higher education, resulting in fewer Native Americans professionals in healthcare, STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics) fields, research, etc. Many Survivors talked about how they weren't ever encouraged to progress in their education.

Health disparities are also present among many Native American communities in Michigan. According to the Inter-Tribal Council of Michigan, Native Americans rated their health status as worse than non-Natives for conditions such as obesity, smoking, binge drinking, asthma, heart attacks, and diabetes (Inter-Tribal Council of Michigan, 2020). One in five Native Americans has poor mental health. Among the Tribes in Michigan, on average, at least 7% of Native Americans in Michigan do not have health insurance to cover their health conditions and health care (National Indian Health Board, n.d.; U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.-b).

Currently, Native Americans experience the lowest life expectancy out of any racial group in the United States; in 2021, it lowered to 65.2 years after the fatal impacts of the COVID-19 epidemic (Fleck, 2023). The most frequent causes of death for Native Americans are heart disease, cancer, unintentional injuries, diabetes, chronic liver disease and cirrhosis, chronic lower respiratory diseases, and suicide (Arias et al., 2021).

Descendants and Survivors discussed the multiple disparities across generations, which they believe are linked to the impacts of boarding school policies.

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*We see high rates of health disparities in our Native communities, due to intergenerational trauma and epigenetics. We see breaks in Tribal communities, because they have not learned about the trauma inflicted*

*on our people, and because they are unaware of it, it cannot be confronted and processed to work through it. There cannot be healing without the understanding and confronting of what generations of our people have been through. And a large part of that is due to the boarding school policies enacted generations ago. -QD123*

*I think the trauma stunted my grandmother's mental, physical & emotional health. She had multiple health problems, and those problems were passed down to her 13 children. That trauma contributed to epigenetic changes that led to a myriad number of emotional and physical manifestations in my mom and her siblings. Alcoholism, suicide, multiple types of cancers, emotional immaturity and poor communication and coping mechanisms were some of the things my mom & her siblings experienced. My grandmother maintained a connection to Catholicism after attending the school and maintained a connection to nature/spirituality. -QD104*

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### *Intergenerational Trauma*

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*So, with the decisions that I made in life, they trickled on to how I took care of my own kids. And I had my first child at 15 years old. I repeated the cycle and just like my mother, I was very unstable. I was in 17 different schools. So, we moved around a lot and thank God my mom became sober by the time I had my daughter so that she could help me take care of her. And her advice to me at that time was, "go ahead, go out. I wish I could relive my teenage years. I didn't have somebody to take care of my kids like that. If you want to go out, go ahead." So, she encouraged it because she didn't have a childhood, and I was gone, and I just didn't leave where we lived. I left the state, and I got more involved in the road that I took, which is selling drugs, affiliated with gangs, creating a gang. -TD13*

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Richard Henry Pratt, the founder of the government-funded off-reservation boarding schools proclaimed that:

A great general has said that the only good Indian is a dead one, and that high sanction of his destruction has been an enormous factor in promoting Indian massacres. In a sense, I agree with the sentiment, but only in this: that all the Indian there is in the race should be dead. Kill the Indian in him, and save the man (Pratt, 1892b, p. 260).

In the nearly 150 years since the beginning of federal and state policies with the stated goals of erasing all Tribal ways in every child, Native American people have continued to experience the worst of the worst outcomes. This intergenerational trauma extends into socioeconomic factors that affect the ability to obtain a higher quality of life, such as health care, education, life expectancy, housing, etc.

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*I think my mom and her siblings are/were very emotionally immature. Their father was an alcoholic, and my grandmother was abused by him. The family was extremely poor and didn't always have the proper clothing to wear and they were made fun of for it. Some of my mother's siblings were also alcoholics. Her youngest brother committed suicide. Many of them have had cardiac and stroke complications or various cancers that have contributed to their deaths. It seemed like they did not have good coping mechanisms and were not great at communicating. Some siblings did not get along with each other, and either yelling or the silent treatment were common amongst them. All of my mom's brothers except one were veterans but she and a majority of her siblings did not obtain education past high school. (QD104)*

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The long-term impact of boarding schools led to emotional difficulties, strained family dynamics, and substance abuse. One in four Indigenous individuals has reported thoughts of historical loss daily and the severe emotional consequences (Whitbeck et al., 2004).

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*It just explained a lot about her journey when she did tell me, and now at this day and age, I can see the way that the*

*boarding school era, how they treated her. It had a lot to do with her parenting style. Even when she would discipline us. I thought I had long hair because she would grab my hair, but in reality, we talked about that later on in life and she said, "I'm sorry that I would grab you by your hair," or just little things that she did. She apologized for it because that's the way that she was treated in the boarding school, and having children at that young of age, she didn't know any better. My grandmother, she was very strict. She showed no emotion. -TD13*

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Dibaajimodag shared how boarding schools impacted their families across generation—describing specific incidents tied to the schools, as well as broader unhealthy family dynamics they wished had been different.

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*It's very scary, you think. My mom and I have had conversations my whole life where she's always said, "I was nervous to have kids. I didn't know how you were going to turn out. Nobody really prepared us for these things." And with being in that environment, you're not taught a lot of love. I am someone who's very fortunate. My mom, we've talked about, has always taken her hardship and her trauma and she's somehow manifested it into love inside herself, and she loves her community. She loves the people here. She loves me. She loves nieces and nephews and everything. I'm very lucky. But there were definitely a lot of struggles that she had to endure on her own that I watched her go through that again, it's one of those things where you're taught that you just keep quiet, and you don't —she had to teach herself the parenting. There are a lot of things that I look at my mom and she's amazing, I can't say enough good things about my mom, but I'm very sad that she had to work so hard to find the happiness that she has in her life. And I know a lot of it comes from your sense of survival and your sense of comfort and safety in your life being skewed from such a young age. -TD4*

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Many respondents indicated that there was no future for their families after the boarding schools. They believe they were set up for failure. Life after boarding schools was ravaged by substance use, poverty, and abuse. Substance use was very common after attending boarding schools as a way to escape the sequelae of trauma.

I would say that overall, my mom wouldn't talk about her experiences until she was drinking. She has lifelong scars from boarding school. Not only was her mom absent in her life due to drinking, but my mom was also a heavy drinker. She had abusive relationships and went through a lot of trauma, resulting in severe anxiety and depression. The overall impacts have been generational. My brother was an alcoholic as well and ultimately passed away from it. My siblings and I have anxiety and depression from the toxic childhood we endured growing up. (QD28)

Unaddressed trauma and adverse childhood experiences such as those experienced in the boarding schools increases the likelihood of substance use disorders as a way of numbing the pain and dissociating from the distress (Evans-Campbell et al., 2012; Gryczynski & Johnson, 2011; Stevens et al., 2015).

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*Honestly, it created a chain of events from abuse to alcoholism. A cycle that's needed to be changed in our family. Any successes he may have had were definitely overshadowed by what he became as a man. -QD42*

*They had a lifetime of shame; they were withdrawn and didn't stick up for themselves; they had fractured families, alcoholism, poverty; they were beaten down by religious unworthiness. -QD46*

*Alcoholism and Addiction is deeply rooted in our family; I credit this entirely to the experience of boarding school and the inability of my family to cope with what happened there at such young ages. Many of my family members have died as a result and thankfully, a few have made their way unto recovery. But their success has not come easy, and they owe it entirely to themselves and the love they found within their communities. I see the shame and guilt associated with living in the ways of their culture and their connections to tradition. As the next*

*generation, we have a duty to inspire them to feel differently—to feel a sense of pride in their deeply rooted culture and tradition. But I see regularly how the shame, guilt and heavy burden of being Native has affected them and continues to be associated with these feelings. They will not ever go away. -QD27*

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### *Resilience*

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*My grandmother was a traditional basket maker as well as working for General Motors for over 50 years. She was blessed and beautiful in spite of the school. She strived and thrived, but I often wonder how she would have been different if she hadn't been traumatized. -QD158*

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Despite the trauma experienced within the boarding schools, a few Dibaajimodag indicated that their families benefited from the education received including being trained in a trade.

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*He did get the basics of education he needed to go forward. He was mostly a woods worker with his father, my grandma was camp cook with her daughter. He never followed the Catholic faith or any other. My father was overall a happy man but was a binge alcoholic. -QD83*

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The literature on Native American resilience highlights the ability of many individuals with high adversity to achieve well-being. Exposure to childhood adversity often has negative long-term health impacts that last into adulthood. However, there are protective factors that mitigate long-term health impacts. In particular, a sense of purpose protects those with childhood adversities, helping them live healthy adult lives (Hamby et al., 2023). In addition, having a loving parent, perceiving community support, and exhibiting higher levels of acculturation have been found to be protective factors among Native Americans who have experienced moderate and high childhood adversity (LaFromboise et al., 2006). As such, those who have been able to retain or regain cultural teachings, cultural belonging, and cultural knowledge can demonstrate greater resilience in the face of adversity. This also

highlights the destructive nature of the boarding school system—it deliberately attempted to erase the students' culture, thereby erasing a significant source of resilience, leaving children with fewer resources to face the long-term harm from the physical, psychological, and sexual abuse they endured.

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*My grandmother didn't let the boarding school break her spirit, my grandmother is strong and let nothing destroy who she was, she was proud to be Native thru [sic] all that. My grandmother taught us how to still be happy through anything we go through. To always pray, the even the White man god is still a Great spirit that's how she kept her faith and spirituality, she graduated with a GED and went to college. She fought hard for her Tribe and husband's Tribe. She went and wrote Indian Bureau Affairs to get plumbing, electricity, and a Tribal school in the 1970s. Her letter was answered, and they provided all of that to the Hannahville Potawatomi Reservation. My grandmother always attended council meetings, she has so much for our Tribal people. As much pain, fear and suffering she endured in the 5 years of boarding school, her prayers were answered by going home she could barely speak to her mom and family as she nearly lost her memory to her native language, but she held on what she could. She never gave up and she never stopped loving her people and all Tribes.*  
-QD92

*My mom was resilient, she raced a lot of poverty, alcoholism, being a teen mom and wife at 18. She later moved to Milwaukee and became nurse in her later years. My mom has a heart of gold, her love language is acts of service. The only negative thing from that school is that she doesn't give physical affection because she didn't have it growing up from the boarding school. She always says that.* -QD103

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As described throughout this report, the trauma that individual students experienced has had an ongoing impact on their families and communities. As such Native American scholars and healers have designed community-based resilience

programs to help communities collectively address and heal their trauma. Scholars (McBride, 2003) have coined the term *ethnostress* to describe the stress of acts of cultural assimilation and violence. To address this, one model suggests that community members, collectively re-establish their identity and heal through a (often 1–2 year) process of reclaiming the American Indian identity story. This establishes a communal story of belonging, which leads to healing (McBride, 2003). Another resilience-building program for Native American communities focuses on breaking cycles of violence caused by historical trauma through a culturally grounded intervention with youth and their parents (Goodkind et al., 2012). It focuses on healing historical trauma, strengthening positive parent practices, reconnecting to traditional knowledge, and improving family communication. The program aims to nurture future generations of Native Americans. Our Dibaajimodag shared many stories of resilience and building resilience as communities and as relatives.

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*To me, we need to understand that here's the history and the resilience that our people have gone through to be able to get to a point in life that now I can say I have a master's and I'm applying to a doctorate program. -TD10*

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### *The Path Toward Healing*

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*And then I think the next step would be to have support in place for when people have those realizations that they are connected to the boarding school legacy, because every Indigenous person has a connection, whether it's direct or indirect connection to the boarding school legacy and the boarding school history. And oftentimes, when people do learn about it, there's a lot of feelings that come with that. Anger, sadness, grief, other feelings as well, there's a lot of emotions that come up with that. And people may not have the tools or the skills to cope and to deal with that. So, having supports in place to help people learn how to cope and handle those different feelings, those emotions that come up with that realization and that learning. -TD12*

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Supporting a process of healing is imperative to address the intergenerational impacts of the historical trauma caused by boarding schools. These traumas have affected the physical, mental, and cultural well-being of Survivors and their Descendants. Survivors experienced a combination of abuse, neglect, and cultural erasure that influenced long-term mental and behavioral health, resulting in PTSD, depression, and substance use disorders, among other conditions (Gone, 2013; Heart & Chase, 2011). These challenges extend beyond Survivors, as historical trauma continues to affect their Descendants, who begin and continue to learn about the boarding school experience of their families and community. Addressing direct and intergenerational trauma through culturally grounded healing is essential to restoring individual and community well-being. One Descendant mentioned that healing begins with raising awareness and educating others.

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*I think that by learning the feelings and awareness levels of our community members is a good place to start healing. This questionnaire is a good starting point, but there has to be follow-up and action. We need to educate our Tribal communities, all generations. And then we need to provide them access to tools to help with healing. And need to understand that healing can come in many different forms. -QD85*

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After years of the federal government neglecting to address the atrocities of boarding schools, progress has been made in raising awareness and promoting education about the historical and ongoing impacts. In July of 2024, the DOI published volume two of the *Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report*. This volume expanded on the findings from volume one by delving deeper into the true stories of boarding school Survivors and facilitating discussions with government officials and Native American leaders to explore pathways toward healing (Newland, 2024). Truth-telling provides transitional justice for human rights violations from the past and allows Native voices to be heard to shape their own history (Ochs, 2022). Many Descendants reflected on the importance of truth-telling to promote healing.

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*I think by hearing the truth about what happened in these boarding schools and by getting firsthand accounts, it will shed awareness on the not-so-long ago dark history of boarding schools. It could bring closure to the families*

*affected and bring a sense of resolve for the trauma that has been inflicted on our Tribal communities. -QD58*

*It's a blessing that I was able to reconnect, not only with my family, but 40 years later, 50 years later, to even know where I came from. I've started learning about it to then, to move up here. I never would've expected to come back here to be here. When I start looking at the genealogy and the family, I said, there's so many relatives that are Native. I guess maybe some of that is pride in being able to prove who I am, not lost anymore. -TD02*

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Descendants and Survivors were asked for their opinions on how different generations think and talk about the impact of the boarding school experience in Michigan. Most Descendants believe that many elders refrain from discussing their experiences and continue to carry the trauma they endured, which has hindered their path toward healing. One Survivor stated, “In the past we never talked about it. I did not talk about it because if I did, I would emotionally suffer for weeks.” However, according to Descendants, elders are now sharing their experiences as they come to understand that it is safe to talk about the trauma they have endured, marking the start of their healing process. After learning about trauma faced by elders, Descendants are now encouraging younger generations to explore this history. Younger generations noted that they lacked knowledge regarding the history of boarding schools and were surprised to learn about what occurred within them. However, they are open to learning and are increasingly seeking healing and reconnection with their cultural teachings.

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*I think that it's different for everyone. To generalize about how different generations think and talk about the Michigan boarding school experience would be hard, because every single person is at a different place in their healing journey. Many young people are completely unaware of our Native history, let alone the boarding school experience ... and so how can they heal themselves and their families when they are unaware of the impacts of settler colonialism. Other young people are very educated and are breaking cycles within their families and helping to heal the older generations by*

*educating them. I think there are many elders that are finally learning and realizing that it's ok to talk about the trauma and experiences they've encountered as young people. And because of that they are able to start the healing process. -QD84*

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### **Organizations and Systems: Schools, Jobs, Prison and Child Welfare Systems**

In this section, we present findings related to the organizations and systems that Survivors or their families interacted with, or that contributed to the boarding school system in Michigan. Some themes discussed here also appear in other sections, which is expected, as these systems and organizations influence both the Survivor and their immediate relationships. The distinction in this section lies in the focus on the aspects of these themes that are under the control of the systems and organizations, rather than on the direct impact to the Survivor or their immediate family. The systems and organization layer are also shaped by the specific context of this study, the State of Michigan, as well as federal and state policies. They will be explored in greater detail in their respective layers, later in the document.

The following major themes emerged related to systems and organizations:

- **Broken Family Connections**—the roles and responsibilities systems and organizations had in strategically breaking familial bonds to facilitate assimilation
- **Pipeline to Prison**—how the systems and organizations for the well-being of Native children instead created conditions that increased the likelihood of incarceration of Survivors
- **Foster Care and Adoption Systems**—how Native children were systematically funneled into foster care and adoption systems as a means of advancing assimilation policies
- **Schooling**—the quality of instruction and staff behavior within the boarding schools, including:
  - **Quality of Instruction and School Staff, Food and Nutrition Quality, Cleanliness and Safety, and Health Care**: the food quality, nutrition, cleanliness, safety and health care provided at the boarding schools
- **Forced Religious Assimilation**: the role of the church in implementing and reinforcing assimilation strategies

Each of these themes represents a thread in the story of the organizations and systems that had a hand in the boarding schools in Michigan. Some of what is shared in this section can lead to recommendations for improvement in K–12 and

post-secondary curriculum, which is discussed in the Carrying the Truths Forward section.

### *Broken Family Connections*

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*These boarding schools were created to erase culture and to erase identity from Indigenous people. So, generations before my mom went, those boarding schools were put into place to weaken family structures and to weaken Indigenous culture and communities so that our people were forced into poverty and were forced to try to live in this way that was unfamiliar for them. So, generations passed, and it affected multiple generations. Many people, like I said, had to rely on sending their kids to school because they didn't have the means to afford to take care of them, or they didn't have, whether or not they had the financial means to take care of them. -TD12*

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Half of the Survivors indicated that they were forced to attend boarding schools, while 33.3% were not sure of the circumstances surrounding the reasons for their attendance. Most Descendants (44.7%) reported that their family members did not go to the boarding school voluntarily, although many did not provide details of the child's removal from the family. Those who provided details said that the government, recruiters, BIA agents, or church personnel forced their family to go. The methods included directly coming in and taking children, manipulating them, or convincing parents to believe that it would be best for their children to go. A Descendant shared, "I was told the Catholic Church came to our reservation, told everyone [that] there was going to be a community picnic, then stole all of the children of a certain age. Many were never seen or heard from again." Many Descendants also said they were unsure (32.9%) if their family members went voluntarily to boarding schools, and some said they went voluntarily (22.4%).

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*I'm in disbelief when thinking that my grandparents and generations before them (almost my own mother) were forced to attend the boarding schools. It's so dehumanizing, upsetting, sickening... I'm angry, sad, and horrified at the history. It's ultimately led my family*

*members to being separated from their family, land, and culture. The traumatization has bled through generations, leaving open wounds to be filled with drugs, alcohol, abuse... nobody to help. -QD07*

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In many situations, parents were forced to send their children to boarding schools and if they resisted, many of their resources were withheld or they were arrested as punishment for their resistance.

U.S. commissioner William P. Dole proclaimed that they must be separated from their families. Dole said, "children leaving even the best of training schools for their homes [are] like swine return[ing] to their wallowing filth and barbarism," (Dole, 1888, p. 262). The separation was intentional and deliberate to assimilate them into the European American ideals and ways. Children were "under the entire control of their teachers, thereby preventing backsliding or retrogression at any point in the process of their being raised and educated [to think] like White children" (Churchill, 2004, p. 21). This deliberate process separated thousands of Native American children from their families as they were perceived as "savage and barbaric." Commissioner William P. Dole equated each child to "swine" and their home to "filth." This systematic separation created generations of Native American children who were trained to believe that going home to their families was a bad thing.

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*I believe [going to the boarding schools] was involuntary, there are records through National Archives that I've seen, and in a letter to the headmaster of the school, my great grandmother asked if one of the older children could come back home to help with household things & a baby, and the school would not allow it. They would've had to take a train, ferry & another train or bus since they lived in the UP [upper peninsula] & the school was in Mt. Pleasant.*  
-QD104

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Attendance at boarding schools ultimately came to an end and the reasons and ways students left varied. While 8.7% of Survivors reported switching to a public school, many cited other reasons for leaving. Among Survivors, the most common reasons included a parent or guardian taking them out and school closures. One Survivor stated, "When I told my parents about what happened to me, they came and got me and my brother." Additionally, two Survivors mentioned being placed in

the foster system as a reason for leaving the boarding school. As reported by Descendants, other common reasons for leaving the boarding schools, included students aging out, joining the military, getting married, or being adopted.

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*Although she graduated the 8th grade which was equivalent to a high-school degree, she said the only way out was to become a nun or marry an American. -QD158*

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### *Boarding School Legacy and the Criminal Legal System*

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*I'm scared that they're not going to come back from the trauma of the prison system. And we need to change the narrative on that because there's so many formerly incarcerated Native Americans that go directly to alcohol, directly to drugs, just behaviors that don't line up with our cultural teachings. And I want to help them with that, and I want to be a part of that change, and I want to be inclusive with all the Tribes throughout Michigan and our community, so that we can make that change. -TD13*

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For every 100,000 Native Americans, 763 are imprisoned, which is four times the rate of White people (181 per 100,000). Furthermore, Native American youth are incarcerated at a rate of 85 per 100,000; they represent the second highest racial group next to Black youth at 115 per 100,000 (Prison Policy Initiative, n.d.). From 2001 to 2022, the incarceration for Michigan Native American residents in federal or state facilities rose from 32,186 to 32,374, suggesting an increasing trend (Carson & Kluckow, 2024). Currently, there are 61,261 total incarcerated individuals that identify as AI/AN alone in Michigan (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.-a). This number does not include the individuals who identify as Native American along with another race, but those statistics are likely startling.

The high rate of incarceration of Native Americans in Michigan can be linked back to the experiences of trauma within the boarding schools. Research about incarcerated women in Arizona concluded that many of the women experienced high levels of adverse experiences or traumatic events in their childhood (De Ravello et al., 2008). Research also found that incarcerated mothers who had higher levels of trauma had insecure attachment disorders where they were unable to have meaningful relationships with others and showed higher risk-taking behaviors. Incarcerated mothers with higher levels of

trauma were also more likely to struggle with unresolved loss, depression, and substance use (Borelli et al., 2010).

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*I started grieving the process and contacting my family about coming into the prison and teaching their culture because I kept telling them, "I feel like I'm in a boarding school." My mom would tell me how she would always be cautious, especially, it felt like walking on eggshells and that's how prison was too. And not being able to go to cultural events, not being able to participate in things that involve Native American culture and being mistreated there. -TD13*

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Native American boarding schools have often been described by Survivors as resembling jails, prisons, or concentration camps, operated with strict, military-like discipline (Hirshberg, 2008; Jacobs, 2006). Students at Mount Pleasant Indian Industrial School referred to the school as "Mount Pleasant Indian Jail" due to the rough work environment (Chakraborty, 2022). Survivors and Descendants reflected on how the boarding schools were like prison in the way students were treated and expected to follow strict regiments and structures during their entire time there.

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*I remember feeling like I was in prison, the place where we would ride our bikes and play in the park was also surrounded by fencing and we couldn't leave. -QS29*

*The nuns ran the school like a prison rather than an educational facility. There was hard labor involved in every school day. -QD41*

*Children were falsely imprisoned in a hostile environment; they were locked up and severely punished; they were stripped of any and all human rights and dignity; they were denied humane treatment. -QD46*

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Life remained challenging for boarding school Survivors even after returning home or moving to new cities to start a new life. Substance use disorders, addictions, combined with a life of poverty, resulted in some Survivors being incarcerated, which ultimately affected their Descendants. It is estimated that 63% of people in jail

and 58% of people in prison have a substance use disorder (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2024a). Additionally, the percentage of people 12 or older in 2023 who had a substance use disorder within the past year was highest among Native Americans at 25.3% compared to any other race including White people at 17.8% and Black people at 17.6% (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2024b). Substance use associated with traumas from boarding schools has intergenerational effects, leading to cycles of incarceration for Survivors and Descendants.

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*My mother's experience impacted her parental skills. My mother had two children by 16 years old. She developed a substance abuse problem, she disciplined us physically, we were unstable, and she was promiscuous. Both me and my brother were absent parents with addiction problems which eventually led us both to prison. -QD111*

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### *Foster Care and Adoption Systems*

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*When they closed the school in 1934, my great-grandmother still had not learned English, so they sent my mother and her siblings to a White foster family to live with. -QD60*

*One time they wouldn't wait for my mom to pick us up for Christmas break and they separated me and my sister from our two brothers and put us in foster homes for Christmas break and never told us they didn't want to wait for our mom. So, we were left thinking our own mother abandoned us. -QS04*

*My grandfather lived on Sugar Island with his little sister under his grandparents' care. The black robes came to the island one day, and decided his grandparents were too old to care for my grandfather and aunt. The black robes took my grandfather and his little sister by boat to mainland/ Sault Ste. Marie from there they were taken to Marquette to*

*what my grandfather and family called the "orphanage". -  
QD77*

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The separation of Native children from their families did not end with the boarding schools. Richard Pratt, founder of the Carlisle Indian Industrial School, promoted the forced removal of Native children and their placement with White families as a means to assimilate them into American society while robbing them of their land and culture. In the 1950s, this approach became an explicit strategy endorsed by the Child Welfare League of America, in collaboration with the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and other agencies, which encouraged the adoption of Native children by White families. This practice sought to further assimilate Native children into White, middle-class society, perpetuating the erosion of Native identity and culture (Grinnell et al., 2023).

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*But that other layer, being Native, and being part of the Sixties Scoop is something I didn't expect to find out. Like I said, I didn't find that out until last year. I'm 64, going to be 65, and my adoptive mother told me, last year when we were talking about boarding schools and classes I've been taking. It had never crossed her mind before to tell me that, "Oh, you were supposed to go to that school, up in Baraga, you and your brothers, but the schools were full. -TD02*

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According to the *Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report*, as U.S. policy of Native American assimilation through boarding schools became increasingly criticized, the U.S. government supported the removal of Native children from their families, placing them in non-essential state foster care and facilitating their adoption by non-Native families (Newland, 2024). Additionally, in the annual report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior it was noted that there was a contract for foster care for "Indian children" with the Michigan Children's Aid Society (MCAS; Collier, 1942). Native American children were not protected from forced removal from their families until 1978 when the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) (ICWA: 25 U.S.C. § 1901 et.seq), was passed to halt this practice. In 2013, Michigan engaged the Michigan Indian Family Preservation Act to incorporate the federal standards into Michigan law (Betti & Fraser, 2019).

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*The boarding school did not prepare her [grandma] for the rest of her life. It caused trauma that she self-medicated*

*until her death. She was separated from her family and eventually the government took half of her children (3) to Chicago. -QD73*

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Furthermore, research about exact numbers is limited, partially because the child welfare data systems (the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System, Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System, and National Youth in Transition Database) do not make it possible to track youth in care who are protected by ICWA (Grinnell et al., 2023). Noting this challenge, Grinnell and colleagues (2023) expanded their analysis for Indigenous youth and included those who meet the standards for “Indigenous Only” under the federal demographic race description, and those who are Indigenous but who are listed as “Two or More Races.” They found disproportionality in the reasons for entry into care (e.g., Indigenous youth were more likely to enter the system because of a parental alcohol use) and that Indigenous youth were more likely than others to have a reunification plan, however they were less likely to exit foster care by reunification. There is consensus that Native Americans remain over-represented in the foster care system and have disproportionately poor outcomes (Roehrkasse, 2021). This represents a continuation of the systematic removal of Native children from their families that continues the legacy of harm at the hands of the government.

Additionally, responses from Survivors and Descendants further illustrated how the systemic removal of Native children continued beyond the boarding school experience and extended into the foster care and adoption systems. For some families, boarding schools were chosen by social workers as an alternative to foster care, while for others, foster placements and adoptions became an exit pathway from the schools.

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*They asked me if I wanted to live with a new family instead of the one I had, to be adopted by others. -QS01*

*[My grandma] died when [my mom and her siblings] were young leaving their dad to raise 5 kids on their own. Social workers first wanted them in foster care but sent to boarding school instead. -QD112*

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## Schooling

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*I know that my mom has said that [the boarding schools] didn't prepare her for what school or life would be like outside of the boarding school. Not only did she suffer a lack of sufficient education at the boarding school, and was forced into Catholicism, but she experienced racism as soon as she got out of school and went to a public school. She was not prepared for how to excel academically or socially. -QD84*

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While this study focuses on Michigan Native American boarding schools, the questionnaire responses revealed that some Michigan Tribal members attended boarding schools outside of the state and in Canada. Among Survivors, 6.7% reported attending a Non-Michigan Native American boarding school, specifically St. Augustine Indian Mission School in Nebraska. For Descendants or Others Impacted, 3.9% identified connections to non-Michigan Native American boarding schools, including Flandreau Indian School in South Dakota. Additionally, 4.6% of Descendants or Others Impacted reported connections to Canadian Residential Schools, such as the Spanish Indian Residential School in Ontario and the St. Michael Indian Residential School in British Columbia.

These findings underscore that while Native American boarding schools in Michigan were central to the experiences of Michigan Tribal members, the findings also reflect the broader reach of Federal Indian policies on Native American boarding schools and their continued impact on Michigan Tribal communities.

Table 5 presents the different locations of Native American boarding schools attended by Tribal members from Michigan, based on responses from Survivors and the Descendants and Others Impacted Questionnaires. The boarding schools are presented in three categories: Native American boarding schools in Michigan, Non-Michigan Native American boarding schools in the U.S., and Canadian residential schools. Further evidence is available in the Appendix J, Table J2 showing that there is considerable time when these Survivors were in the boarding schools away from their family and culture.

Table 5. Locations of boarding schools attended, reported by Survivors (N = 30) and Descendants or Others Impacted (N = 168)

Boarding School	Location	Survivors	Descendants or Others
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		Impacted	
Michigan Native American Boarding Schools			
Holy Childhood of Jesus School	Michigan	26 (86.7%)	61 (40.1%)
Mount Pleasant Indian Industrial Boarding School	Michigan	—	43 (28.3%)
Old St. Joseph Orphanage and School	Michigan	2 (6.7%)	13 (8.6%)
Unsure about the name of the MiNAB	Michigan	—	20 (6.4%)
Baraga Chippewa Boarding and Day School	Michigan	—	1 (0.7%)
Holy Family Orphanage	Michigan	—	1 (0.7%)
	<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>28 (93.3%)</b>	<b>139 (91.4%)</b>
Non-Michigan Native American Boarding Schools			
Flandreau Indian School	South Dakota	—	2 (1.3%)
Wahpeton Indian School	North Dakota	—	1 (0.7%)
St. Augustine Indian Mission School	Nebraska	2 (6.7%)	1 (0.7%)
Eufaula Dormitory	Oklahoma	—	1 (0.7%)
Lac du Flambeau Indian Boarding School	Wisconsin	—	1 (0.7%)
	<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>2 (6.7%)</b>	<b>6 (3.9%)</b>
Canadian Residential Schools			
Spanish Indian Residential School	Ontario, Canada	—	3 (2.1%)
Unsure about the name of the Canadian Residential School	Canada	—	3 (2.1%)
St. Michael Indian Residential School	British Columbia, Canada	—	1 (0.7%)
	<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>—</b>	<b>7 (4.6%)</b>
	<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>151</b>

The data highlights that Holy Childhood of Jesus School in Michigan had the highest attendance rates reported by both groups. Specifically, 86.7% of Survivors reported attending this school, while 40.1% of Descendants or Others Impacted identified it as a school their relative or community member attended. Holy Childhood of Jesus School remained open until 1983 or 1984 (official records differ), which may have contributed to its prominence in questionnaire responses

and the impact on multiple generations. The second most frequently mentioned school by Descendants or Others Impacted was Mount Pleasant Indian Industrial School, with 28.3% reporting a relative or community member attending this school. Mount Pleasant's closure in 1934 could also explain why it was primarily discussed by Descendants or Others Impacted rather than Survivors. Notably, 6.4% of Descendants or Others Impacted were uncertain about the Native American boarding school their relative or friend attended. A possible explanation for the uncertainty is the intergenerational sharing of stories focused on personal experiences rather than the institution's name.

### *Quality of Instruction*

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*I just did not understand math. And because I did not do well in math, then they used my face for the eraser. They'd grab me by my hair and rubbed my face back and forth across the chalkboard. -TS17*

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The lack of proper instruction and preparation for life after the boarding schools set the students up for poor post-school outcomes. Educational attainment is a strong determinant of income, health status, housing, involvement with the criminal justice system, reliance on public assistance, and other conditions prone to inequalities (Levin et al., 2007). Consequently, the inadequate education provided in these schools placed many boarding school Survivors at greater risk of adverse social determinants of health (e.g., limited access to healthy foods, quality health care, stable housing, or economic opportunity). This systemic failure to provide adequate instruction perpetuated cycles of poverty, poorer health outcomes, and social inequities, undermining the long-term well-being of Native communities. The education they received failed to give Survivors the tools necessary to thrive in the unfamiliar and rapidly changing world imposed upon them. After leaving the boarding schools, some students continued their education in public schools, where they encountered significant racism and mistreatment.

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*They prepared [students] to be laborers, to work in factories, to keep quiet, to not ruffle feathers, and to just work. -QD57*

*After my grandmother attended the boarding school, she went to a different Catholic school. There she did domestic servant work. -QD95*

*They prepared students how to fit in White world as a marginalized person. -QD64*

*I didn't know how to live. I was like a caged bird. And then I was let loose and free, but I didn't know where to go or how to do anything. I felt dumb because I didn't know how to do nothing. I had to ask for help all the time, and these are the effects that I still deal with in my life. It stunted my growth. - TS08*

*I don't think my father was at all prepared for the rest of his life. He didn't receive a quality education. He wasn't happy there. He was conflicted spiritually. He ended up a raging alcoholic after the boarding school experience, though the last 30 years of his life were living in sobriety. He entered the army at age 17, dropping out of high school due to racism and poor treatment at the public school he returned to after boarding school. He lost his father at age 10, so he didn't have time to learn what a father's responsibility was. He did not give affection because of not receiving any for the 5 years he attended boarding school. The boarding school experience was detrimental to his childhood development, mental health, wellbeing, and built a layer of trauma that was difficult for him to manage and heal from. -TS08*

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A Survivor stated that the teachers lacked fundamental teaching skills. Instead of using best practices for teaching and learning, the teachers were “abusive and punitive” they would hit “rulers on [students’] hands when spelling and doing cursive” or “if you didn’t learn fast enough.” Other Survivors described leaving the school without knowing basic math and described how students were ridiculed for not understanding how to solve the problems.

A Survivor shared that her brother struggled with math and was punished for it. As he got older, she started to see the rage build in him. She perceived his rage as

“internalized hatred” and a mix of “sadness, helplessness, hopelessness, and frustration.” Many Dibaajimodag reported that the focus at the boarding schools was on behavior and compliance not on academics. They followed a strict schedule throughout the day, including being forced to pray several times a day.

While the boarding school public narrative was often about providing Native students with an education, the questionnaire responses also demonstrate that the instruction received was frequently subpar and often abusive. Figure 2 demonstrates how Dibaajimodag perceived the quality of education with the boarding schools. Nearly 41% of Survivors rated the education quality as “horrible.” Survivors also shared that they felt inadequately prepared academically and with life skills after leaving the institutions. Additionally, the majority of Descendants (74.4%) felt that the education quality was “horrible.”

Additionally, Dibaajimodag indicated that the education from boarding schools prepared their families to be in a “White world” only where they would be laborers and domestic servants.

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*They were terrible! Don't teach my family anything other than it's evil to be Native. My grandma only spoke Ojibwe, and [students] were hit if caught speaking it. -QD51*

*Teachers and nuns hit them often with rulers and thick leather straps. -QD112*

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### **Staff Behavior**

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*There was no affection and no love. The nuns were super strict and once [her mother] was beaten with a hanger because she didn't grab the right dress. -QD28*

*My grandma wouldn't talk much about it & her brothers passed when I was little. My mom said it was a traumatic experience for my grandmother, and she said that the teachers were very mean, and it was very scary for her to be away from her parents at such a young age especially without knowing English that well at the time. -QD75*

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Overall, most Dibaajimodag shared that staff in general were mean and strict. They also used words such as “cruel,” “terrible,” “horrible,” and “devil” to describe school staff. The lack of positive student-teacher relationships predisposed Survivors for long term negative outcomes, as research has consistently demonstrated that the quality of student-teacher relationships impacts educational outcomes and well-being (Sanders et al., 2016; Sharkey et al., 2008). Other Dibaajimodag stated there was a lack of compassion and love from the school staff. A few Dibaajimodag labeled staff as hypocrites because they praised God but did not follow the teachings of their own church.

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*They were the devils. Hypocritical because they praised a god by doing the exact opposite of his words. -QD23*

*When my grandma was in 3rd grade, the nun asked her to point out Alaska on an unmarked map. When she couldn't, the nun smacked her on the back of the head with a ruler causing my grandmas head to slam on the desk. -QD93*

---

Figure 1 compares how Survivors ( $n = 30$ ), rated teacher and staff quality based on their direct experiences as students. Descendants and Other Impacted Individuals ( $n = 15$ ) provided ratings based on the lived experiences and stories shared by their relatives or community members impacted by teacher and staff quality. The majority of Dibaajimodag—85.4% of Descendants and 60.0% of Survivors—rated the teacher and staff quality with the lowest quality rating on a scale from 1 (low) to 5 (high).

When responding to this question, Dibaajimodag responses focused less on the quality of teaching and instruction and more on the mistreatment, physical and sexual abuse, and neglect they experienced from teachers and staff. Half of the Survivors reported some form of punitive physical abuse for minor actions, such as talking in one's sleep. One Survivor shared, “I was locked in the small room every night because I talked in my sleep. The room had no windows. I was made to clean the dining room tables after I was denied dinner.” Another described punishment involving physical abuse: “The nuns used pointer sticks as a way of punishment to hit the students, and kneeling on them during mass. My brother ran away after a nun tried molesting him” (QS14).

Descendants and Other Impacted Individuals recounted how boarding schools prioritized strict discipline and control over students, focusing more on forced labor than education. Some Descendants shared that the boarding school experience

centered on labor instead of learning. A Descendant shared, “My grandmother doesn’t remember any education there. Only was taught how to work” (QD96).

Other Descendants described how teachers neglected Native children’s education: “The teachers were not paying attention or giving instruction to Native American children. Instead, they were teaching others who were not supposed to be on that program” (Q78). Another account noted, “They lacked the fundamental skills as teachers. They were Catholic nuns and priests who did not follow the teachings of their Church” (QD91). Many emphasized that teachers and staff created an environment resembling a prison rather than a school, perpetuating a system of control and neglect.

Many of the Descendants’ responses highlighted cultural oppression at these institutions. One Descendant shared: “They were terrible! They didn’t teach my family anything other than that it’s evil to be Native. My grandma only spoke Ojibwe, and they were hit if caught speaking it. Teachers and nuns hit them often with rulers and thick leather straps. If caught bedwetting, you’d have to sleep on the floor covered with your piss blankets” (QD112). Another recounted: “My mom didn’t like it. They forced her to learn English and would hit her hands with a stick if she spoke her Native language” (QD29).

A few of the Descendants recounted stories of sexual and physical abuse from the staff and nuns. “They were mean to innocent children. My mom said she remembers hear[ing] other students crying and getting disciplined many days she attended school. She said it was worse when you stopped hearing the crying” (QD90). Another Descendant described the sexual abuse: “Sexually and physical abuse took place at this location and young children had lost their life’s. No one was ever held responsible or accountable” (QD85).

Conversely, some Survivors who described rare moments of kindness or positive memories amidst the broader challenges. One Survivor recalled, “I remember at night one of the nuns would play music for us to dance to” (QS22). Another noted that some teachers were more lenient or supportive compared to others. Some Dibaajimodag shared mixed accounts, such as one Descendant saying, “Some teachers were great at what they were teaching. Others—not so good” (QS10). Others described relatives who had limited recollections of their time at boarding schools.

The frequency of abuse used during instruction was a part of so many Dibaajimodag memories. This was a common boarding school experience; discipline was harsh and constant, as evident in one Survivor’s account.

*By time I left the school, I felt different. I was insecure, very, very shy because you had to keep your mouth shut, feet on the floor, hands to yourself, walk two by two down the hall. No whispering, no talking, nothing. And we did all of that with precision, but they took away that ability to feel. When I saw my sisters beat up by the nuns, I couldn't say anything. I wanted to say something like leave them alone, because I used to fight my sister's battles when we were in kindergarten. But with her, I couldn't do that because if I did, then I'd get beat too. Or if you said something, she would yell, "You, Florence, get over there and smack that kid. You, Frida, go punch that one." And they had to go do it because if they didn't, then they would get it too. So, the kids all learned to pretty much make it look good. -TS17*

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Building on the previous discussion about staff behavior in the schooling section, the following 1925 letter from Mt. Pleasant Indian School teacher Eugenia Courtright to BCIM Director Rt. Rev. William Hughes (Figure 10 and Figure 11) discusses the new Mt. Pleasant Indian School Superintendent, Ora Padgett. Courtright's letter makes allegations about the character of religious leadership with access to Native children at the government school. For example,

Mr. Padgett is a Methodist; he has not interfered in any way with Catholic religious activities, but the fact remains that religious policy of the school is dictated by one Mr. C. W. Campbell of Mt. Pleasant who is in charge of the religious work among the Indians in the district as Methodist minister. He is in the furniture business.

Mr. Campbell has an unsavory reputation. He is in the pay of the Indian Committee of Home Missions referred to in the latter [sic] attached. Also, he belongs to the Ku Klux Klan and was very active in the late campaign for the abolishment of parochial schools in Michigan. (Courtright, 1925)

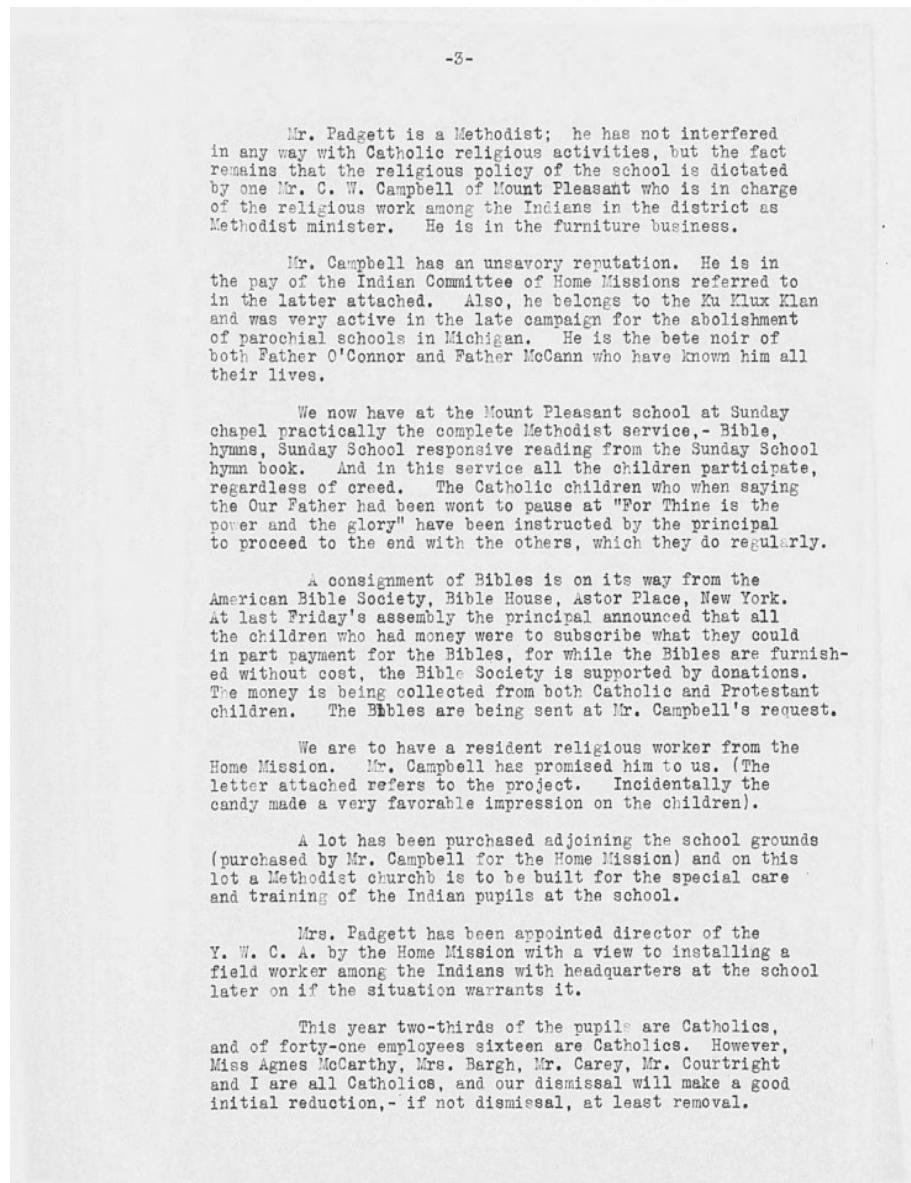


Figure 9. Excerpt of a letter from Mt. Pleasant Indian School teacher Eugenia Courtright to Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions Director Rt. Rev. William Hughes. 1925. Page 1 of 2

-4-

To further complicate matters Mr. Peairs saw fit to appoint a Catholic principal last fall, - Mr. Schmitt, and he it is who is teaching the children the responsive readings and the postscript to the Lord's Prayer.

Mr. Schmitt was employed as temporary teacher at Haskell last year, and sent here as principal by Mr. Peairs. Mr. Schmitt is from Lawrence, Kansas, is a personal friend of Supervisor Spalsbury, and worships blindly at the shrine of Mr. Peairs. He has a peculiarly over-developed sense of the respect and loyalty due a superior officer: if Mr. Peairs or Mr. Padgett told him to take the Catholic children to the Methodist church every other Sunday he would do just exactly that, and find justification for doing it.

Personally, we like him. He is a gentle, kindly man with what is apparently a sweet and lovable disposition. He has four very lovely daughters, a wife who is an ideal mother, and his home life is a joy to behold. But I am afraid he is gullible.

Father McCann can not understand Mr. Schmitt's attitude on the religious question. Mr. Schmitt was the first to ask Mr. Campbell to speak at Sunday chapel. Agnes McCarthy who knew the reputation he enjoyed in town somewhat demurred, but Mr. Schmitt was firm and just a bit angry; he said Mr. Campbell might be a "good Kluxer, but that he might also be a good speaker." At chapel he spoke to Mr. Campbell and his assistant, an Indian named [REDACTED], as Brother Campbell and Brother [REDACTED]; it is a terrible strain on the Irish contingent.

We have a member of the Ku Klux for our engineer. He is a professed atheist, and loudly emphatic in his denunciations of Catholics, - (he tried to convince me that there was an underground passage from Father O'Connor's house to the nun's house across the street, and that each of my children had a gun buried under the church with which they would some day destroy a certain number of Protestants, - he is that sort of man); his vocabulary is beyond conception, and his pet pastime is telling obscene stories to the boys detailed at the power house, pausing in this occupation only long enough to permit him to listen to the nocturnal exploits of the boys with the girls, with which tales the boys in turn regale him. He is Mr. Schmitt's most intimate friend, and Mr. Schmitt listens confidently to all that is told him concerning the other Catholic employees.

If it was Mr. Peairs' intention to pull the wool over our eyes by appointing a Catholic as principal, his scheme has worked beautifully. Some of us did wonder at times, but we decided we must be old-fashioned and rather narrow-minded.

Figure 10. Excerpt of a letter from Mt. Pleasant Indian School teacher Eugenia Courtright to Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions Director Rt. Rev. William Hughes. 1925. Page 2 of 2

### *Food and Nutrition Quality*

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*I hated the venison that was crammed down our throats.  
The nuns would walk up and down the dining room to  
make sure everyone was eating all their food.  
Consequences were harsh if we didn't finish. -QS17*

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Many Descendants described the quality and nutritional value of the food at boarding schools as based on the stories shared by their parents. Descendants described how the meals were nutritionally inadequate and unsafe. One Descendant shared, "Food was little rations full of bugs and viruses, and the children had no choice to pass because they were hungry and would have to experience abuse if they refused" (QD111). Another stated that the food had "no nutritional value" and was "lacking and far from nutritious" (QD51). Several Descendants shared how food was weaponized as a form of punishment and control. Students who refused to eat or did not finish their meals endured physical abuse or had their food withheld. One Descendant described that their father "would get abused if they didn't eat enough" (QD61). Another Descendant shared that if their mom did not eat all of their food "they would not get anything else to eat until they finished this meal first ... even if it was days old" (QD82).

The differences in perceptions between Survivors and Descendants stemmed from Survivor's lived experiences with food scarcity and food insecurity, which provide important context and are linked to the induced family vulnerability described in other sections. For many Survivors, the food provided at boarding school, even though inadequate, may have seemed better because it included regular meals. One Survivor explained, "We got to eat three meals a day. We didn't always have that at home" (QS32). Another Survivor shared about having access to nutritional food, "You had food to eat that had a nutritional value" (QS30). Even among Descendants, many included stories from their parents: "My father compared it to military food. As a marine, military food is quite literally four steps below prison food. No attempt was made to keep them healthy, just alive" (QD01). Similarly to the Survivors, the Descendants commented about their family members having access to regular meals, "My dad said that was the reason sometimes they were brought there was to make sure they were not going hungry" (QD34).

Survivors viewed the food they received at boarding school as an improvement from the severe food insecurity experienced at home. Descendants highlighted the systemic abuse associated with it. Many described the food as nutritionally lacking, unsafe, and often used as a tool for control, abuse, and punishment. Additionally, many described the food as bug-infested and served in small quantities. Students who refused or did not finish their meals could also suffer more abuse and punishment, such as food deprivation. The Survivors' and Descendants' shared stories underscore that food was not sustenance but a tool to enforce compliance and was another example of the trauma experienced at boarding schools.

Since colonization, Native Americans have struggled with food insecurity and disorders related to food consumption, such as diabetes, obesity, and heart disease. As mentioned earlier in this report, many Native Americans experience major physical health issues. It has been estimated that one in four Native Americans experiences food insecurity, and the figure may be higher on reservations where transportation and resources are sparse (Administration for Native Americans, 2025).

Historical traumas have impacted traditional foodways, or the connection between culture, community, and the production and consumption of food. These traumas include the loss of food sovereignty from the forced relocation of AI/AN people from ancestral lands, forced cultural assimilation policies (e.g., boarding schools), disrupted land management and fractionation, Tribal termination and land privatization, and the substitution of Native culturally appropriate foods with commodity foods. Barriers to obtaining Native traditional food include requiring permits, which limits access to hunting, fishing, or farming; discriminatory farm lending practices; and degradation of the environment; while barriers to buying healthy food include the lack of transportation and the higher cost of food in Tribal areas. Access to preparing healthy food is limited in areas that lack electricity or running water (Move For Hunger, 2024).

For many Tribes in Michigan, the traditional ways of sustenance, preservation, and consumption greatly changed throughout the centuries since colonization, thus impacting future generations. In response, the United States distributed commodity foods to Tribal communities, which consisted of "non-Native foods, such as lard, wheat flour, canned fruit and vegetables—often high in sugar and sodium, respectively—and canned meat. High-fat, high-sodium, and calorically dense foods featured heavily" (Maillacheruvu, 2022). Thus, relationships between Native Americans, food insecurities, and chronic health conditions are a public health concern across the United States.

### Cleanliness and Safety

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*The school was clean because the girl students cleaned and scrubbed it every single day. The basement, however, was horrendous. There was no safety anywhere in the school or anywhere on school grounds. They were abused and tortured everywhere. -QS17*

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Survivors rated cleanliness higher than other factors, attributing it to strict standards enforced through physical and verbal punishment for failing to meet these expectations. However, Descendants overwhelmingly described conditions as "horrible." Both groups agreed that cleanliness was achieved through exploitation and disregarding student well-being. Survivors reported exposure to hazardous materials and unsafe conditions. While the ratings provide a broad view of perceptions, they do not reflect the complexity of the experiences shared by Survivors and Descendants. Additional context about the cleanliness and building safety quality was shared by Dibaajimodag and is reported below.

One Survivor noted, "The school was clean because they made us keep it clean, and if it wasn't clean enough, they made us clean it again and again, every inch" (QS05). A Descendant reflected on the trauma experienced by their family, stating, "They children cleaned that building. I can still see that trauma in them. All my dad's siblings and grandparents' house you could eat off the floor. They are religious, clean and clean" (QD31). Descendants also reported that the buildings were unhygienic; for example, one commented, "Sickness was rampant." Others discussed instances of little to no heat, with many reports of relatives recalling that the buildings were dark and cold. However, both groups described how building safety was overshadowed by the emphasis on maintaining the appearance of cleanliness.

Several Descendants reported that some forced labor to keep the schools clean mirrored adult responsibilities, including dangerous tasks like chimney sweeping. Dibaajimodag also discussed unsafe drinking water. These narratives highlight the ongoing risk of harm endured by students, which was exacerbated by neglect and health risks. One Survivor described a situation where "My uncle sustained a head injury in September that became infected in October, requiring a week-long hospital stay for treatment" (QD46). Descendants echoed these themes through stories about fear and danger. One Descendant described, "There was nothing safe about that building. Children died there. Spirits were broken there" (QD61).

Several Survivors expressed their concerns about safety issues, including exposure to hazardous materials such as painting and asbestos, unsafe areas, a lack of fire alarms, and an outdated fire escape. One Survivor described the environment as "full of dangerous paint and asbestos" (QS10), highlighting the hazardous conditions they endured. They shared that cleanliness was prioritized over safety: "It was clean, but safety was not [prioritized]" (QS11). Living in fear, especially of the nuns, they said, "The building was safe so long as you were clear of the nuns." Another Descendant shared, "The school stood for many years after it was shut down; it was a sound building." The cleanliness of the building came at the expense of the students' safety.

As further evidence of the issues regarding Cleanliness and Safety presented earlier, in 1929, *The Indian Sentinel* (Figure 12), a national Catholic publication about Indian missions, reported deplorable conditions at its orphanage in Michigan, which *The Indian Sentinel* played a role in securing funds to replace:

The Buildings at Assinins were the poorest imaginable. The stones were piled on top of the other and joined with lime mortar. The mortar, disintegrating, left great cracks in the walls. The interior presented an appearance suggestive of the poverty and the privations of the stable at Bethlehem. The orphanage consisted of two houses, one for boys and the other for girls. Both houses were in a condition beyond repair. Many a barn was better than the rooms in the building, although the Sisters and children had to live there. Plaster was falling, floors were sinking and rats infested the big holes in the basement walls. There were no conveniences. Fifty Indian children took their baths in the shanty which served as a laundry. Many who saw the place remarked, "I never thought that an institution as wretched as that could be occupied." (Sisters of St. Agnes, 1920)

ST. JOSEPH'S MISSION EDITION

THE INDIAN SENTINEL

**BISHOP PAWNS WATCH TO SAVE MISSION**

On the shore of Keweenaw Bay, near the site where, in October, 1660, the illustrious Jesuit Father Rene Menard said the first Mass among these Indians, and a few miles from the present town of L'Anse, Michigan, is St. Joseph's Orphanage, Assinins. Hallowed by the labors of the martyred Father Menard, it was especially dear to the heart of the great missionary, was laid to rest among the old Indian chiefs in the little mission cemetery.

Bishop Eis appointed Father Melchior Faust as Father Terhorst's successor. With untiring zeal and devotedness he continued the noble work of his predecessors, improving and bettering the condition of the Indians in every respect. They in turn looked upon him as their father and protector and had recourse to him in all their troubles and difficulties, always parting from him consoled and helped. Toward the children especially he displayed unfailing kindness.

In the spring of 1906 the Sisters of St. Joseph withdrew from Assinins mission. They, too, like Father Terhorst, had held the place for forty years. Of their companions, Sisters Protais, Ildephonse, Ermelinda and Genevieve have found their resting-place among a race they benefited by their self-sacrifice.

June 20, 1906, the Sisters of St. Agnes, of Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, took charge of the Indian school and St. Joseph's Orphanage. In 1910 Bishop Eis built the Holy Family Orphanage in Marquette for the white orphans. The Indian orphans were retained at Assinins. The buildings at Assinins were the poorest imaginable. The stones were piled one on top of the other and joined with lime mortar. The mortar, disintegrating, left great cracks in the walls. The interior presented an appearance suggestive of the poverty and privations of the stable at Bethlehem. The orphanage consisted of two houses, one for boys and the other for girls. Both houses were in a condition beyond repair. Many a barn was better than the rooms in the building, although the Sisters and children had to live there. Plaster was falling, floors were sinking and rats infested the big holes in the basement walls. There were no conveniences. Fifty Indian children took their baths in the shanty which served as a laundry. Many who saw the place remarked, "I never thought that an institution as wretched as that could be occupied."

This will give you an idea of the great joy which was ours when last summer we were able to lead the little Chippewa orphans out of that tumble-down dwelling into a beautiful new fireproof structure built by the charity of diocesan benefactors whom our Right Reverend Bishop Nussbaum directly and by means of THE INDIAN SENTINEL had interested in the cause. Through THE INDIAN SENTINEL also, Monsignor Hughes, who takes an active interest in these little orphans, has secured friends who send shipments of clothing that enable us to keep the children clothed warmly and well.

SISTERS OF ST. AGNES.

**JULIAN NODIN, CHIPPEWA, ASSININS, WHO DIED AT THE AGE OF 108 YEARS**

Bishop Baraga, who came here from La Pointe in 1843.

In 1853 Father Baraga was consecrated Bishop of what is now known as the Diocese of Marquette and Sault Ste. Marie. In the autumn of 1854 he visited his beloved mission at Assinins and addressed the Indians in their native tongue.

Father Gebhard Terhorst was ordained by Bishop Baraga in 1860 and about a year later was sent to the mission, encouraged by the Bishop's declaration that he himself had spent ten of the most pleasant years of his life there. Father Terhorst enlisted the services of the Sisters of St. Joseph of St. Louis, who accepted his school with all the poverty and hardships it had to offer. Like a poor man who puts his all in pawn, Bishop Baraga ~~donated~~ his silver watch as an offering for the school. Father Terhorst sold the Bishop's watch for twenty-five dollars and used the money to help defray the traveling expenses of the Sisters.

Father Terhorst gave up his house to the Sisters and took up his abode in a room in the rear of the church. In 1881, at the instance of Bishop Verdin, Father Terhorst built an orphanage at Assinins, and placed the institution under the patronage of St. Joseph. After forty years of labor for the salvation of the Indians, Father Terhorst



Figure 11. Article from the Indian Sentinel describing the poor conditions of the Assinins Indian orphanage. 1929-1930.

### Health Care Quality

*Mom said they would receive vaccinations without parents being there or consenting ... she said they were rarely told what was being injected into them. If you were hurt, you were punished for being clumsy, and did not receive any other medical attention to care for your wounds. Other students would help however they could. -QD77*

The findings from the Survivor and Descendant questionnaires align with those of the *Meriam Report* (Brookings Institution, 1928) regarding the living conditions of students. As illustrated in Chakraborty (2022), students faced cramped living spaces and poorly nutritious diets, often consisting solely of bread and boiled potatoes. These conditions contributed to the prevalence of diseases like tuberculosis and trachoma among the students.

Survivors reported a broader distribution of ratings for the quality of health care (Figure 5), while Descendants expressed a high concentration of negative ratings, highlighting generational differences in perceptions and demonstrating how trauma can build through generations.

Survivors described a complete absence of medical attention. One Survivor recalled, "Never seen the doctor or dentist the whole five years ago. Was there?" Another Survivor shared, "They threw me down the stairs and broke my arm yet only brought me to the doctor for that one time." Many Descendants recounted stories of systemic neglect. One Descendant noted, "They didn't receive health care and was traumatized by a sibling's death at the school." Another shared, "Kids were beaten up and nothing was done about their injuries."

A Descendant stated her family member "said that they had a sick clinic or sick bay, but they never went because kids would never return back to the dormitory." Similarly, 15.4% of Survivors rated healthcare as "poor," often describing inadequate care that was only provided in severe cases.

One Survivor noted, "I only remember that we could see the nurse at school during school days only," indicating limited access to health care services.

One Descendant commented, "I've seen the correspondences and letters between my family members and the school staff, the students' health was often talked about at length." Another Descendant reflected on the inadequacy of care, underscoring the serious repercussions, "I think health care could have been a lot better considering the fact some stories I've been told from other elders involve deaths." Survivors had a slightly more positive perspective. One Survivor shared, "They fixed my teeth, I had fallen and knocked out my baby teeth before attending." This shows that while care was available, it was not accessible to everyone. While Descendants pointed to a broader pattern of inconsistencies, Survivors highlighted personal care experiences.

Few mentioned medical interventions such as shots or immunizations. However, some Survivors expressed uncertainty regarding the health care they received, as reflected in the quote: "Don't recall getting health care." Ultimately, the shared

testimonies from Survivors and Descendants do not necessarily reflect a progression in health care quality from poor to excellent, but rather subjective interpretations of varying degrees of medical neglect.

Echoing the accounts shared by the Survivors and Descendants, others confirm that medical care for Native students was typically minimal, often limited to extreme emergencies. As Estrada (2022) describes, with many students enrolled, it was not uncommon for sick children to be admitted and to intermingle with healthy students. While schools did perform physical examinations on incoming students, these examinations were often superficial. School officials primarily conducted visual checks, making it easy for them to overlook hidden internal diseases.

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*They never saw doctors. They had an infirmary though but never ever saw doctors. -QD82*

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Archival evidence also supports Dibaajimodag reports of inadequate health care in the boarding schools. An 1891 letter (Figure 13) from the Chippewa Boarding School in Baraga reports a student death and the disenrollment of several other children due to illness (Terhorst, 1891). Fr. Terhorst reassures the Bureau that new enrollees will be found to replace these children, likely a reference to the per-child funding that the BCIM schools relied upon.

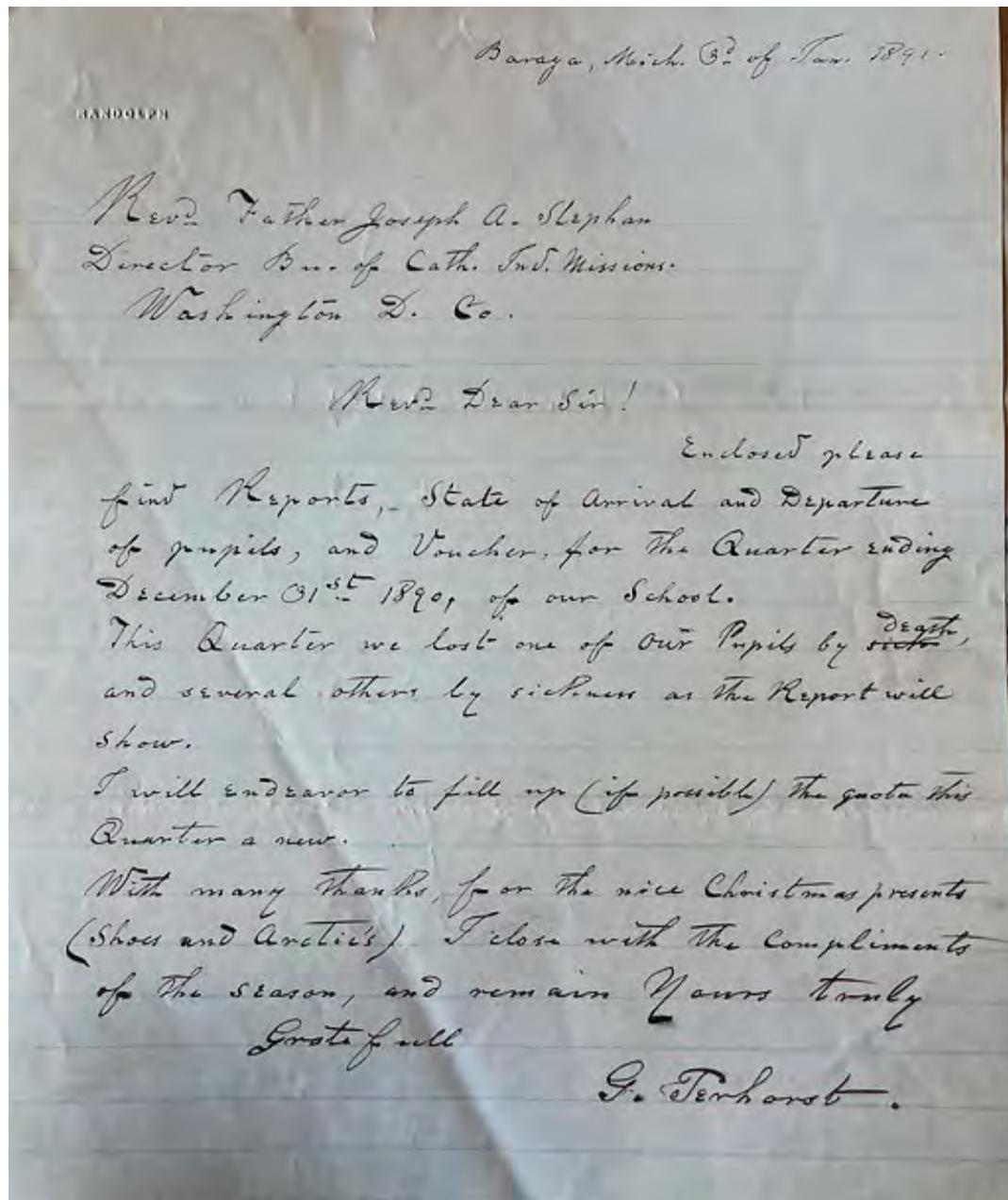


Figure 12. Letter from Chippewa Indian Boarding School to the Director of the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions. 1891.

Unfortunately, this letter contains no details about the children who were ill or who had passed away. Such detailed reporting and specifics about individual pupils may be the domain of local dioceses. The archives of the Diocese of Marquette may also have additional information and records.

Another example of the harsh conditions at the institution that compromised student and safety and well-being can be found in confidential reports and communications

between personnel within the Indian Service. For instance, as shown in Figure 14, Mt. Pleasant Indian School Superintendent Robert Cochran made an urgent request for additional medical resources from a BIA physician, Dr. W.S. Stevens, on March 18, 1920 (Cochrane, 1920).

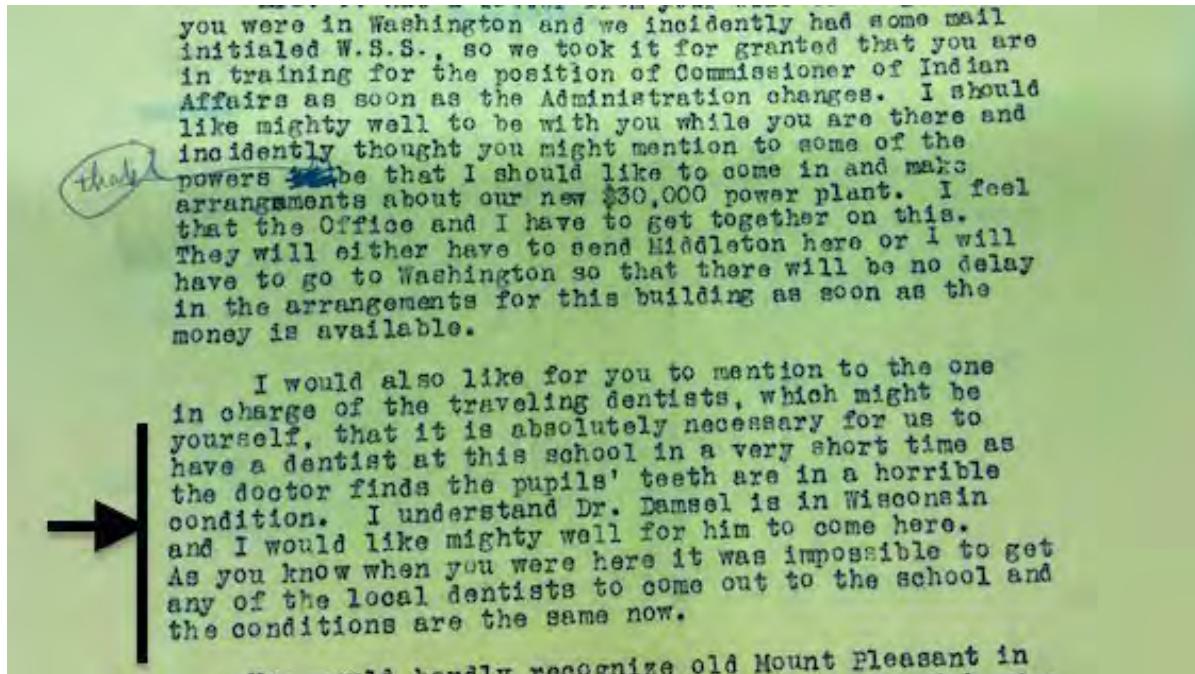


Figure 13. Excerpt from a letter from Mt. Pleasant Indian School Superintendent requesting urgent medical support. 1920.

Based on research by the team and confirmed by the National Archives and Records Administration archivist, only one physician's ledger (Figure 15 and Figure 16) has survived among the BIA's records of the Mt. Pleasant boarding school, documenting school clinic activities from 1926 to 1934 (Mt. Pleasant Indian School & Agency, 1928). The ledger reinforces Superintendent Cochran's pleas for urgent medical care.

The ledger offers a snapshot of the health conditions at the school, which were influenced by factors such as inadequate sanitation, overcrowding, overwork, and insufficient nutrition. These living conditions contributed to the prevalence of illnesses and injuries, including tuberculosis, influenza epidemics, conjunctivitis outbreaks, impetigo (a contagious skin infection often linked to overcrowding), whooping cough, burns, chapped hands (potentially from overwork and exposure),

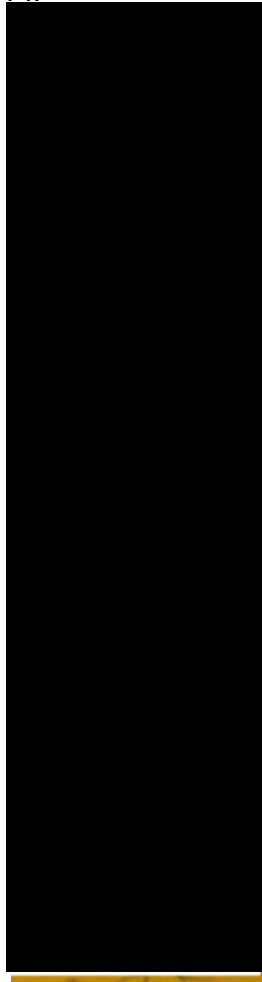
dental issues, pregnancy, and trachoma (a contagious disease-causing eye damage and potential vision loss). This ledger reflects some of the common health challenges recorded but is not exhaustive.

PII

13 ✓	Cold	1/3/28
15 ✓	Otitis Media	1/3/28
16 ✓	Acute Pharyngitis	1/4/28
15 ✓	Cold	1/5/28
13 ✓	Cold	1/6/28
7 ✓	Conjunctivitis	1/4/28
11 ✓	Conjunctivitis	1/4/28
16 ✓	Burn - skin	1/23/28
14 ✓	Acute Pharyngitis	1/2/28
15 ✓	Cold	1/6/28
9 ✓	Cold	1/3/28
16 ✓	Cold	1/4/28
13 ✓	Calanthalal Conjunctivitis	1/23/28
7 ✓	Sleeping sickness	1/9/28
18 ✓	Otitis Media	1/3/28
13 ✓	Cold	1/24/28
13 ✓	Cold	1/24/28
18 ✓	Toothache	1/3/28
10 ✓	Conjunctivitis	1/4/28
11 ✓	Intestinal inflammation	1/3/28
17 ✓	Intestinal	1/10/28
15 ✓	Glossitis of fingers	1/4/28
8 ✓	Cold	1/4/28
17 ✓	Glossitis of fingers	1/3/28
18 ✓	Conjunctivitis	1/2/28
14 ✓	Trachoma - eye	1/4/28

Figure 14. Excerpt from the school clinic register of the Mt. Pleasant Indian School detailing student medical conditions. January 1928.

PII



14 ✓	" 4-3-26 4-7-28
19 ✓	TD obturator 4-3-27 5-7-28
15 ✓	diffusalg 4-4-27 5-11-28
12 ✓	Cystitis 5-2-27 5-7-28
10 ✓	good -
10 ✓	diffusalg 4-4-27 5-12-28
9 ✓	" 5-4-28 5-12-28
9 ✓	" 5-4-28 5-12-28
14 ✓	" 5-4-28 5-12-28
14 ✓	" 5-4-28 5-12-28
12 ✓	" 5-4-28 5-12-28
11 ✓	" 5-4-28 5-12-28
12 ✓	" 5-4-28 5-12-28
8 ✓	" 5-4-28 5-12-28
10 ✓	" 5-4-28 5-12-28
12 ✓	" 5-4-28 5-12-28
15 ✓	" 5-4-28 5-12-28
11 ✓	" 5-5-28 5-12-28
15 ✓	" 5-6-28 5-12-28
15 ✓	" 5-6-28 5-12-28
12 ✓	" 5-6-28 5-12-28

Figure 15. Excerpt 2 of Mt. Pleasant Indian Boarding School Clinic Register. May 1928.

While reviewing the physician's ledger the researchers noted a significant gap in its records, as the pages corresponding to 1927 appear to have been removed. The researchers recorded that the binding was damaged, and several pages were semi-loose, with entries abruptly skipping from 1926 to 1928. Notably, 1927 was the year the DOI commissioned the Brookings Institution to conduct a comprehensive investigation into conditions at Native American boarding schools and agencies. Furthermore, in June of that year, the Brookings Institution's educational expert conducted an inspection of the Mt. Pleasant Indian Industrial Boarding School and Agency (Stambaugh, 1927).

In February of 1928, the DOI released the Brookings Institution report, *The Problem of Indian Administration*, colloquially known as the *Meriam Report*. The study's

findings aligned identically with the illnesses and injuries reported by the Mt. Pleasant physician's ledger.

Conditions at Native American boarding schools, the report revealed, included deplorable and dangerous conditions overseen by underpaid, understaffed, unqualified, and—at times—dangerous individuals:

Old buildings, often kept in use long after they should have been pulled down, and admittedly bad fire-risks in many instances; crowded dormitories; conditions of sanitation that are usually perhaps as good as they can be under the circumstances, but certainly below accepted standards; boilers and machinery out-of-date and in some instances unsafe, to the point of having long since been condemned, but never replaced; many medical officers who are of low standards of training and relatively unacquainted with the methods of modern medicine, to say nothing of health education for children; lack of milk sufficient to give children anything like the official "standard" of a quart per child per day, almost none of the fresh fruits and vegetables that are recommended as necessary in the menus taught to the children in the classroom; the serious malnutrition, due to the lack of food and use of wrong foods; schoolrooms seldom showing knowledge of modern principles of lighting and ventilating; lack of recreational opportunities, except athletics for a relatively small number in the larger schools; an abnormally long day, which cuts to a dangerous point the normal allowance for sleep and rest, especially for small children; and the generally routinized nature of the institutional life with its formalism in classrooms, its marching and dress parades, its annihilation of initiative, its lack of beauty, it's almost complete negation of normal family life, all of which have disastrous effects upon mental health and the development of wholesome personality: These are some of the conditions that make even the best classroom teaching of health ineffective. (Brookings Institution, 1928, pp. 392–393)

### *Forced Religious Assimilation*

---

*Every day we went to church, three, four times a day. Going to church, praying for your meals, before and after every meal, before you go to bed, forever praying, before your classes started, before you ran out to recess and all kinds*

*of prayers going on. And they treated us like we were the most sinful things. -TS17*

---

In 1452, years before the first arrival of European colonizers in the Americas, Pope Alexander VI established the Doctrine of Discovery, a set of legal frameworks to essentially claim control over non-Christian lands (Charles & Rah, 2019). The doctrine allowed European Catholic nations to expand their control over “discovered” lands through official decrees that granted explorers rights to claim lands, setting a precedent of forced religious assimilation in the Americas (Charles & Rah, 2019). During the late 19th and 20th centuries, the U.S. government and Christian missionary organizations collaborated to forcibly impose Christianity on Native American children through boarding schools. The federal government often paid religious organizations on a per capita basis for each Native American child enrolled to a school, with funds taken from Tribal treaty or trust fund accounts (Newland, 2022). One Descendant shared, “I know the U.S. Government used ‘Indian money’ from treaties to fund the boarding schools. The churches within the states and state-elected officials approved the schools.” These schools, often operated by various Christian dominations, sought to eliminate Indigenous spiritual traditions and practices and replace them with Christian doctrines (Adams, 1995). Additionally, Native children were forced to attend church services and study Christian principles, and those who did not comply were punished. One Survivor mentioned that church-run schools were “very bad” compared to government-run schools and expressed happiness for not attending a Catholic boarding school. Descendants and Survivors recalled stories and memories of being forced to go to church, specifically highlighting the repetitive nature of daily church activities.

---

*My grandmother said they mainly forced religious beliefs unto them, and she was scared to disobey them because of what the consequences could be. -QD81*

*We went to church every morning at 6am, then breakfast. Then go to school classes. Don't remember really having any fun. -QS16*

*I know that Holy Childhood was a place where they really, and many schools were run by religious institutions, but Holy Childhood, for example, was one school that really forced religion and Christianity and Catholicism on the*

*students. So, they had to attend mass multiple times a day, multiple times per week. -TD12*

---

Forcibly learning and practicing a new religion at a young age influenced boarding school Survivors' beliefs into adulthood, which also affected their Descendants. Historically, Native children learn about traditions and beliefs guided by the culture their parents belong to and live in (Tsethlikai, 2011). Growing up without cultural guidance from parents has impacted generations of Natives who still struggle with their identity today. Responses to Christianity have varied along a range of rejection to acceptance, with many communities adopting different components of both Christianity and Native spiritual beliefs (Dees, 2018).

---

*Spiritually she [Mom] developed a strong practice in Christianity and raised her children that way as well. She didn't start integrating Anishnaabe lifeways back into her life until her early 30s. Because she developed strong faith in boarding school, that did serve her when she was reconnecting back to her Anishnaabe traditional spirituality. So that was ironically one positive. -QD84*

---

Many Descendants reflected on how their families continued to follow Christianity after attending boarding schools, ultimately raising their children to do the same. However, some Survivors may have continued following Christianity because of fear. One Descendant reflected on how their mother's continued adherence to Christianity was influenced by the forced assimilation and abuse she experienced.

---

*Her culture was beaten out of her, and she was forced to be Catholic. She passed it on to her children/grandchildren so they would never have to go through what she went through. She told me this at breakfast one morning. -QD44*

---

Descendants also shared feelings of resentment, frustration, and hurt regarding forced religious assimilation. At the same time, they were also empowered and hopeful to rediscover and reconnect to Native spiritual beliefs encouraging Survivors and younger generations.

*I, myself, growing up hated churches all of them. I spiritually could feel the darkness, emptiness. I hurt because knowing what they been thru [sic], I know of more Tribal people that have gone to boarding school. I have only shared my grandmother's experience so far. I have a sense of fear, hurt, and hatred when it comes to Catholicism, I had it since I can remember before I knew my grandmother went here. -QD50*

*It's hard to be forced to think that Catholicism and Christianity is the only belief and that it's the only way of spirituality. I have personally suffered growing up, I am White, and I am Native. -QD92*

*She [Mom] still believes in Catholicism, when my sisters and I talk about traditional healing, ceremonies. She never wants to be open minded to it. -QD103*

---

Further understanding of the forced religious assimilation practices shared by Dibaajimodag can be gained by examining records that document these practices. For example, a 1926 correspondence between the Holy Childhood Mission in Harbor Springs and the National Holy Childhood Association (Figure 17) provides insight into the mechanisms of cultural and familial disruption. The association, which identified its “special interest” as “converting pagan children,” provided a \$150 donation to the Harbor Springs school (equivalent to \$2,644 in 2024) (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, n.d.). This donation required the school to submit a report detailing “the number of Indian children baptized,” “rescued,” “nursed,” “confided to Christian families,” and “placed on farms” (Figure 18). Access to the Diocese of Gaylord records is essential to fully contextualizing this correspondence and its implications (Lusk, 1926).

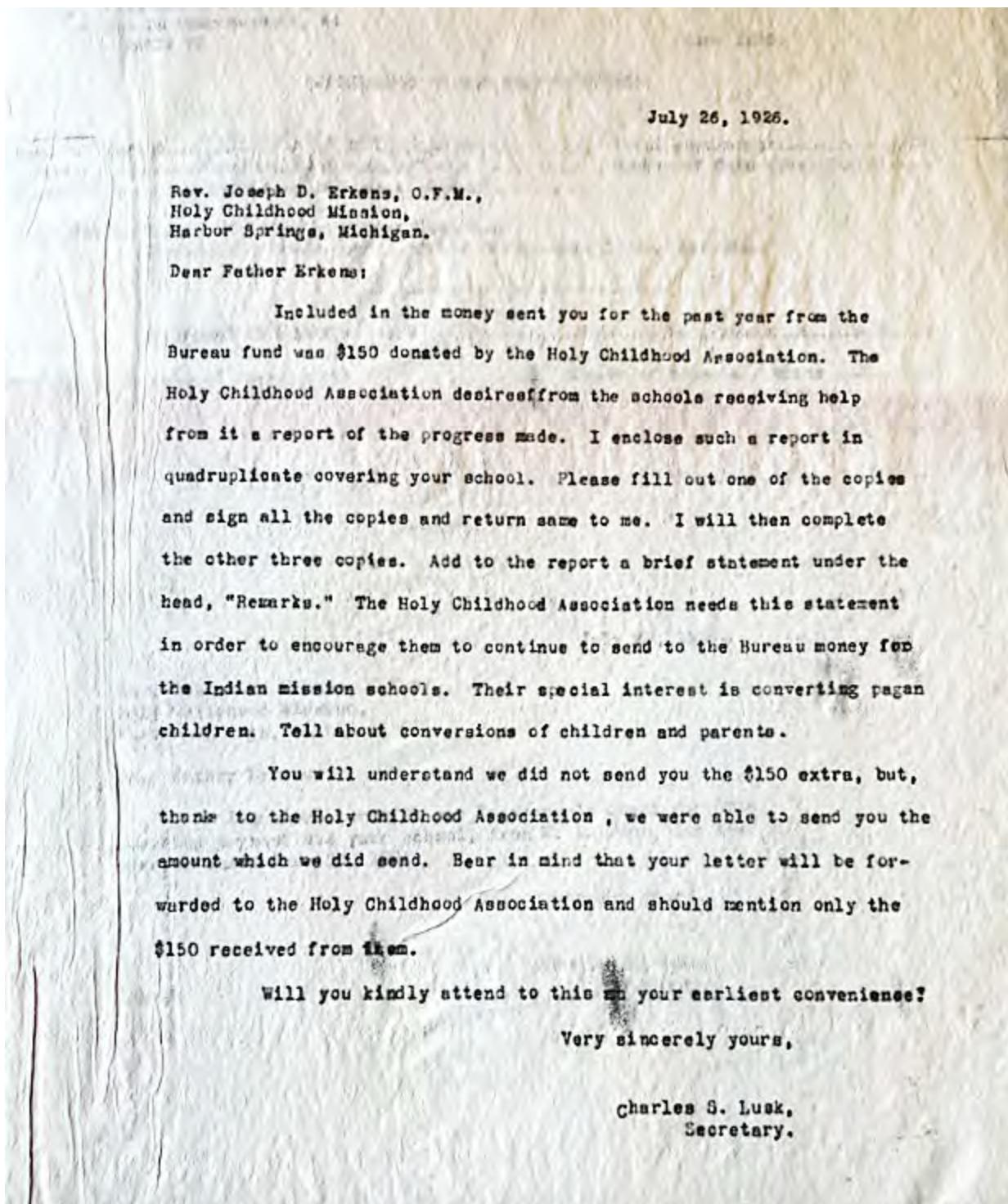


Figure 16. Letter from the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions to the Holy Childhood Mission School in Harbor Springs, Michigan. 1926.

General Direction & Central Advisory Board 44, Rue Du Cherche-Midi, 44 PARIS VI		No.
Year 1926.		
ASSOCIATION OF THE HOLY CHILDHOOD		
Name of Mission	Holy Childhood of Jesus	Total population
Location	Harbor Springs, Michigan	Number of Catholics
Superior	Joseph D. Erbman, C. S. B.	
Supported by Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions, Society for Preservation of the Faith among Indian Children.		
-----		
STATEMENT OF MISSION from January 1, 1925 to June 30, 1926		
Baptism of Infants of pagan birth	7	Number of priests - White 3 Indian
Children rescued	7	Number of Sisters - White 15 Indian
Children nursed	7	Number of Brothers - 3 Number of catechists - 4 Number of pupils - boys 147 girls 147
Children confided to Christian families	7	
Children placed on farms	7	
-----		
EXPENSES OF THE YEAR FOR CHILDREN.		
Received for year.		
Last Holy Childhood allowance	5,650.00	Baptized
Profits from work.		Children rescued
Donations		Children nursed
Total		Children confided to christian families
BALANCE.		Children in orphanages
Total receipts		Children in schools
Total expenses		Children in workshops
Gain		and factories
Loss		Children on farms
		For medical supplies
		For repairs
		For construction
		Extra expenses
REMARKS		
Last year about 100 children could not be taken into our school on account of lack of means.		
Joseph D. Erbman, C. S. B. Superior.		
1. All children who frequent many establishments should be counted only once. 2. The funds of the Society should be spent exclusively in favor of pagan children whom missionaries baptize, rescue and bring up.		

Figure 17. Holy Childhood Indian Boarding School Harbor Springs, Michigan Statement of Mission. 1925-1926.

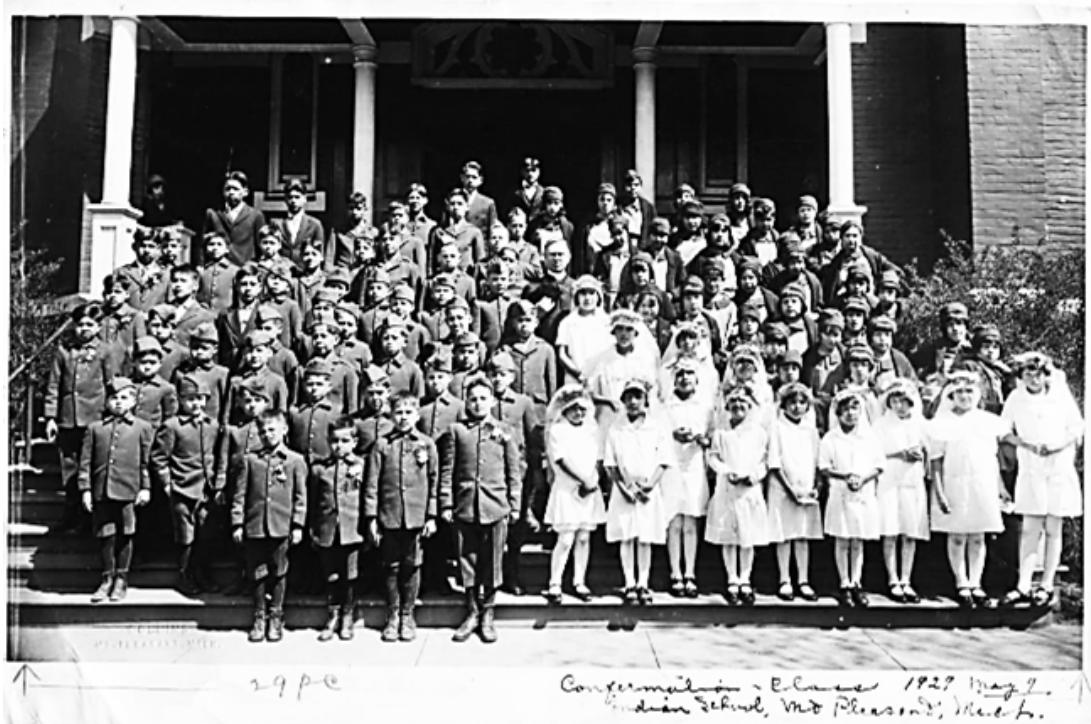


Figure 18. Mt. Pleasant Indian School confirmation class of 1929.

Additional evidence of forced religious assimilation includes photographs of the confirmation classes of Mt. Pleasant Indian school from 1929 and 1930 (Figure 19 and Figure 20) (Confirmation Class 1929 Indian School, Mt. Pleasant, Michigan; Confirmation Class 1930). These photographs verify Courtright's claim that Catholic education was allowed. Taken for Catholic publications, the images were intended to document the religious conversion and adherence of Native children, often to drive fundraising efforts. However, when combined with the truths shared by Dibaajimodag, a more troubling perspective on the evangelizing efforts of Michigan clergy at the Native American boarding schools is apparent.



Figure 20. Mt. Pleasant Indian School confirmation class of 1930.

### **Location Context: Michigan**

In this section, we present findings specific to the State of Michigan, the geographical and historical context of this study. This layer of the model examines the legacy of Native American boarding schools within Michigan and how it continues to shape the health, behavioral outcomes, economic conditions, and educational opportunities of Native communities within the state, as well as Survivors and Descendants living elsewhere. While some themes discussed here also appear in other sections, the emphasis in this section is on how these themes are situated within Michigan's unique geographical and historical context. This layer interacts with the broader systems and organizations, such as schools, child welfare services, and the justice system (which may receive state funding), and is also influenced by federal and state policies, which will be discussed in the next section. While focusing on Michigan, we acknowledge the far-reaching impacts of the boarding school system in Michigan.

The major themes that emerged related to the State of Michigan and include the **Legacy of the Boarding Schools in Michigan**, which describes the long term damage caused by the boarding schools; **Broken Family Connections**, demonstrating how the State made decisions about child removal; **Responsibility**, focusing on specific comments from Dibaajimodag about the state's role in the boarding schools; and **The Path Toward Healing**, describing steps that can be taken to bring forth healing. Each of these themes represents a thread in the story

of how Michigan is responsible for the impact of the Native American boarding schools in the state and ideas for a path forward. Some of the findings shared in this section led to recommendations for the broader goals of reconciliation and healing, which are discussed in the Carrying the Truths Forward section.

### *Legacy of the Boarding Schools in Michigan*

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*Boarding school normalized religious trauma, rape, separation of children from the home by the state, it has created cycles of community fracture and sickness that will never go away. -QD62*

---

Survivors and Descendants understand the cascading impact of boarding school policies and practices on their families, which in turn impacts their wider communities. In the questionnaires, Survivors and Descendants were asked about the overall long-term impact of boarding schools on Native communities in Michigan. Most responses from Descendants focused on cultural disconnection, emphasizing the loss of heritage and traditions not being passed down, with language loss mentioned as one of the most significant impacts. Additionally, Descendants referenced intergenerational trauma stemming from substance use, mental health disorders, and dysfunctional relationships as lasting impacts of boarding schools. As for Survivors, their responses touched on the same topics as Descendants; however, their most frequent responses regarding lasting impacts of boarding schools were associated with a combination of mental health disorders and substance use.

---

*TRUTH, JUSTICE and HEALING ... in that order ... This will affect every generation moving forward, intergenerational trauma is real and long lasting. This is also partly responsible for the effects of DV, alcoholism, drug abuse and all negative behaviors in our Tribal communities. - QD61*

*It's devastating. Ojibwe people gathered together, hunted together, foraged together. We don't do this anymore. Every single child who was forced into these schools, taken to these schools, was stolen from their "forced to live on" reservations. Some of us have literally had the*

*"Indian" beaten out of us. It affects every single Indigenous community. -QD01*

---

Boarding schools in Michigan damaged families through a number of parallel mechanisms. First, they separated families. The *Meriam Report* (Brookings Institution, 1928) recommended eliminating the practice of forcing young children (any younger than the seventh grade—and ideally those in the ninth grade and above) to live apart from their families, acknowledging the developmental and social damage that this can have on children.

---

*They ruined our family structure, our connection and feeling of safety. We lost our language. They almost succeeded in killing the "Indian." -QD77*

---

Second, boarding schools discouraged (sometimes through physical violence) students from expressing any form of their culture and spiritual practices, which separated them from their history and identity and taught them to be ashamed of it (Prucha, 1986). Furthermore, many students were abused psychologically and sexually. Children growing up in such abusive environments are at risk of depression and becoming dependent on substances such as alcohol (Easton et al., 2019), leading to the transmission of historical trauma (Myhra, 2011).

---

*Loss of sense of belonging, the sexual abuse is still being passed down, the loss of spirituality, loss of language, fear to be Native, loss of identity, suicide is still a high rate, the younger generations have all suffered from the loss of our Tribal ways, it's hard to live life not knowing how to be truly spiritual, it's hard sometimes to be proud of who we are, it's hard to be different and not know why, it's hard to live with racism, it's hard to be forced to think that Catholicism and Christianity is the only belief and that it's the only way of spirituality. I have personally suffered growing up, I am White, and I am Native. I am an alcoholic and addict in Recovery now 4 years. I suffered our Tribes suffer from all of that. -QD92*

*Most of our Native languages have gone extinct due to the Boarding Schools. And this is where almost all of our*

*people's alcoholism or addiction comes from, trying to cover up their pain/trauma and then passing that on through the generations. -QD90*

---

### *Broken Family Connections*

---

*My mother's mother died when she was 3 years old and the State of Michigan said that her grandmother was unfit to raise her grandchildren because she only spoke Potawatomi, so they took my mother and her sister and brother away and sent them to school. -QD60*

*My grandmother's mother died during childbirth. My great grandfather couldn't take care of them, so my grandmother and her siblings were sent to the boarding school. From what I've heard, the social services or government at the time had coordinated their attendance arranged their attendance. -QD128*

---

Death of a parent was a common reason for being sent to boarding schools, as it was assumed that the widowed parent couldn't provide for their family. However, even with a death of a parent, families reported that they were willing to take care of the children, yet the government used the parental death as a reason to take children. Many Dibaajimodag shared stories of death from unfortunate circumstances which took loved ones out of their lives, whether within the boarding schools or at home among their families. Other stories were shared about broken family connections due to children being taken from home and placed in foster care. As this Survivor discussed, she had to work hard to get to know her siblings after the state sent them to different homes.

---

*I do my own family stories. Like I said, I was, out of the home six, six-years-old, probably the oldest. My parents died. I didn't reconnect with my siblings until 12 and on. And then we were still being raised in different families, and we were scattered, different places, just because the siblings were older. And the three youngest of us, we*

*belonged to different families, different places, different experiences. I don't know. -TD02*

---

Dibaajimodag reported broken family connections that contributed to numerous socioeconomic challenges stemming from poverty and systemic oppression. Archival evidence further supports Dibaajimodag accounts of forced removal of children by state officials. By 1930, Tribal communities faced profound economic collapse, exacerbated by the cumulative effects of broken treaties, unpaid annuity obligations, land dispossession, and exploitative resource extraction. The Great Depression intensified these hardships, leaving some communities in dire conditions.

Historian Dr. Charles Cleland provides a poignant example, recounting that members of the Bay Mills Indian Community "were starving during the winter of 1930":

[T]he people had been advised that they had to abide by state game laws, they could not fish without a ten-dollar license, which none could afford. Neither was there work in the woods: the pine timber had been stripped and the blueberry cash crop was insufficient due to takeover by the State and National Forest....Chippewa County was forced to pay aid to keep the Bay Mills people from starving to death...on an aid of ten dollars per family per month....

(Cleland, 1992, p. 268)

Poverty and family strife made Native American children ever-more vulnerable to child removal actions by State of Michigan courts and social service agencies. The Mt. Pleasant school archives contain records of two Native American children who passed through those halls and into foster care/ad hoc adoption under questionable legal authority (Figure 21). Ethical research requires extreme discretion in sharing the personal records of children. But general facts help shed light on child removal practices by the State of Michigan.

A child from Emmet County (Mt. Pleasant Indian School and Agency, n.d.) was reportedly abandoned by her parents at the age of two and left with neighbors. When the girl was four years old, her elder caregivers alleged they met in Petoskey with Probate Judge E. E. Gilbert, who recommended the child be sent to Mt. Pleasant Indian School. The superintendent refused enrollment due to age, but they located a foster couple in Wisconsin, and the MCAS authorized them to foster the girl. The Mt. Pleasant Indian School served as a temporary holding site for

approximately one month while school and MCAS personnel navigated the appropriate legal channels and logistical arrangements.

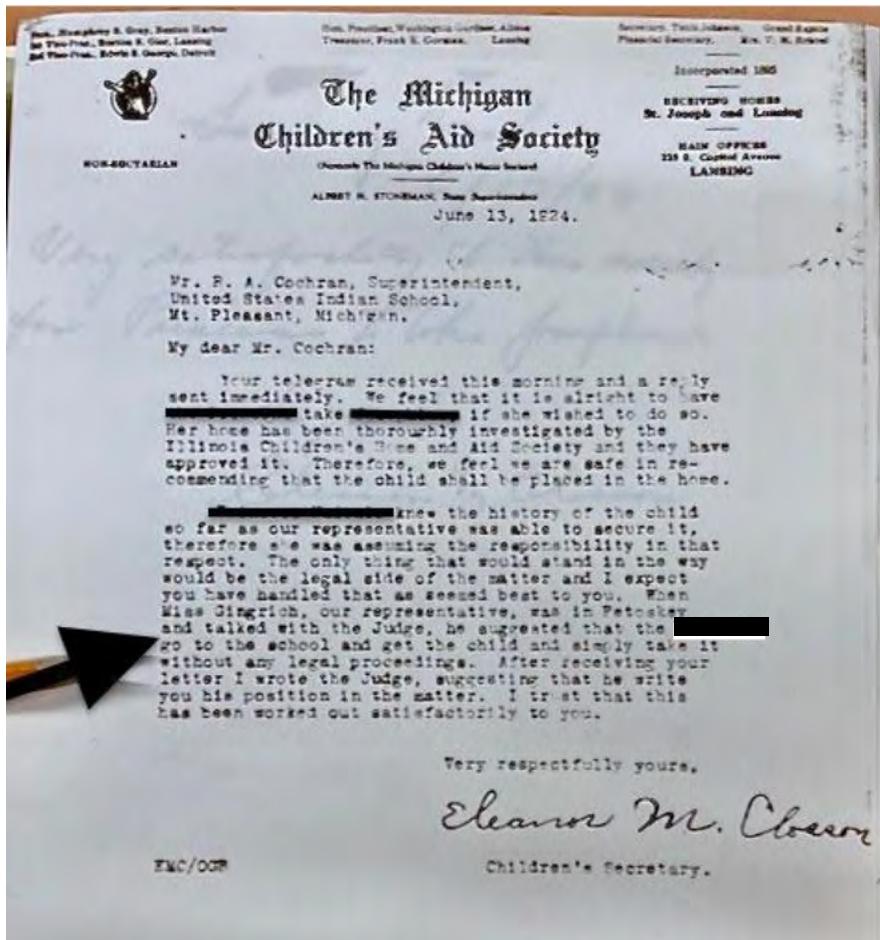


Figure 21. Letter from the Michigan Children's Aid Society to the Superintendent of the Mt. Pleasant Indian School. June 13, 1924.

On June 13, 1924, MCAS authorized the school to release the child, reporting the foster couple's home had been inspected and "the Judge" in Petoskey suggested to a MCAS representative that the foster mom should simply "go to the school and get the child and simply take it without any legal proceedings." This child was subsequently raised by her foster mother in Wisconsin, and it doesn't appear that she was ever legally adopted. Similarly, questions remain about a second child, also from Emmet County, who was placed in foster care in Wisconsin.

These cases exemplify the processes often used to place Native children into foster care, raising questions about the lack of legal oversight and the long-term impacts on the children involved. Such practices reflected broader systemic issues within federal Indian policy, which were sharply criticized in the landmark *Meriam Report* of 1928.

The *Meriam Report* sent shockwaves through Indian education policy, reinforcing long-standing calls for reform of the BIA and its programs. These demands gained traction in 1933 with the appointment of Indian rights advocate John Collier as part of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal. Collier's Indian New Deal sought to address the widespread inequities documented in the report, initiating significant changes to federal Indian policy during a time of economic upheaval.

Collier, shortly after his appointment, announced the closure of Mt. Pleasant Indian Industrial Boarding School, along with several others across the country. The plan marked a significant shift in federal policy, with Great Lakes Indian children expected to attend public schools wherever possible.

To facilitate the transition from federal to state oversight, Collier deployed a team of social workers. However, with the Great Depression exacerbating already grim conditions in Native American communities across Michigan, creating viable plans for children still in boarding schools proved particularly challenging.

In May 1933, BIA (1933) submitted a report titled *Statistics—Mt. Pleasant—May 1933: Summary of Home Conditions Etc.* The document starkly outlined the BIA's metrics for determining whether children would be placed under the care of the State of Michigan, revealing the harsh and reductive approach to assessing the welfare of Native children. Figure 22, Figure 23, and Figure 24 are from this report.

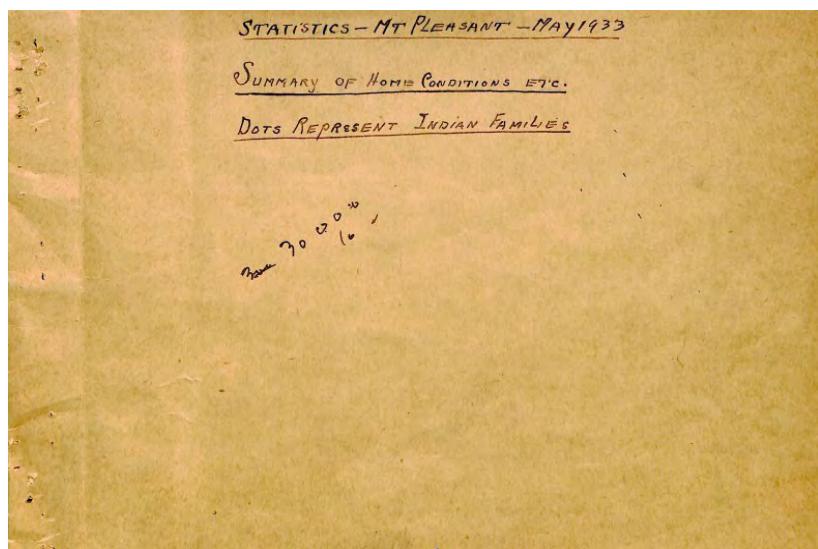


Figure 22. Mt. Pleasant Indian School Statistics Report. May 1933. Page 1 of 3.

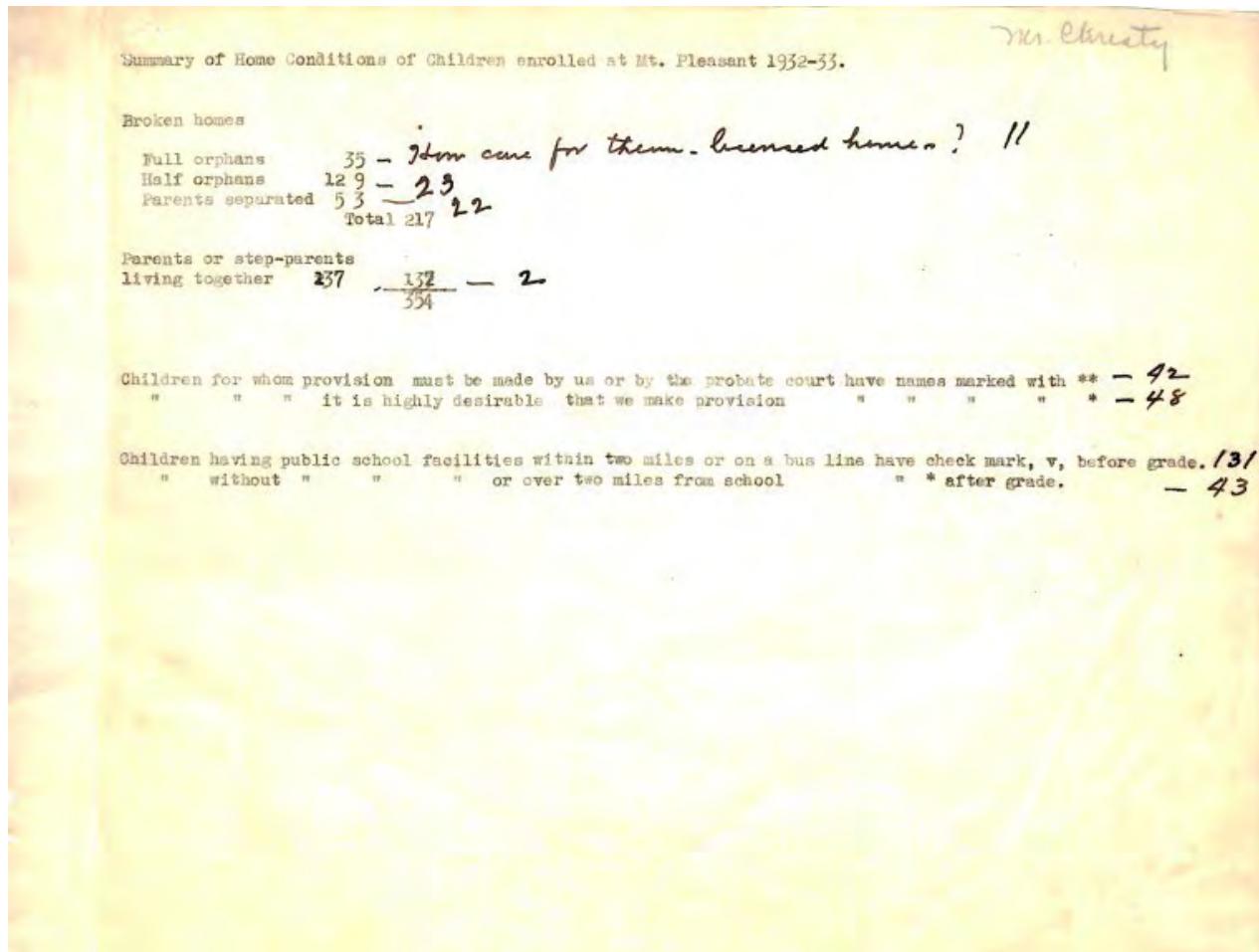


Figure 23. Mt. Pleasant Indian School Statistics Report. May 1933. Page 2 of 3.

BIA staff labelled two-thirds of the 354 children enrolled at Mt. Pleasant school during the 1932–1933 academic year as “full orphans” or “half orphans.” Of this pool of 217 children, 90 were identified as needing court-appointed “provisions,” or what became known as foster care. Many of these children were already—or would soon be made—wards of the court via probate action.

Indian Service social workers also tabulated the number of children who were within two miles of a public school or had access to a bus line to take them there. Only a third of the children (131) had easy access to these resources.

Half Orphans			Mr. Sherry
Name	age	grade	remarks
	17	✓9	Father dead. Mother, Hattie. Zeba
	16	✓7	" " " " "
	15	✓8	" " " " Helen, Omesa.
	17	✓8	" unknown. Mother Marion. Zeba
	17	✓9	Mother died of T.B. Father takes no responsibility for children
	10	3	" " " " "
	8	2	" " " " "
	11	3	
	14	6	Father dead (or unknown parts) Mother irresponsible
	12	5	Fa. dead. Step-fa. unsuitable. Makes home with aunt, Gr. Rapids
	14	9	" " " " "
	13	✓8	Mo. dead. Home with sister, Charlevéix.
	15	4	Mo. dead. Fa. lives in tent. Bros. in corrective institutions. - OTC
	14	7	Fa. dead. Referred by Mich. Children's Aid
	10	2	" " " " "
	11	✓3	Mo. dead. Home unsat. Man has 'housekeeper'
	15	✓9*	Illeg. Mo. dead. Adoptive mo. dead. Has adoptive fa.
	14	8	Wisconsin. Mo. dead. Fa. remarried. Home with old grandmother
	11	7	" " " " "
	14	7	Oneida, Wisconsin. Mo. dead
	15	8	Wisconsin (LacDuFlambeau) Fa. dead. Mo. was Indian sch. cook.
	14	✓6	Mo. dead. Home unsat.
	12	✓5	" " " "
	15	✓7	" " Home with fa. and grandmother

Figure 24. Mt. Pleasant Indian School Statistics Report. May 1933. Page 3 of 3.

BIA social workers described Native American children as illegitimate and unwanted. Parents were described as “unsuitable,” “irresponsible,” “unsatisfactory,” “drunk,” and “immoral, unreliable, drunk” and in the county jail.

For this report, BIA staff in Lansing relied on U.S. Census data (Figure 25) to estimate the number of Native American children in Michigan, representing them with crude dots on a hand-drawn map (Figure 26) submitted to the DOI. This map serves as a visual representation of the systemic shortcomings and inefficacy of a century of federal Indian education policy.

Figure 26. Census of Michigan Indian, Chinese, Japanese, and Mexican residents, 1910 to 1930.

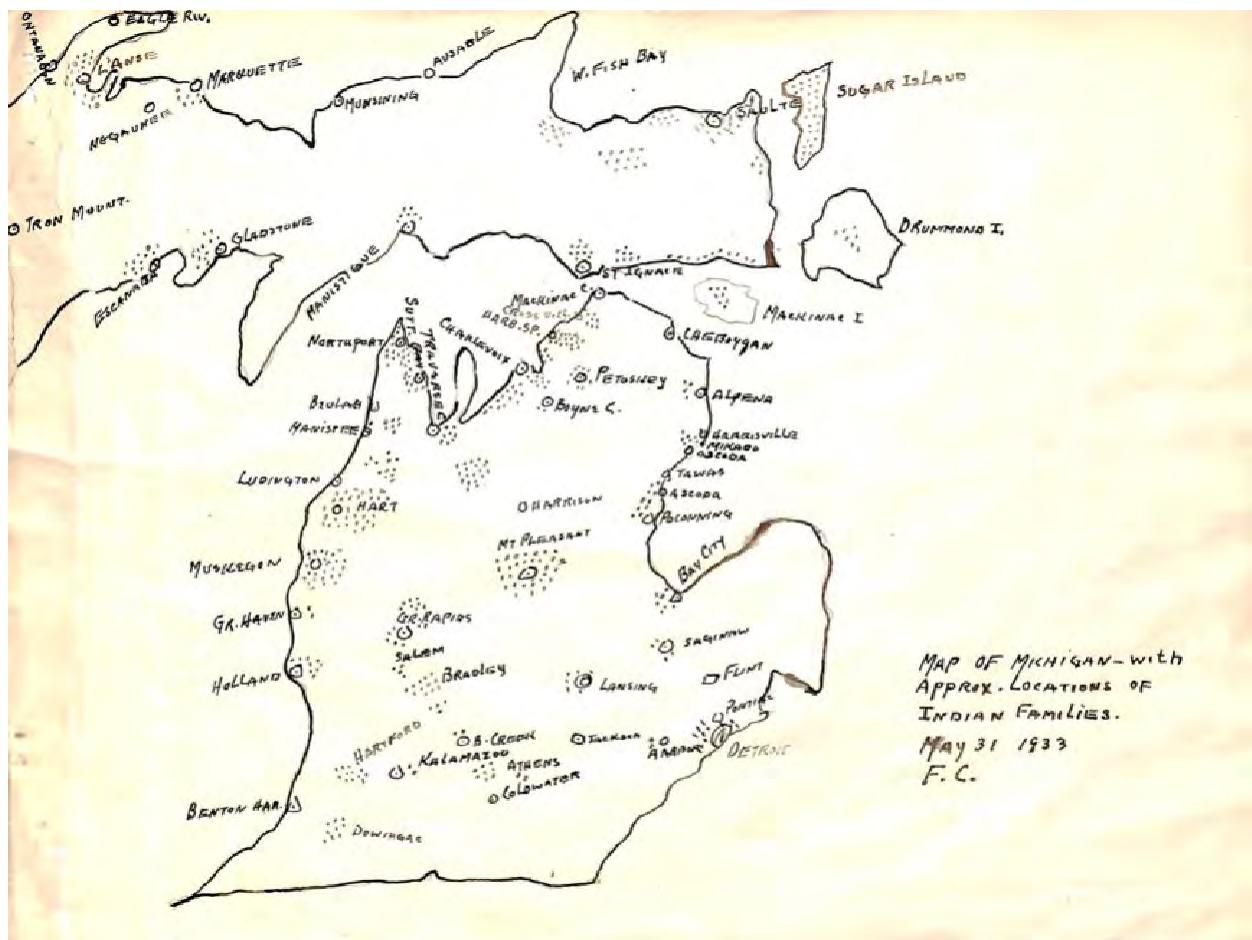


Figure 27. Map of Michigan. 1933.

In 1933, the decisions made by the BIA and the State of Michigan became particularly evident. Despite the flow of treaty and trust funds into Native American schools in Michigan, these resources had not resulted in adequate facilities located near Native "settlements," nor had the boarding school curricula over two to three generations contributed to the financial stability of Native American families.

With the *Merriam Report* in hand and a progressive Commissioner of Indian Affairs in place, policymakers in 1933 had an opportunity to forge a better path. Instead, the State of Michigan, the DOI, and Michigan's leading children's aid organization worked collaboratively to perpetuate family separation.

MCAS, a private aid society founded in 1891, played a central role as the state took over the Indian trust responsibility. MCAS contracted with the DOI to find and manage boarding home placements. As described in the following documents

(Figure 27; MCAS, 1934; and Figure 28'; Christy, 1934a) the State of Michigan licensed boarding home providers discovered and managed by the Indian Service and MCAS.

**MCAS to Undertake Foster Home Program for Indian Children**

Discontinuing its traditional policy of custodial care for Indian children in Michigan, the Bureau of Indian Affairs has ordered the U. S. School for Indian Children at Mt. Pleasant closed on June 30, 1934. This necessitates the development of other plans for over 300 children who have been living at the School.

The Michigan Children's Aid Society has been requested by the representative of the Bureau to place in family homes all children who cannot be transferred to their own parents, relatives, etc. Already 9 children have been accepted for boarding care and 14 additional children have been referred. It is expected that eventually the Society will care for 30 to 40 of these children. The Bureau of Indian Affairs continues financial responsibility for these children.

Plans are being made by the state to use the school buildings to care for the overflow at the Michigan Home and Training School at Lapeer.

Figure 28. Article about the Michigan Children's Aid Society's Foster Home Program for Indian Children. 1934.

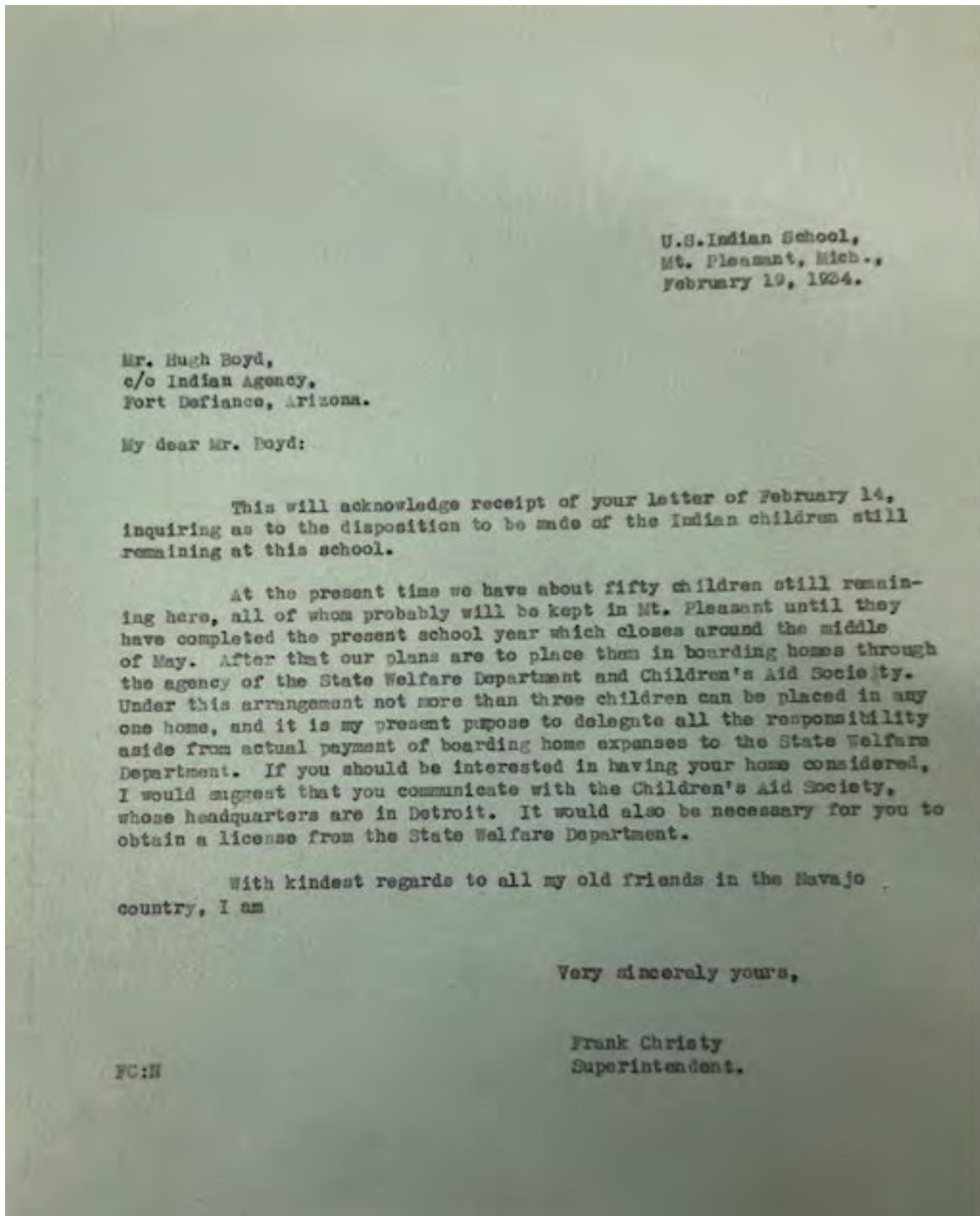


Figure 29. Letter from Mt. Pleasant Indian School Superintendent to Mr. Hugh Boyd. February 19, 1934.

In April of 1934, the Johnson-O'Malley Act (1934) authorized the Secretary of the Interior to contract with states and other bodies to administer “education, medical attention, agricultural assistance, and social welfare, including relief of distress, of Indians in such State” for some 271,000 Indian children nationally (Getches et al., 1998). The following month, the Secretary of the Interior and Michigan Governor William Comstock signed the Comstock Agreement, and the Mt. Pleasant Indian School property “was transferred from the United States to the State of Michigan through a Congressional Act. An Act Granting Certain Property to the State of Michigan for Institutional Purposes, 48 Stat. 353, 342 (1934)” (Comstock, 1934). By 1936, the BIA and the State of Michigan had their process figured out. That December, the MCAS authored an article for the BIA “news sheet,” *Indians at Work* (Brown, 1936). The article (Figure 29) was intended to convey positive news about the improved conditions for Native children transitioning from Mt. Pleasant Indian School to state-licensed boarding homes. However, a critical reading reveals the conditions at the government-run school, where children suffering from tuberculosis required urgent commitment to a sanitarium, dental care was severely neglected, and many exhibited signs of malnutrition and other health issues.

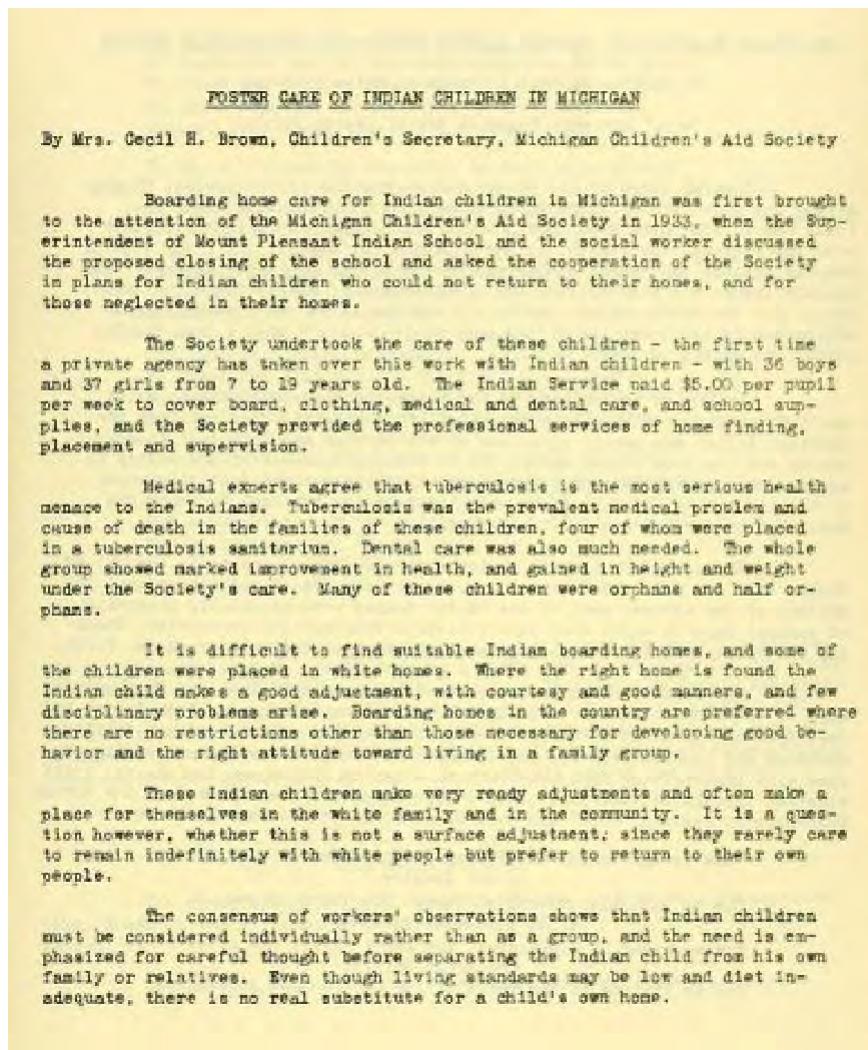


Figure 30. Article from the BIA describing the placement of students into foster care following the closure of Mt. Pleasant Indian School. 1936.

The response to the neglectful conditions at government-run boarding schools was continued institutional and governmental intervention. The language used in the 1935 MCAS newsletter (Figure 30) reflects a paternalistic and assimilative tone. In an article titled "A Racial Experiment," the newsletter describes the organization's efforts under the Comstock Agreement in terms that convey cultural superiority.

T H E C O U N C I L L O R

**A RACIAL EXPERIMENT**

What shall we do to graft the young Indian to our civilization so naturally and so firmly that he will grow along with us and will have the natural urge to help the rest of his people to push forward?

This is a vital question to the Michigan Children's Aid Society, which is just beginning an interesting racial experiment. Backed by the Indian Service of the United States Government, both financially and in policy, the Society has taken fifty-five dependent Indian children into its care since the United States Indian School at Mt. Pleasant closed last June.

These youngsters are suddenly being thrown into today's fast-moving life to take their places along with their white brothers and sisters. Only eleven of them are in Indian homes. The remaining forty-four are in white homes of the average American rural type, near eight of the Society's branch offices.

**THE INDIAN HERITAGE**

Will this change mean that these young Indians must become like white people? The Society believes not. Certainly they have a right and an obligation to their race to keep alive its most cherished traditions and feelings. Therefore the policy will be to guide them in their natural inclinations and to encourage a racial pride. This is also the attitude of the United States Government towards this important question.

Practically speaking, it is actually the work of the boarding parents, the school teacher, and the visitor of the Michigan Children's Aid Society to fit these children into the new life so that it will become natural to them. A good deal of energy will undoubtedly be spent in teaching them to become self-supporting. Then, the older Indian children, coming from communities where they have been allowed to run wild, will need special guidance.

The Society carries the child's religious training into whatever church he was born. Indian children in the organization's care are about equally divided between Roman Catholic and Protestant churches. One of the largest specific problems the Society has had to deal with so far has been in finding Catholic boarding homes for the Catholic children. Cooperation given by the Society of St. Vincent de Paul and several parish priests is greatly appreciated.

**HEALTH NEEDS**

Physically, there are certain racial tendencies to be watched in the matter of these children's health. Tuberculosis, for instance, has long been known by medical science to be exceptionally prevalent in the Indian race. This has probably been because of an inherent racial lack of resistance. No statistics are available on this point, but it is conceded that the tuberculosis rate is declining as the Indian becomes better acquainted with the nature of the disease, fights it, and builds up resistance. One Indian child in the Michigan Children's Aid Society care is now in a tuberculosis sanatorium in Kalamazoo County.

Originally these children came from twenty-three widely scattered counties in Michigan. Thirteen of them were born in the Upper Peninsula, and twelve of these are now in homes near the Marquette office. In the Lower Peninsula the St. Joseph branch is supervising the largest group. Van Buren County, adjacent to St. Joseph, has a considerable Indian colony.

The pictures are of typical Indian children now in the boarding homes. Their faces show what workers have already reported of how courageous, affectionate, and adaptable these children are.



Figure 31. Article from the Michigan Children's Aid Society describing its program to place former Indian boarding school students into foster homes in the state. 1935.

The newsletter characterizes Native American children as "coming from communities where they have been allowed to run wild" and asserts that these children "will need special guidance." It further emphasizes that those entering "civilization" must "push forward" to integrate into the dominant society. Of the children placed under MCAS care, only 11 were placed with Native families, while

44 were placed in “white [sic] homes of the average American rural type.” These placements underscore the assimilative goals of the program, prioritizing placement in White households over maintaining connections to Native culture and community (MCAS, 1935).

The continued removal of Native American children from their families and cultures appears to have been a significant objective during this period. In 1933, social workers at the BIA’s Lansing field office harshly criticized Native families, attributing issues such as poverty, poor health, divorce, and addiction to the families themselves. These reports failed to consider the systemic factors contributing to these challenges, including broken treaties, fraudulent trust management, land theft, forced child removal, and pervasive poverty.

The competency of the BIA in managing Native American affairs warrants scrutiny. After more than a century of control over Native American assets, family structures, and “competency” requirements for self-management, the BIA seemed to lack an understanding of Native American values and kinship systems. In most Native American cultures, and certainly amongst the Anishinaabe people of Michigan, children whose parents were divorced or deceased were not considered “orphans” within their extended kinship networks. These networks were integral to Anishinaabe life and were reflected in the language, Anishinaabemowin. For example, the term for “my paternal uncle” (nimishoome) literally means “my stepfather” and is closely related to the word for “my grandfather” (nimishoomis), illustrating the deeply interwoven responsibilities within these familial systems (Livesay & Nichols, n.d.).

Despite these rich kinship networks, the BIA disregarded them in 1933 as it began transitioning Native children out of boarding schools. Instead of funding improved schools near Native communities, BIA social workers pushed Native children into distant boarding homes chosen and overseen by the Michigan Children’s Aid Society. As recorded by the Michigan field office of the BIA that year, these children were not without family connections. Many of the family names on this list are well-known now and include the ancestors of today’s tribal leaders and respected knowledge keepers.

In 1930, Bay Mills families were starving and attempting to survive on \$10 per month per family from Chippewa County aid. Four years later, more money was made available to support Native American school children—but only if they were being fostered away from their families. In 1934, multi-generational dispossession took on a new form in Michigan. The DOI paid “boarding mothers” \$5 *per child per week*. Up to three Native American children could be boarded at a time (Brown, 1934). (Figure 31).

This funding provided much needed financial support during the Great Depression, it also raises critical questions about the priorities of federal and state policies. Rather than investing in programs to strengthen Native American families and support children within their own homes or kin networks, resources were directed toward separating children from their families. It is worth considering whether individual trust funds, withheld from starving Native families during the Depression, were made accessible only when children were removed from their homes. Furthermore, the financial gains for the State of Michigan and the Michigan Children's Aid Society in this arrangement deserve closer examination.

Boarding home care included board, lodging, medical care, clothing, and supervision while the children attended public schools. On October 11, 1934, Commissioner Collier notified Tomah School Superintendent Frank Christy, who was also overseeing the transition in Michigan, that a \$13,600 boarding home budget had been authorized for Michigan Native children (Collier, 1934) (Figure 32).

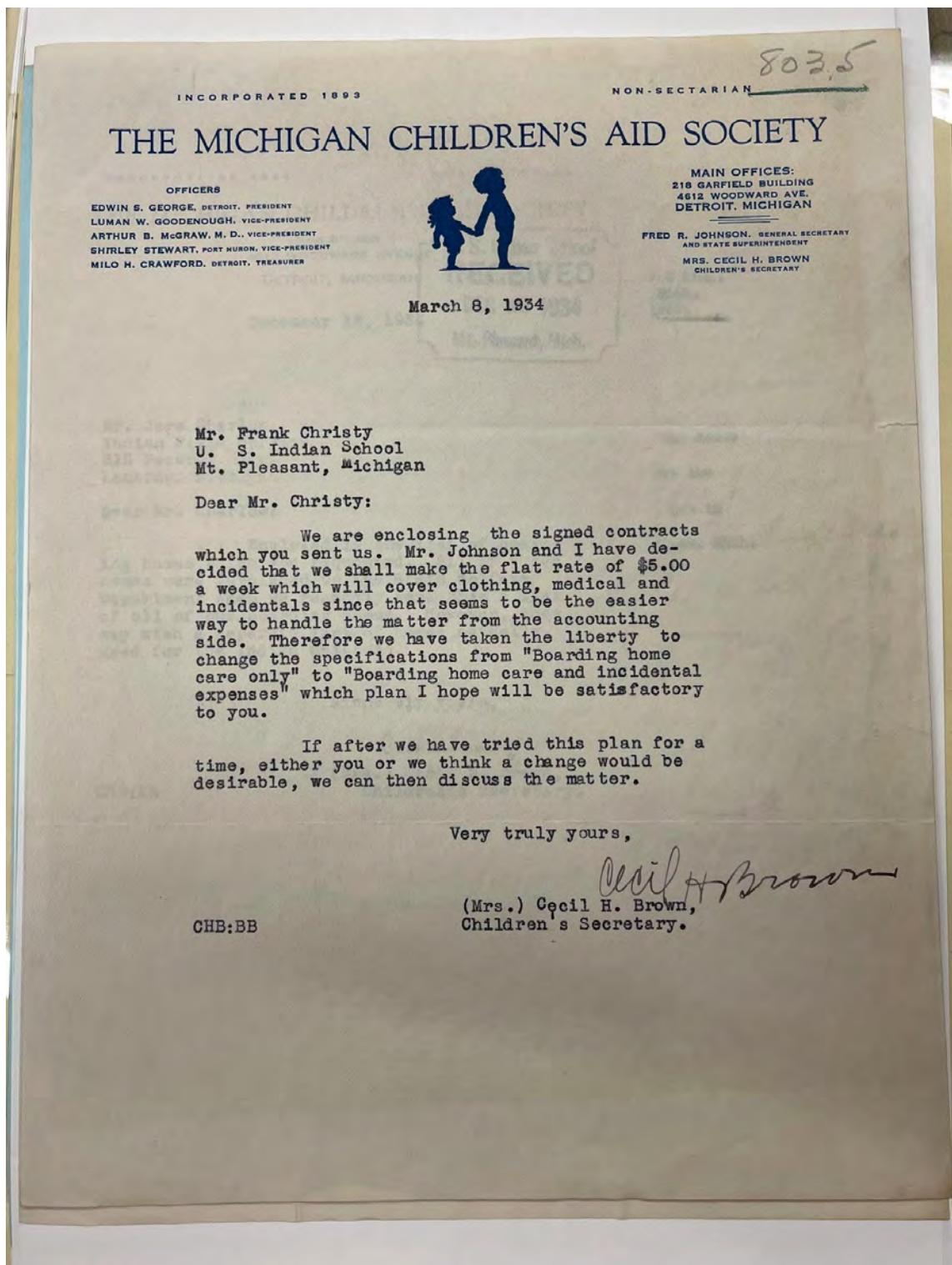


Figure 32. Letter from the Michigan Children's Aid Society to the Superintendent of the Mt. Pleasant Indian School. March 8, 1934.

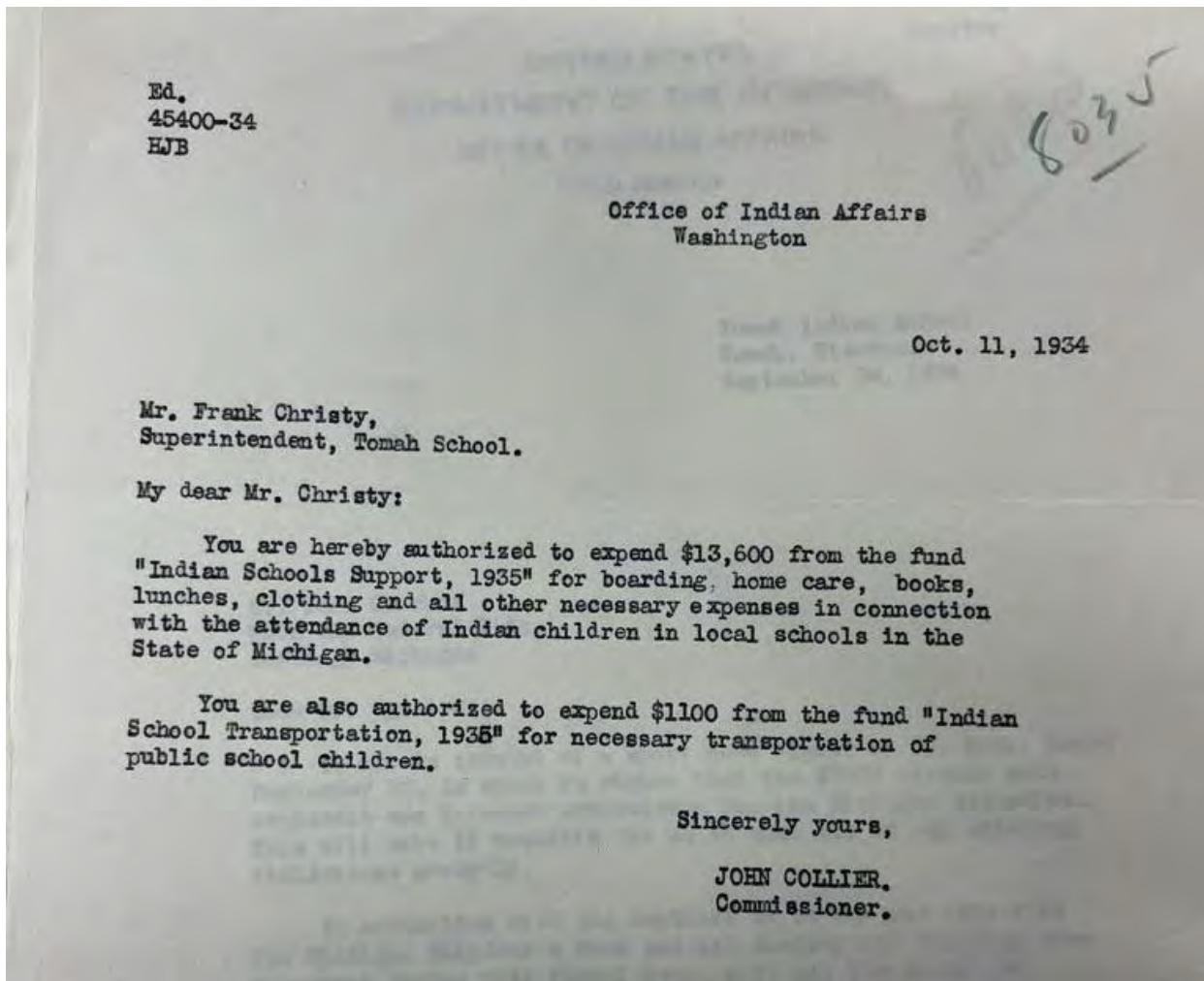


Figure 33. Letter from the Office of Indian Affairs to the Superintendent of Tomah School. October 11, 1934.

By 1940, 62 children were in boarding homes, and the budget had increased by more than 50% to \$20,620 (Gwinn, 1939). Superintendent Christy also oversaw Tomah School in Wisconsin, an industrial boarding school similar to Mt. Pleasant Indian School. There, families had to relinquish custody to the court for children to be admitted to Tomah or be placed in foster homes in Wisconsin (Christy, 1934b) (see Figure 33).

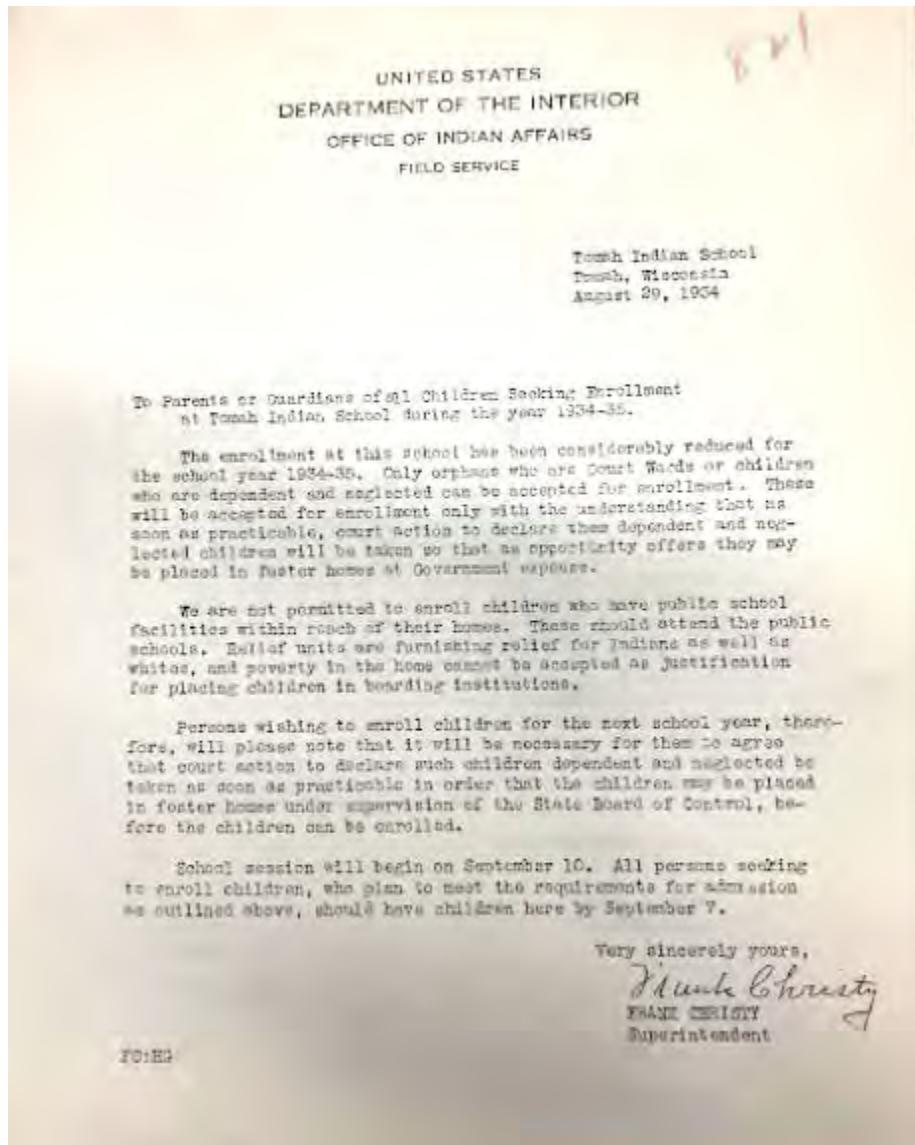


Figure 34. Letter from the Tomah Indian School Superintendent to parents and guardians of students seeking enrollment in the 1934-1935 school year. August 29, 1934.

### Responsibility

*The State itself created the circumstances in which my people were abused, misjudged and misguided. it is the state, the country built off of the blood and bones of my ancestors in which that made the circumstances even possible to have murdered, raped and pillaged the peoples of this land. -QD44*

Descendants and Survivors point to Michigan's role in and responsibility for the legacy of suffering that resulted from the Indian boarding school system. They recognize that the state helped enforce the removal of children to boarding schools and their return if they ran away. The state also did not properly oversee the treatment of students at the boarding schools and did not act to rectify the situation when the children suffered.

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*The State allowed children to be tortured in the name of education and the churches. The State did not evaluate the health, safety, or treatment of schools in boarding schools in Michigan. -QD41*

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Moreover, Descendants and Survivors recognize that while a program of cultural erasure for Native Americans was underway, the federal and state governments were establishing an entirely new culture, one built off the resources and bounty of Native American lands.

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*By wiping our language out that alone hurt me till this day so taking kids from their homes and stealing their language and there right to our own religion. That alone was harm, and they need to make a public apology to Indian children. The state robbed us of our dignity. -QS26*

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Some Dibaajimodag are requesting a public apology to Native people. The scholarship on formal government apologies for previous atrocities suggests that the apologies must accompany new policy and support for the individuals and communities that were victimized in order to be meaningful (Llewellyn, 2008). Taking responsibility and acknowledging past crimes and abuse is essential for the rebuilding of trust and credibility.

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*I think the state played a part by allowing these schools to stay open knowing the things that were going on behind closed doors and helping cover up many deaths and degradation. -QD109*

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Dibaajimodag described Michigan's role and responsibility in the forced removal of Native children, as well as Michigan's failure to protect children despite being aware of the conditions and treatment endured.

Figure 34 and Figure 35 demonstrate that state and local government entities played a key role in enforcing federal Indian laws and policies on Native American children and their families. While policies such as mandatory school attendance were crafted in Washington, D.C., their implementation relied heavily on state and local law enforcement and county agency personnel. At Mt. Pleasant Indian School, superintendents employed coercive and intimidating strategies to ensure compliance from Native American families.

The letters in Figure 34 and Figure 35 are part of the student case files for Mt. Pleasant Indian School (Mt. Pleasant Indian School and Agency, n.d.). In adherence with best practices adopted by the Society of American Archivists and the American Library Association (McCracken et al., 2023; Miron, 2024), individual student names are withheld. Note that Mt. Pleasant Indian School Superintendent Robert Cochran doesn't identify this student, or himself, by name.

According to personal communication with the family the student was 21 years old or nearly so at the time of this correspondence.

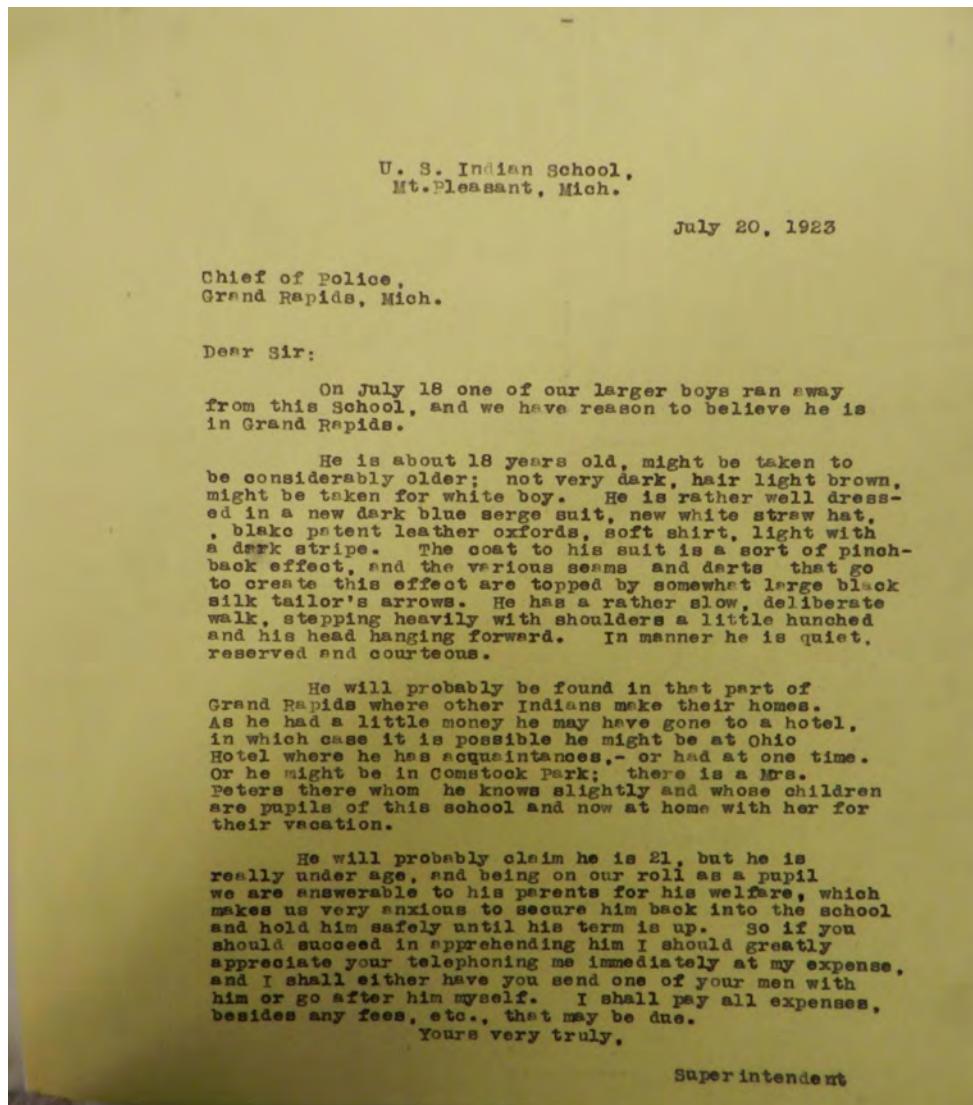


Figure 35. Letter from Mt. Pleasant Indian School Superintendent Robert Cochran to the Grand Rapids Chief of Police. July 20, 1923.

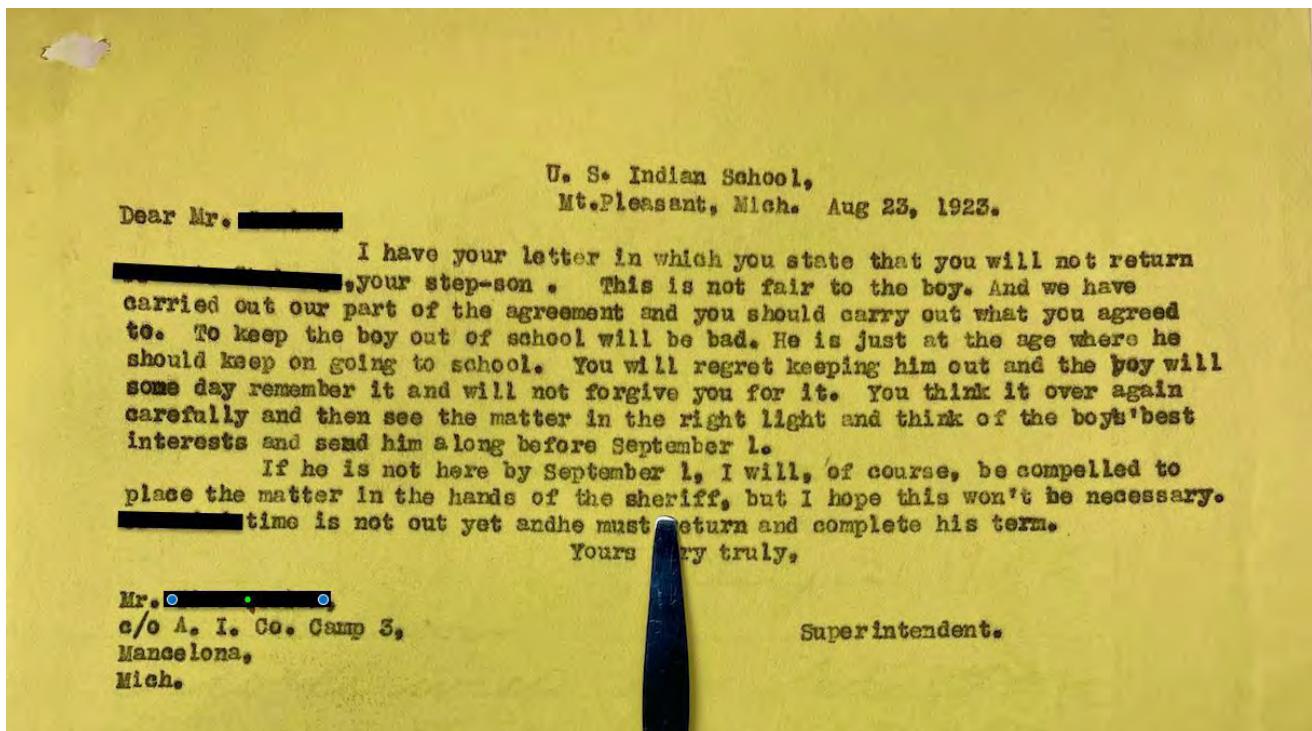


Figure 36. Letter from the Superintendent of Mt. Pleasant Indian School to a student guardian. August 23, 1923.

### *The Path Toward Healing*

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*The state of Michigan should provide funds for healing centers and Ojibwemowin language programs for all affected Tribes. Survivors should receive the support they need to heal their wounds. Children of Survivors should also receive healing support. -QD90*

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Since the legacy of boarding schools continues to impact Native families and communities across the state, steps are needed to heal communities and to protect the well-being of future generations. Moreover, truth-telling, to be healing, must elicit a genuine response, otherwise the relationship (in this case between Survivors, Descendants, and their communities and the state) may be further damaged (Llewellyn, 2008). Recommendations from the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission—which had similar findings to those documented in this report—may be informative for Michigan state. They include enhanced investments in health care for individuals and communities impacted, enhanced investments in Native

language revitalization, programs to reduce the number of Native children in foster care, and funds to support “efforts to locate, document, and memorialize” boarding school burial sites and family efforts to repatriate children’s remains (Government of Canada, 2024). In addition, scholars have outlined pedagogical possibilities for supporting the commission’s findings, including developing a curriculum for all students, centered on Survivor and Descendant stories, and clearly demonstrating the intergenerational impact of the boarding school experience (Czyzewski, 2011). A few Descendants expressed the need for greater awareness of the Native American boarding school experience, with one Descendant specifically highlighting the need for “curriculum in the school system.” Finally, legal scholars recommend embarking on a restorative justice process to address these past abuses (Zabriskie, 2023). However, Survivors and Descendants themselves shared their wisdom, which ought to be the starting place for healing and reconciliation.

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*Financial support for cultural and language preservation programs. Additional mental health support for all generations. Healing centers funded in each Tribal community. -QD91*

*Government and State officials owning up to their past grievances and wrongdoings unto our people. Build schools for Native American children to teach them their ancestry and their rightful spiritual beliefs. -QD40*

*Never stop investigating and bring the secrets to light to help the Survivors know they don’t need to be quiet about their trauma anymore and can work toward healing. - QD86*

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Many Descendants and Survivors indicated the need for mental health services, such as talking circles or healing circles, storytelling, counseling, and therapy, emphasizing the need to let their voices be heard. Traditional practices such as talking circles and storytelling have been used successfully to improve quality of life and promote healing through sharing stories (Charbonneau-Dahlen et al., 2016; Mehl-Madrona & Mainguy, 2014).

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*Counseling, and just community support, letting them know they are not alone and that what they went through*

*was not ok, it was not their fault, and that we love and support them. -QD150*

*Talking Circles, Oral History Preservation, true healing events with trained and licensed Native therapists in boarding school trauma. -QD81*

*Cultural and traditional healing practices. Support groups may help. But they tend to be less attended overtime.*

*Adulting classes right after graduation could be a good idea. -QS09*

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Studies have shown that Native healing practices are deeply rooted in knowledge of Native cultural practices, languages, values, and identity (Bassett et al., 2012; Gone, 2009). As part of the healing process, many Descendants and Survivors recommended cultural activities and programs, including language revitalization, Tribal ceremonies, and opportunities to learn about Native customs, traditions, and identity.

### **Federal and State Policies**

In this section, we present findings specific to federal and state policies and practices, a critical layer within the ecological model that shapes the enduring legacy of Native American boarding schools in Michigan. This layer examines how historical federal and state policies and practices influenced the health, behavioral outcomes, economic conditions, and educational opportunities of Native communities within Michigan, as well as Survivors and Descendants residing outside the state. While some of the themes discussed here also appear in other sections, this section places a distinct focus on how these policies intersect Michigan's unique historical context. The state and federal policies explored in this section also interact with the broader systems and organizations surrounding Survivors and their communities.

The section is organized according to the major themes that emerged related to state and federal policies: **Federal Policies and State Enforced Assimilation**, focusing on federal policies designed to promote assimilation and the role of the State of Michigan in implementing and enforcing these policies; **Economic Exploitation and Land Dispossession**, examining how federal policies and treaties funded boarding schools through Native land cessions and mismanaged trust monies; **Failure to Protect Children**, which discusses issues with funding and lack of oversight; and **The Path**

**Toward Healing**, which describes direct calls for the government to take responsibility and for funding.

Each of these themes represents a thread in the story how federal and state policies created the boarding schools and the conditions within them. Some of what is shared in this section is instrumental in understanding how the state and federal government must approach reconciliation and healing, which are discussed in the final section.

### *Federal Policies and State-Enforced Assimilation*

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*They allowed the children to be taken from their homes. They didn't check on the well-being of the children at these schools. The saying "Kill the Indian but save the man" was still being implemented by having these boarding schools. Slowly killing our traditions, language and culture by stripping their next generation from their teachings. -QD90*

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In 1849 the BIA was transferred from the Department of War to the DOI, signifying a shift in federal policy toward Native Americans, from one of armed conflict to one of assimilation. In 1869 the U.S. President announced the Board of Indian Commissioners' policy, which supported an assimilation approach (over a termination approach), chosen for economic and not moral reasons (Peters & Woolley, n.d.). It had two goals: The replacement of corrupt government officials, called the "Indian Ring," with religious men nominated by churches to oversee the Indian agencies on reservations and to Christianize the Native Tribes and eradicate their culture and religion, primarily through the removal of the children from reservation settings (Shelton et al., 2019).

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*[My father] was kidnapped from his family in addition to many other children by the United States cavalry. -QD149*

---

Native American families often resisted sending their children to boarding schools. The Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Thomas Morgan Jefferson, responded that when his agents were not able to convince Native American parents to allow their children to attend boarding school, "wherever it seemed wise, resorted to mild punishment by the withholding of rations or supplies, and, where necessary ... directed agents to use their Indian police as truant officers in compelling

attendance" (Clarke Historical Library, n.d.-b). In 1898, the Acting Commissioner of Indian Affairs (U.S. Department of the Interior, Office of Indian Affairs, 1898) published rules allowing agents to arrest and return students or arrest or punish any family member "harboring" students.

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*The State of Michigan is grossly negligent regarding the number of children who were students in an Indian boarding school. Michigan Social Service organizations arranged placements into Indian boarding schools, and some of Michigan's County funds were used to support placements. Review the pre- ICWA data for Michigan regarding Indian child removals and foster care placement ratios when compared to all other races and ethnicities. The State of Michigan owes its Native American constituents a public apology for their participation in the Indian boarding schools and for the discriminatory child welfare practices that were interconnected. -QD41*

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Although boarding school programs were led by the federal government policies and funding, states had some oversight and a role in enforcing the policies. Michigan, in particular, had the responsibility for Native American education and boarding school operations and ultimately the impact of boarding schools within its state boundaries because it entered into an agreement with the federal government to accept full responsibility for providing Native education (Comstock, 1934).

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*The state mandated the schools! We found a letter threatening to throw family in jail if they didn't send their kids! -QD112*

*Michigan Social Service organizations arranged placements into Indian boarding schools, and some of Michigan's County funds were used to support placements. -QD41*

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The state was also complicit in the enforced assimilation that students experienced in the boarding schools. The boarding school system offered an opportunity for federal and state officials to remove children from their families and assimilate them

into White society by removing elements and symbols of their culture. The mechanisms by which students were stripped of their culture were replacing their clothing with a school uniform, cutting their hair, giving them a Western name, outlawing the use of Native languages, and outlawing cultural practices and ceremonies. Boarding schools in Michigan focused on manual labor, discipline, and education, preparing Native students to live and work in a White society. Notably, “the reparation of Indian youth for their duties, privileges, and responsibilities of American citizenship is the purpose of the governmental plan of education. This implies training in the industrial arts, developing the moral and intellectual faculties, the establishment of good habits, the formation of character, and preparation for citizenship” (U.S. Department of the Interior, Office of Indian Affairs, 1898, p. 3).

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*They did what they always wanted to do, get rid of Native Americans forever, if they couldn't physically kill/ murder them, kill their culture and heritage as children. – QS19*

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The federal and state governments, having set the policies and conditions and allowed the abuse to happen—in part due to their own financial incentives to maintain the boarding schools—are responsible for what occurred in those schools. As argued above, the State of Michigan is responsible for the conduct of boarding schoolteachers and administrators. One respondent stated that “they [the State of Michigan] were just as responsible as the feds. They knew the abuse and impact of the horrible treatment.”

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*It was the state and the federal government that took away our language, that took away access to our traditional lifeways, and so it's their responsibility to provide the means, the space, and the support to bring those things back, to revitalize our language, to revitalize our practices and our lifeways. An important thing is that they're not going to look the same as they did 100 years ago or 200 years ago. Of course, we're not going to harvest, and we're not going to practice ceremony the same way that we did 200 years ago because humans adapt, and we adapt, and we have to. So, understanding that our ceremonies and our practices need to adapt to whatever means that we can still practice them today. Hunting and fishing rights, acknowledging our treaties and enforcing our treaties. The*

*federal government and the state government needs to provide space and support for that. -TD12*

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### *Economic Exploitation and Land Dispossession*

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*The state had a financial interest in sending children to school. Once in attendance the schools would have guardianship and access to the children's land claims which were sold for lumber and oil drilling rights. -QD44*

*I know the U.S. Government used "Indian money" from treaties to fund the boarding schools. The churches within the states and state elected officials approved the schools. -QD61*

---

The federal government funded boarding schools—often through proceeds from Native land ceded through treaty agreements and through unauthorized use of Indian Trust monies (Newland, 2022). Treaty agreements often had stipulations that the Tribe had to use a portion of their allotted lands for schools (for example, the Treaty with the Chippewa, etc. 1859; Kappler, n.d.). Treaties also had stipulations that those Tribal members who were not “competent”—often meaning uneducated—had their land allotments managed by the Secretary of the Interior (for example, the Treaty with the Chippewa of Saginaw, Swan Creek, and Black River, 1864; Kappler, n.d.). Such policies tied education to the rights of managing one’s own assets. When Dibaajimodag were asked whether they knew of the treaty obligations that the government had about providing education to Native Americans, their responses were evenly distributed among ion between “yes,” “no,” and “unsure.”

However, evidence from other studies suggests that the DOI used money held in Individual Indian Money accounts to fund boarding schools—and during certain periods of time that was the primary source of funding (Newland, 2022). The federal government deposited money into Individual Indian Money accounts from a variety of sources, such as timber sales, land sales, and court settlements.

This evidence suggests that the federal policy of assimilation—centered on the establishment and growth of boarding schools—supported financial interests, not simply as a means of encouraging Tribes to be self-sufficient economically, but as a means of extracting lands and other assets from Tribes and Tribal members.

Archival evidence supports Dibaajimodag stories regarding the financial interests of the federal and state governments in sending children to boarding schools, which were sometimes funded with Indian trust funds. Investigating the Catholic Native American boarding schools in Michigan offers a way to consider how the trust-funding process was administered. The DOI contracted religious organizations and independent schools (e.g., Carlisle, Hampton) to operate Native American boarding schools. These organizations were compensated, in whole or in part, from Indian trust monies (Prucha, 1979). The images that follow are examples of DOI contracts with Catholic Indian boarding schools in Michigan (Figure 36, Figure 37, Figure 38, and Figure 39; Bureau of Indian Affairs, n.d.). An Emmet County Circuit Court Clerk assisted the Holy Childhood of Jesus School Superintendent with verification of the school personnel signatures required by the DOI for a contract for the 1892-1893 academic year (Figure 37).

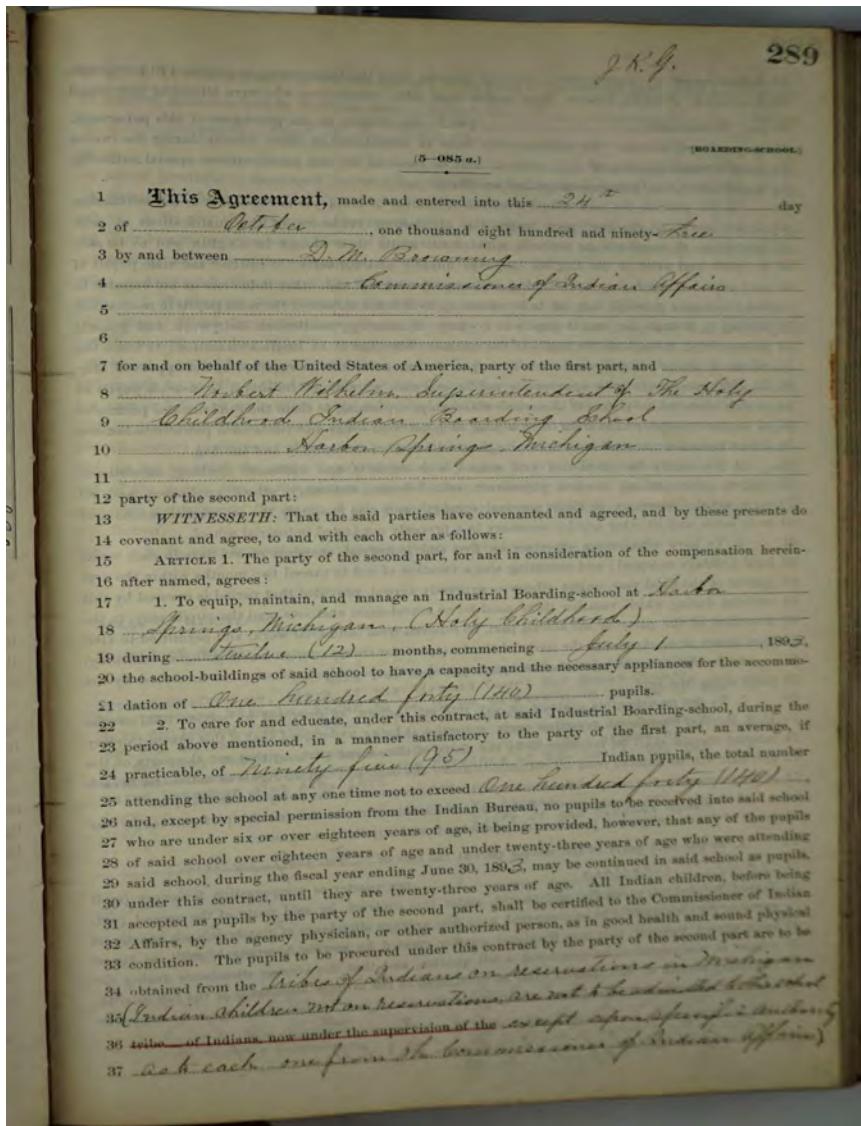
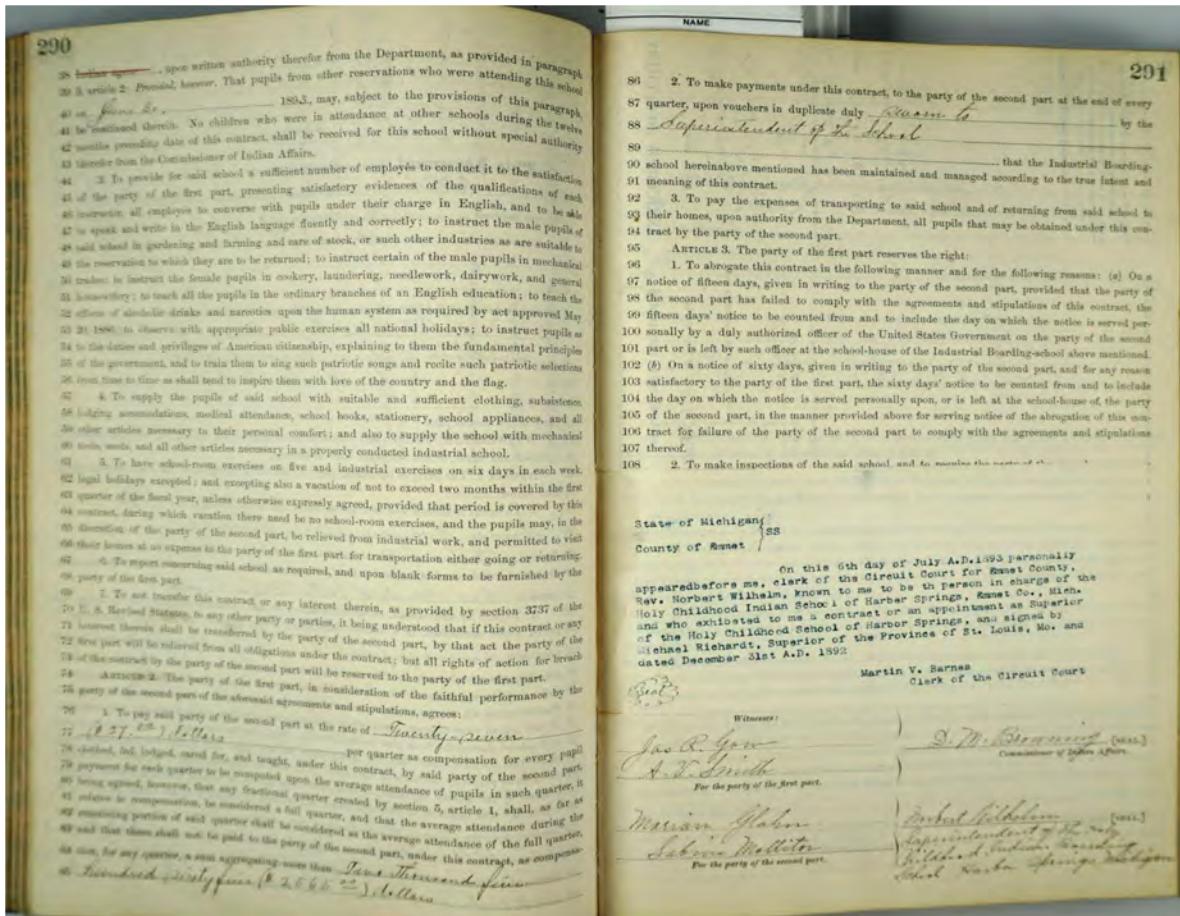


Figure 37. Contract between the US Department of Interior (DOI) and the Superintendent of the Holy Childhood Indian School of Harbor Springs, 1892. Page 1 of 3.



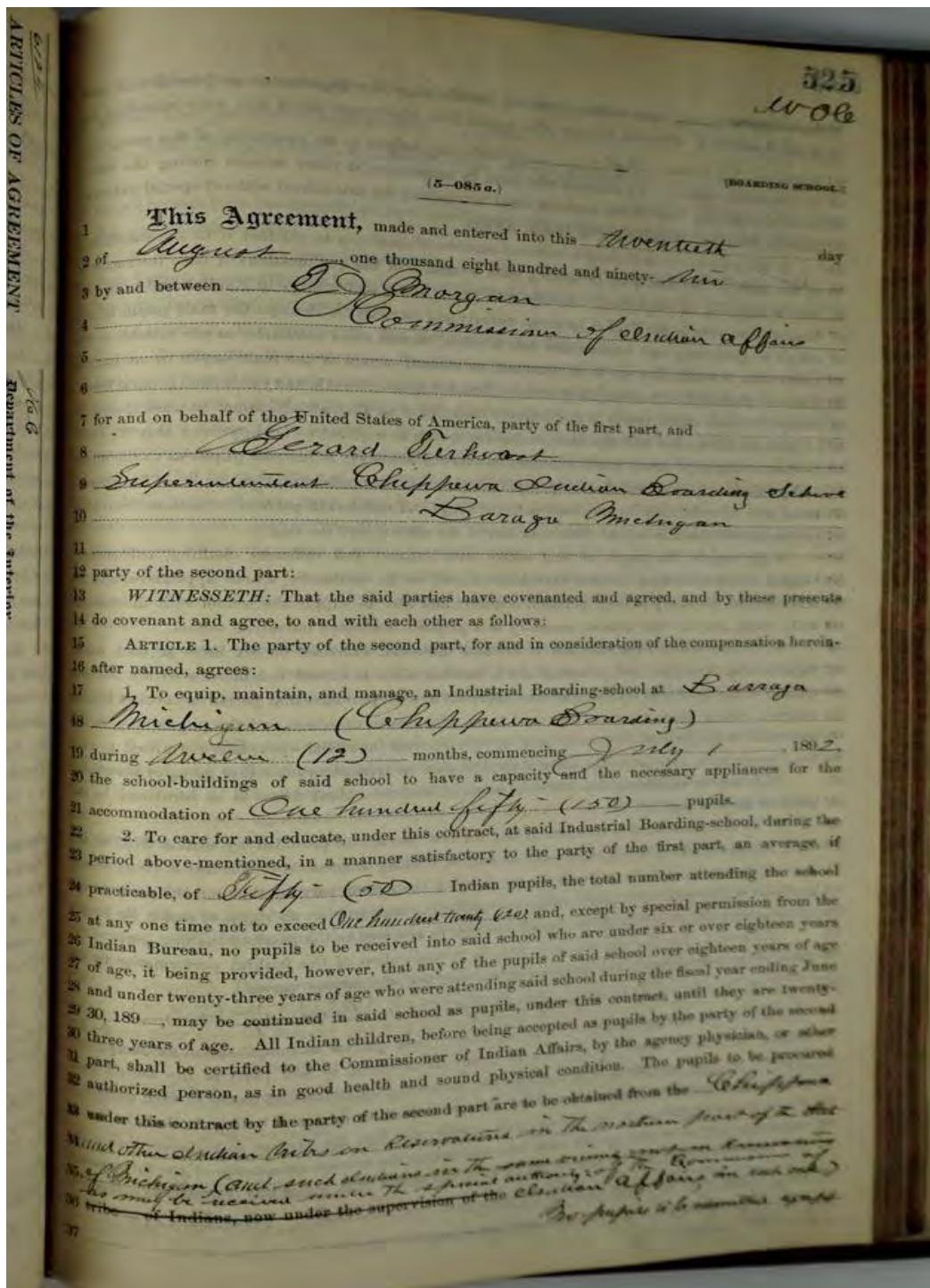


Figure 39. Contract between the US DOI and the Chippewa Indian Boarding School to equip, maintain and manage the school for 12 months for an average of 50 students, and up to 120. 1892. Page 1 of 3.

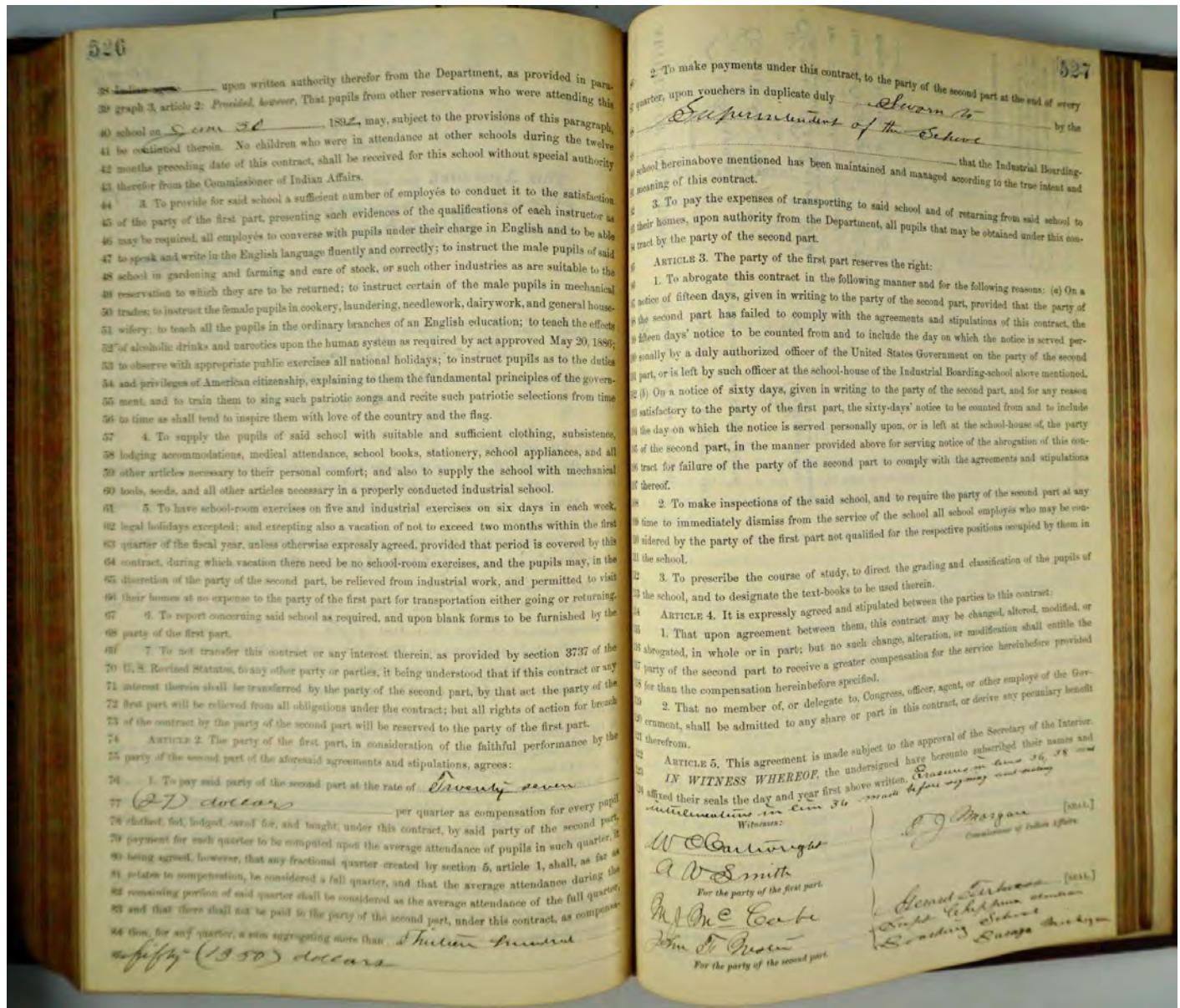


Figure 40. Contract between the US DOI and the Chippewa Indian Boarding School to equip, maintain and manage the school for 12 months for an average of 50 students, and up to 120. 1982. Pages 2-3 of 3.

The contract compensation must be tallied in 2024 dollars, though the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Consumer Price Index Inflation Calculator only calculates back to 1913 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, n.d.). Access to Indian treaty annuities and

trust funds provided significant financial resources for Catholic churches and religious orders. According to a 1900 tally by the BCIM, Catholic Indian schools in the United States siphoned just under \$4.5 million from Indian families—well over \$144 million in 2024 dollars. The BCIM estimate included cash payments, student treaty rations, and clothing, all received from the DOI (Prucha, 1979). According to Marquette University, which holds a large portion of the BCIM records, Indian trust funding for Catholic Indian schools “continued until a Tribe’s account became depleted.” Total trust collapse for Native Americans in Michigan did not occur until 1976, according to the Raynor’s BCIM collections.

### *Failure to Protect Children*

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*The schools seemed to be places that were full of abuse (many different kinds) and trauma, but where was the state to protect our kids? -QD58*

*I can't imagine a scenario where thousands of people from one race are forced to schools around the state and the state itself had no involvement; their knowledge of ongoings where kids were killed had to have been reported to some extent or another. How do you have these mass graves and children never coming home, other kids saw. So how would it be possible that the state didn't know. - QS23*

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Conditions in boarding schools were often inhumane. As outlined by the *Meriam Report*, an investigation into the conditions of Native Americans, including those in boarding schools, which documented unhealthy conditions, low-quality nutrition, and forced labor (Brookings Institution, 1928). Similarly, in Michigan, it was documented that the Mount Pleasant School had egregiously limited funding for food (Clarke Historical Library, n.d.-b). Compounding these issues, over the years, there have been numerous documented occurrences of abuse and harsh punishment by teachers, administrators, and clergy in boarding schools in Michigan (Brunner, 2002). Native children died while enrolled in boarding schools in Michigan (Clarke Historical Library, n.d.-b, "Health" section). Although Indian agents were required to oversee all schools and visit and inspect them quarterly (U.S. Department of the Interior, Office of Indian Affairs, 1898, p. 5), their reports focused on attendance and educational activities, not the living or learning conditions of the students.

### *The Path Toward Healing*

Survivors and Descendants emphasized the urgent need for governmental responsibility in addressing the lasting harm caused by the boarding school system. They highlighted the impacts of intergenerational trauma, particularly the ongoing struggles with substance use, mental health, and cultural loss that continue to affect Tribal communities and the need for programs to address them. Calls were made for direct federal funding for culture and language preservation programs ensuring broad and accessible support. As one respondent powerfully expressed, “I hope the government might impose some programs to help combat the drugs and alcohol epidemic along with the staggering problems with mental health the Tribal communities are facing still from the fallout caused by boarding schools.”

## **Carrying the Truths Forward**

The ecological framework (Figure 7) provides a structure to understand the multifaceted legacy of Native American boarding schools in Michigan. By examining interconnected layers—from individuals to policies—we gain insights into the pervasive and enduring impact of these institutions on Survivors, their families, and Native communities. At the core of our model are Survivors, whose narratives anchor this report, for it is their voices that must remain at the center of the conversation regarding what happened and how we move forward. Themes such as Native American identity erasure, abuse, and induced family vulnerability illustrate how the boarding school experience disrupted Survivor’s development and created lasting harm. Themes such as exploitation of child labor and deaths within the boarding schools demonstrate how the policies and adults responsible for caring for children exploited and harmed them instead. Survivors’ voices reveal the immediate effects of trauma while also highlighting their resilience and strength within their communities. The findings have shown that Survivors’ experiences are not isolated but radiate outwards and impact family dynamics, community health, and intergenerational healing.

The layer of Immediate Relations describes the boarding schools' impact on families, friends, and Tribes. Systemic family separation, the loss of traditional parenting knowledge, and the destruction of cultural practices intentionally fractured familial bonds and created intergenerational vulnerabilities. Dibaajimodag again shared insights that point to resilience and their collective commitment to healing. However, it is important to recognize that the responsibility for healing does not only land within the Native communities that were most impacted by the policies, systems, and organizations that intended to harm them. Providing the structure and funding for healing is the responsibility of those who make policy and systems that interact with Native communities and organizations that caused harm in the first place. The findings also demonstrate how the trauma caused by systematic

separation of families magnified vulnerabilities in Native communities that appear in other layers of the model. For example, the fractured familial bonds resulting from children being forced into the child welfare and adoption systems have perpetuated conditions that lead to ongoing interactions between Native families and social service and justice systems.

Within the Systems and Organizations layer, we describe how entities like schools, child welfare and adoption agencies, and the justice system perpetuated assimilation policies. Foster care placements and adoptions, the intent of schooling and the conditions within the boarding schools and forced religious assimilation often functioned as extensions of the federal and state assimilation policies, compounding harm and limited long-term opportunities for Survivors of the boarding schools and their families. These organizations and systems did not operate in isolation but interacted directly with Survivors, families, and Tribes, creating a cycle where systemic harm exacerbated individual and collective trauma, demonstrating how these organizations and systems impact multiple layers of the model.

The Location Context layer of the model contextualizes these findings within the State of Michigan's unique historical and geographical landscape. The boarding schools in Michigan not only disrupted Native lives within the state but also shaped the experiences of Descendants living elsewhere. Themes such as broken family connections and Michigan's responsibility emphasize the need for healing initiatives and accountability to address the state's role in the broader boarding school system. Michigan's role as both an implementer of federal policies and a site of localized boarding school practices highlights the interconnectedness of state-level actions with national agendas. Further research is needed to fully understand the benefits the state derived from boarding school policies.

The outmost layer, Federal and State Policies, highlights the broader structural forces that enabled boarding schools. Policies promoting assimilation, economic exploitation through land dispossession, and failure to protect children created the conditions for systemic harm. These policies directly influenced Michigan's implementation of boarding schools and continue to shape Native communities' struggles today. Federal policies established the foundation for systemic assimilation, while state policies and practices tailored those foundations to Michigan's specific context. This layer demonstrates how states were complicit in carrying out federal policies of assimilation and cultural genocide, impacting every layer of the ecological model and amplifying the trauma experienced by Native communities.

Through the ecological model, we see how each layer—from personal experiences to systemic policies—interacts to produce a deeply rooted legacy of trauma. This

framework not only illuminates the complexities of the boarding school experience but also underscores the importance of a comprehensive approach to healing, reconciliation, and justice. Healing requires addressing the intersection of the layers—where harm flows inward from systemic policies to individual experiences, while resilience, knowledge, and advocacy must flow outward from Survivors and communities to influence systems and policies. The model reminds us that addressing enduring harm requires understanding the interconnected systems that continue to influence Native lives in Michigan today.

In the next section, we share Dibaajimodag suggestions for reconciliation and healing, improvements in K- 12 and post-secondary education, and creating healing centered, culturally relevant human services. We conclude this section with a discussion of the limitations of this study and implications for future research. Then, we conclude the report with a list of short- and long-term recommendations to assist in healing the harm caused by the Native American boarding schools in Michigan.

### **Pathways to Reconciliation and Healing**

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*Speaking about it can help the healing process. Bringing awareness to the issue can also help facilitate healing. It's not a dirty little secret that should be swept under the rug. Speaking on it takes away the power it has over those who experienced trauma. -QD26*

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This section addresses how insights from Survivor and Descendant stories support the broader goals of reconciliation and healing. It considers the importance of formal apologies, acknowledgment, and financial commitments (e.g., trauma-informed, healing-centered services, Native language centers) that can help communities heal from the trauma of boarding schools.

Acknowledging, supporting, and providing financial support for pathways toward reconciliation and healing from the tragedies of Native American boarding schools is an ethical obligation of the State of Michigan and federal government. The truths shared by Survivors and Descendants uncover the impact of government-funded institutions that intended to systematically assimilate Native Americans into Euro-American culture. Healing requires formal apologies from the government and religious organizations that had a part in the atrocity of the Native American boarding school experience. The truths shared in this report reinforce the necessity for more truth-telling, acknowledgement, and action to alleviate the intergenerational trauma that impact Survivors, Descendants, and their communities today. While this

research represents an important step forward, it must be viewed as preliminary, as much remains to be uncovered in archival records and through the voices of Survivors and Descendants. With the Survivor population aging, there is an urgent need to engage with them further to document their experiences and preserve their truths.

### **Preserving Culture and Language**

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*The state of Michigan should provide funds for healing centers and Ojibwemowin language programs for all affected Tribes. Survivors should receive the support they need to heal their wounds. Children of Survivors should also receive healing support. -QD91*

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Survivors and Descendants from Native communities in Michigan discussed how their experiences with boarding schools intersect with broader efforts to preserve Native culture and language. Throughout their stories, both Survivors and Descendants articulated that healing is supported by reclaiming their Native identity and promoting cultural revitalization such as language programs. Cultural revitalization is a long-term process that will require support and funding from the State of Michigan and the federal government. Additionally, Survivors and Descendants' recommendations were centered on using methods that are culturally grounded to address historical trauma including talking circles, storytelling, and Tribal ceremonies. These cultural methods allow for healing not only to be an individual act but an ongoing process that requires community support to transform pain into resilience. It is crucial that insights from Survivors and Descendants are used to create recommendations and policies that will support their healing and preserve their culture and language.

### **Carrying Truths into Education**

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*I believe this study might help heal Tribal communities impacted by Indian boarding schools in Michigan by publicly sharing the truth. I want to know the truth about the harms imposed on over 20 members of my family and my Tribal community, and I want the Michigan Department of Education to mandate that this truth be taught in all schools. Michigan legislature's failure to enact the History*

*of Indian boarding schools be taught in Michigan schools  
is a huge slap in the face to the Survivors and their  
Descendants. -QD41*

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### ***K-12 Curriculum***

Survivors and Descendants felt strongly that the true history of colonization, including the Native American boarding schools in Michigan, should be integrated into K-12 curricula, including part of the state standards. By centering these narratives, educators can offer more accurate, empathetic, and healing-centered education that acknowledges historical truths and fosters understanding. It was recognized by many Dibaajimodag that more education is needed that acknowledges what happened and prevent it from happening again.

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*Boarding school is America's best kept secret. This needs  
to be standard curriculum. If they can do this to our kids,  
they can do this to any [children]. -QD77*

*With Truth and knowledge, comes healing. Once we know  
better, we can do better. -QD81*

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### ***Post-Secondary Curricula***

As detailed throughout this report, the legacy of boarding schools intersects with every system and organization serving Native people in Michigan. We have highlighted their profound impacts on education, employment, substance use, and mental and physical health services, among other areas. Therefore, it is essential that professionals in social services, the justice system, education, and public policy receive comprehensive education and training to deeply understand how the legacy of the Native American boarding schools in Michigan influences the behaviors and outcomes they observe in the Native populations they serve today. Survivor and Descendant narratives can inform curricula in post-secondary programs, including law enforcement, behavioral health, medical, and legal fields. Integrating these stories into training and educational programs can help cultivate professionals who approach their work with cultural humility and deliver trauma-informed and healing-centered care.

### **Creating Healing-Centered, Culturally Relevant Human Services**

*Michigan must allocate annual funding to each of the federally recognized Tribes in Michigan so that each Tribe can develop and deliver cultural and traditional healing activities in its Tribal communities. -QD41*

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This section highlights ideas Survivors and Descendants shared that can guide the development of healing-centered practices within human services departments. It underscores the importance of understanding intergenerational trauma and the need for culturally rooted pathways to healing.

Dibaajimodag shared that the goal is to create services that are responsive, culturally grounded, and restorative.

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*Trauma informed care, food sovereignty and cultural programs, life skills classes, financial management classes, alcohol and addiction resources, mental healthcare services, domestic violence resources. -QD75*

*Mental health and substance abuse services. Talking circles for the community. -QD90*

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Additionally, events that bring awareness and funding to help with access to therapy and substance use disorder treatment will benefit Native Americans who struggle with their overall well-being. Many of the Dibaajimodag said that policies should be created to help spread awareness and healing.

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*Developing institutions to aid those who've been affected and make public figures and politicians own theirs and their ancestors' actions to our people and proceed to make contributions to our community. -QD39*

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It is essential to recognize the federal trust responsibility extended to the State of Michigan through the Comstock Agreement of 1934, which binds the state to protect Native American and treaty rights. To date, the State of Michigan has not undertaken a comprehensive legislative effort to address its obligations in this area. The state's approach has been fragmented, relying on the integration of Tribal citizens into pre-existing state and local programs—an insufficient response to the gravity of the historical injustices faced by Native communities. Survivors and Descendants must

be helped through the creation of policies from the state government to address all the health disparities that many Native Americans experience today.

### **Limitations and Implications for Future Research**

This study represents an important initial effort to understand the Native American boarding school experience in Michigan. However, several limitations should be acknowledged. One of the primary constraints was the short timeline for data collection and analysis. The small sample size for this study, particularly of boarding school Survivors, presents a challenge in fully understanding the impact on Survivors and across Native American communities in Michigan.

Many Survivors are elderly, and the window to gather their truths is narrowing. Therefore, it is imperative that the State creates a mechanism for hearing the truths of remaining Survivors. In addition, one of the federally recognized tribes in Michigan did not participate in this study, which limits the sample size and the perspectives included in the report. The voices included in this report provide critical insight; however, they represent only a portion of the lived experiences of those impacted by boarding schools.

Additionally, no Survivors who attended Mount Pleasant Indian Industrial Boarding School or Baraga Chippewa Boarding and Day School participated in the questionnaire. Mount Pleasant Industrial Indian Boarding School was the only federally operated Indian boarding school and the largest boarding school in Michigan; it operated between 1893 and 1934, for grades K–8. Based on the operational timeline, Survivors would have been born approximately between 1879 and 1929 and would be at least 95 years old (in 2025). The advanced age of potential Survivors from Mount Pleasant Indian Industrial School more than likely explains their non-participation in taking the questionnaire. Similarly, the Baraga Chippewa Boarding and Day School, located near Baraga, Michigan, was a Catholic-run institution that operated between approximately 1866 and 1915. It is therefore unlikely that there are remaining Survivor who attended this school.

Furthermore, archival research, particularly when engaging with federal, state, Tribal, and religious records, requires extensive time to locate, review, and cross-reference materials. The compressed timeframe of this study limited the scope of documents reviewed; however, the archival research conducted in this study reveals several gaps that warrant further investigation. Additional research is necessary to fully understand how treaty funds designated for Native American education were managed and whether these funds, including treaty annuities and land cessions, were appropriately allocated to the boarding schools. Key questions also remain regarding the extent to which individual trust accounts were used in the funding of

these schools and whether such practices were proper given the intended purposes of those funds.

Furthermore, the specific types and amounts of trust money allocated—such as from treaty annuities, allotment lease income, and land sales—have yet to be fully explored. The DOI's report, though comprehensive in its scope, was unable to answer these questions, highlighting the need for continued research in this area. Additionally, no review of school operating budgets was conducted. This information would have demonstrated whether the State of Michigan provided or received funding related to the boarding schools.

In addition to funding issues, further investigation is needed to understand the scope and history of foster care practices, especially in relation to child displacement at Catholic Indian boarding schools. Questions about when and how foster care became widespread and whether this practice was used at institutions like Holy Childhood of Jesus School remain largely unanswered. Access to confidential Department of Health and Human Services records from the State of Michigan may provide crucial insights into this practice, and Tribal leadership will be made aware of these records moving forward.

Also, while Marquette University's recent digitization of the BCIM correspondence records offers valuable information, the records held by the Diocese of Gaylord and Diocese of Marquette remain largely inaccessible due to restrictive access policies. These diocesan records are critical to understanding the full history of Michigan's Catholic Indian boarding schools, and further efforts to gain access to them will be essential for completing the historical narrative.

Given these limitations, this study should be considered preliminary. While the themes identified are powerful and provide some first steps toward reconciliation and healing, this study does not capture the full complexity of the impact of the Native American boarding schools in Michigan.

Enumerating the number of students enrolled in boarding schools in Michigan and the number who died while attending those schools remains an important but daunting task. The following approach is suggested to determine the scope of boarding school attendance and death. Estimating the number of children who attended Indian boarding schools in Michigan would require a review of summary reports by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs and missionary societies. Such data reports were common and many are in the digitized annual reports of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs at the University of Wisconsin. Estimating the number of children who died at any Indian boarding school requires a thorough and time-consuming archival review of myriad record types such as clinic ledgers; student files, school reports, and correspondence with the DOI; school publications; and

local death notices. One approach to tallying the attendance and death at Indian boarding schools in Michigan would be to support each Tribe in learning about the archives and developing their own next steps.

## Recommendations for the State of Michigan

*If there's one thing that we're made for, that we're placed on this earth for, it's to be helpers. -TD07*

Ongoing support from the State of Michigan is necessary to progress toward healing and justice through transitional justice actions. The recommendations presented in this section are rooted in the findings of this study and are organized using the Anishinaabe Medicine Wheel (Figure 40).

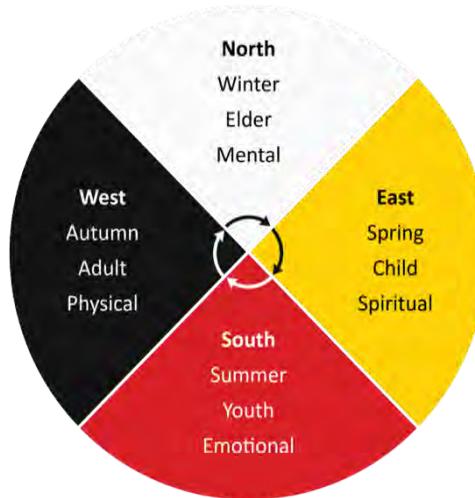


Figure 40. Anishinaabe Medicine Wheel

Just as the layers of the ecological model (Figure 7) demonstrate the interconnectedness of those most impacted by the organizations, systems, the State of Michigan, and federal and state policies, the Medicine Wheel acknowledges the interconnectedness and balance essential for reconciliation and healing.

The recommendations begin in the East and focus on items that can be implemented immediately (i.e., the infancy of reconciliation and healing), laying the foundation for future actions. The recommendations in the South quadrant address short-term goals (approximately 6 months to 1 year) and build upon the early initiatives from the East. The West quadrant represents longer term goals (approximately 1–3 years) and emphasize continued growth, deeper healing, and more complex structural and systemic changes. The recommendations conclude in the North with longer-term

actions for reconciliation and healing for Tribal communities and future generations, charting a path 3-5 years into the future. This cyclical approach reflects the Medicine Wheel's teachings of balance, interconnectedness, and the progression of our life journeys, ensuring that the recommendations address immediate needs and long-term visions for healing and justice.

### *East Recommendations*

The East is represented by yellow, spring, childhood, and spirituality. The recommendations within this section are those that should be acted upon immediately. The concepts of spring and childhood correspond to the early stages of reparations and the work toward healing. These recommendations can contribute to the spiritual healing within Native communities by recognizing harm, empowering families to reclaim their lost histories and identities, and be a step toward restoring balance.

The following are East Recommendations for the State of Michigan.

**1. Acknowledge that it has an inherent and ongoing obligation to provide for the educational interests of the Tribes located in the area now known as the State of Michigan and their citizens.**

This obligation is based on the trust and treaty relationships between the Tribes and the United States as inherited in the Comstock Agreement of 1934.

**2. Acknowledge that although the state has on occasion referenced and acted on this obligation in positive ways, it has also knowingly neglected this obligation, contributing to the harm experienced under its oversight.**

**3. Acknowledge that its actions and inactions associated with Native American boarding schools have caused significant damage to the education, health, and well-being of Tribes and their citizens.**

**4. Recognize that addressing the issues associated with the legacy of Native American boarding schools located within the State is a significant part of its ongoing obligation.**

**5. Embrace the broadest, most inclusive approach in its efforts to address these issues.**

Using a broad definition of what constitutes a Native American boarding school is an example. Including children who were sent from Michigan to Native American boarding schools outside of the State is another example.

**6. Issue an executive order as an official apology that recognize its deliberate participation in the national policy of Native American boarding schools.**

The acknowledgement should include religious entities as official contractors who assisted in running and funding schools. This apology should be issued by the Governor's Office as an executive order and be accompanied by policies approved by the 12 federally recognized Tribes within Michigan. As discussed in the Responsibility and Federal Policies and State Enforced Assimilation sections of the report, Dibaajimodag requested public apologies from the State of Michigan for their involvement in forcing Native American children into boarding schools. The formal apology for the Native American boarding schools and the declaration of support for an investigation issued by the Office of the Governor for the State of Wisconsin (Executive Order #136) serves as a useful example.<sup>1</sup>

The apology should recognize the treatments endured at the Native American boarding schools and similar institutions as a crime against humanity. Doing so acknowledges the historical and systemic injustices imposed on Native Americans, validates Dibaajimodag experiences, and displays dedication to truth, accountability, and reconciliation. As noted in the Survivor layer of the model, under the Abuse and Death in Boarding Schools sections, Dibaajimodag shared traumatic experiences of torture, physical and sexual abuse, and deaths that most often resulted from abuse while attending boarding schools. These experiences all translate to crimes against humanity. Like genocide, crimes against humanity can be committed against people who do not fulfill the criteria of protected persons in the context of interstate conflicts and are part of an official policy or tolerated by authorities.<sup>1</sup>

According to the Rome Statute (International Criminal Court, 1998, Article 7) , there are eleven types of crime that can be charged as a crime against humanity when "committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population": "murder; extermination; enslavement; deportation or forcible transfer of population; imprisonment or other severe deprivation of physical liberty in violation of fundamental rules of international law; torture; rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced abortion, enforced sterilization, or any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity; persecution against any identifiable group or collectivity...; enforced disappearance...; the crime of apartheid; other inhumane acts of a similar character intentionally causing great suffering, or serious injury to body or to mental or physical health."

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<sup>1</sup> Wisconsin developed an Executive Order (#136), entitled "Relating to a Formal Apology for Wisconsin's History of Indian Boarding Schools and a Declaration of Support for Federal Investigation into the Same" and can be found here: <https://evers.wi.gov/Documents/EO/EO136-IndianBoardingSchools.pdf>

**7. Support Tribal Data Sovereignty practices to further reconciliation and healing efforts, as they ensure that Tribes control, manage, and utilize data related to their histories, communities, and citizens.**

Tribes are the rightful owners of their historical narratives, and supporting data sovereignty would address some of the challenges described in the limitations section such as access to archival materials, including those held by religious organizations. Throughout this study Dibaajimodag asked the research team where the data and findings would be stored. Many shared that they prefer the data were “owned” by the Tribes. Additionally, supporting Tribal data sovereignty could guide Survivor and Tribal community-led initiatives by ensuring that the way additional data about the boarding schools is gathered and shared remains culturally appropriate. Finally, Tribal data sovereignty supports transitional justice, which is described in more detail in the North section below.

**8. Utilize subpoena power in a second state investigation to ensure full archival research is completed, including denominational archives.**

The State of Michigan should utilize its legal authority to compel organizations or institutions to provide documents, records, or other evidence that could contribute to uncovering truths essential for reconciliation and healing. These archives may contain new or supporting data, such as reports or letters that may contribute to a more thorough investigation. As noted by a Descendant, “Never stop investigating, and bring the secrets to light to help the Survivors know they don’t need to be quiet about their trauma anymore and can work toward healing.”

***South Recommendations***

The South is represented by red, summer, youth, and the emotional dimension. The recommendations in this section should be implemented within approximately 6 months to 1 year. They represent youth and summer, which correspond to the stages of reparations and healing that builds on the foundation built within the spring. These recommendations can contribute to the emotional healing within Native communities by fostering justice and accountability, honoring lived experiences, respecting Tribal knowledge, restoring familial bonds, and creating spaces for culturally grounded healing.

The following are South Recommendations for the State of Michigan.

**9. Consult with the Tribes on all State activities surrounding Native American boarding schools. Tribes must have an ongoing and meaningful opportunity to provide input into such activities.**

**10. Provide financial support for ongoing research regarding its role in the development and perpetuation of Native American boarding schools as well as the aftermath.**

To begin, the state should focus on recording the truths of the remaining survivors, the research described in the future research section of this report, and other research needs as identified by the Tribes in Michigan.

**11. Support individual and community Tribal healing by providing resources, programs, and funding committed to addressing the trauma caused by Native American boarding schools.**

This support is essential to help Natives in Michigan process emotional, cultural, and intergenerational impacts of forced assimilation and abuse. As mentioned throughout The Path Toward Healing sections in the report, Dibaajimodag highlighted the need to share truths and the need for funding that can support healing centers and services such as talking circles, healing circles, storytelling, counseling, and therapy.

As indicated in the Resilience section, one possible method of community healing, which was used with the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe, is a program designed to help community members identify and reclaim their Tribal identity collectively (McBride, 2003). Another method focuses on breaking cycles of violence caused by historical trauma, which strengthens positive parent practices, reconnecting to traditional knowledge, and improving family communication (Goodkind et al., 2012). This program aims to nurture future generations of Native Americans.

**12. Support Tribal family preservation and reunification.**

Many Native American children were taken from their parents and relatives at young ages to attend boarding schools, and some never returned home. Generations of Native American families with induced family vulnerability have suffered family separations from substance use disorders, chronic health conditions, foster home placements, and socioeconomic disparities caused by the Native American boardings schools. As such, the State of Michigan should help to protect the family relationships and facilitate reunification of Native Americans, as their strength, culture, and resilience should come from their family. Bringing families back together will help restore collective healing and cultural preservation. Evidence-based efforts for family preservation and reunification include home visiting programs, harm reduction and safety planning, and education and job training programs for parents and caregivers.

Many Dibaajimodag talked about how the boarding schools did not prepare Survivors to be parents. Descendants often discussed times when their parents were devoid of emotion and nurturing, and often responded to their children with harsh discipline similar to what they had endured in the schools. Additionally, as mentioned in the

Foster Care and Adoption Systems section, many Dibaajimodag were exited out of the boarding school system into the foster care system. They frequently used substances to manage the trauma they had endured at the boarding schools. As a result, the state separated families again due to substance use disorders.

Historically, family separations occurred first because of the boarding schools and then due to the State of Michigan and other organizations promoting adoptions into White families to further the assimilation of Native American children. Therefore, the State of Michigan should focus on family preservation and reunification to help Native American families restore their family relationships and collective healing.

**13. Invest in violence prevention for Tribal populations by funding culturally specific violence prevention programs to break cycles of violence while promoting safety and resilience.**

The Native American boarding schools perpetuated cycles of abuse, neglect and mistreatment, leaving ongoing impacts on future generations, including increased vulnerability to violence. Additionally, violence prevention fosters opportunities for education and advocacy that addresses fundamental causes of violence, creating safer Tribal communities. As discussed in the Resilience section, one example of a violence prevention program is *Our Way*, a culturally grounded Native youth and parent intervention that focuses on breaking cycles of violence caused by historical trauma.

Further efforts are needed to actively research, encourage and promote violence-based prevention programs in Tribal communities.

**14. Include the Indian Boarding School era within the Michigan school standards.**

As discussed in the Carrying Truths into Education section of this report, Dibaajimodag shared their desire for a curriculum on Native American boarding schools for grades K-12 that acknowledges historical truths and fosters understanding. Currently, the reformed social studies standards (Michigan Department of Education, 2019) only include a few Indian boarding schools as examples in section 7.1.1, Growing Crisis of Industrial Capitalism and Responses, but do not feature the era as key content. The Native American boarding school era is often an overlooked chapter of American history. The education of students about the forced assimilation, cultural erasure, and abuse and mistreatment experienced by Native children is critical for raising awareness, cultivating empathy, and understanding the historical context that led to socioeconomic outcomes for Native Americans.

**15. Eliminate the statute of limitations for sexual and physical abuse charges involving minors in Michigan.**

Currently, boarding school Survivors cannot testify in a court of law about physical and sexual abuse, as the period for reporting has passed. However, many Survivors were not ready to speak about their experiences until well into adulthood. Some Descendants shared that they did not know their parents went to boarding schools until they themselves were adults.

Allowing Survivors to press charges against their abusers, regardless of how much time has passed, is an essential path toward healing. Addressing these abuses in a court of law provides an opportunity for justice and validates the experiences of Survivors. It also empowers them to reclaim their voices and hold those responsible accountable, fostering individual and community healing while reinforcing societal commitment to preventing future harm.

The statute of limitations for most criminal sexual conduct (in the 2nd, 3rd and 4th degrees) is 10 years from the date of the crime or the victim's 21st birthday (whichever is longer). First-degree criminal sexual conduct does not have any statute of limitations.

### *West Recommendations*

The West, represented by black, autumn, adulthood, and physicality. Recommendations in this quadrant are essential for continued progress toward intergenerational healing, and more complex structural and systemic changes. They represent adulthood, and while they will take longer to implement (approximately 1-3 years), they are essential if the State of Michigan wants to repair relationships with Tribal communities and support healthy Tribal communities. These recommendations can contribute to physical healing with Native communities by restoring resources necessary for health and well-being and fostering reconnection to traditional knowledge and cultural practices that promote wellness. By addressing historical injustices and restoring cultural connections, these actions also support healing of trauma that is stored within the bodies of Native people and foster resilience.

The following are West Recommendations for the State of Michigan.

#### **16. Investigate inappropriate use of Indian trust funds for the benefit of non-Native populations and American development, and ensure accountability, transparency, and justice for Tribal communities.**

Investigating the misuse of Indian funds is an important step toward addressing the financial exploitation of Native Americans. As discussed in the Forced Religious Assimilation section, the federal government often paid religious organizations to recruit Native American children into boarding schools with funds taken from Tribal treaty or trust fund accounts. Additionally, one

Descendant noted that “Indian money” from treaties were used to fund boarding schools.

**17. Fund Native American Languages revitalization programs and provide resources for language education in schools and communities.**

Revitalizing Native languages is an essential part of healing as it allows Native people to reclaim their voices and cultural practices. As noted in the Native American Identity Erasure section, Dibaajimodag highlighted how the boarding schools punished the use of Native languages, which negatively affected many Dibaajimodag’s ability to learn and pass down their languages generationally. Additionally, in The Path Toward Healing section, Dibaajimodag recommended the funding of language revitalization programs to support healing.

***North Recommendations***

The North is represented by white, winter, elders (the knowledge holders), and the mental dimension. Recommendations in this quadrant are longer-term actions (approximately 3 years) needed for reconciliation and healing that will continue to bring healing for current Tribal communities and future generations. These actions can contribute to mental health by addressing psychological impacts of historical injustices, furthering acknowledgment and accountability, and creating opportunities for collective mourning. These recommendations not only support the mental well-being of current Tribal members, but they also ensure that future generations can thrive in a framework of truth, justice, and reconciliation.

The following are North Recommendations for the State of Michigan.

**18. Identify and repatriate children who never returned from Michigan Indian boarding schools.**

While repatriation should begin immediately, identifying mass and unmarked graves could take a considerable amount of time. Therefore, the effort should continue until the Tribes are fully satisfied with the outcomes.

**19. Identify and repatriate the Native children who died while attending boarding schools to ensure justice, closure and healing for affected families and communities.**

This process is crucial for fostering accountability and offering steps toward healing the intergenerational trauma still affecting Native communities today. Additionally, identifying and repatriating children would demonstrate Michigan’s commitment to reconciliation and commitment to healing. As discussed in the Death in Boarding School section, Dibaajimodag shared instances of students that “disappeared,” while also mentioning cemeteries and burial sites. *The Washington Post* noted 140 burial sites in their investigation, whereas the DOI

reported 74 burial sites. By continuing to investigate, Michigan can set a precedent for accountability, ensuring the memories of Native children are not forgotten and their spirits are laid to rest with honor.

Transitional justice should be used as the framework for all recommendations. This framework (Gissel, 2022) is designed to transform societies into rights-respecting democracies while addressing past human rights violations. It involves actions such as criminal prosecutions, truth commissions, reparations programs, institutional reforms, memorials, apologies, and art. Transitional justice actions are particularly relevant to the legacy of Native American boarding schools in Michigan, as they provide a framework for acknowledging and addressing the human rights violations that occurred within the boarding schools (e.g., removal of Anishinaabe children from their parents, cultural genocide, and abuse).

Transitional justice (Gissel, 2022) is designed to transform societies into rights-respecting democracies while addressing past human rights violations. It involves actions such as criminal prosecutions, truth commissions, reparations programs, institutional reforms, memorials, apologies, and art. The framework is informed by a desire to rebuild social trust and repair harmful systems and promote healing. By implementing transitional justice actions, including truth commissions, reparations programs, and public apologies, the State of Michigan and its partners can begin to honor Survivors' experiences, rebuild trust with Native communities, and address the intergenerational trauma caused by the Native American boarding schools.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Michigan Department of Civil Rights Request for Proposals

## SCHEDULE A – STATEMENT OF WORK CONTRACT ACTIVITIES

### Request for Proposal (RFP) No. 240000000405

#### Native American Boarding School Study

This schedule identifies the anticipated requirements of any Contract resulting from this RFP. The term “Contractor” in this document refers to a bidder responding to this RFP, as well as the Contractor who is awarded the contract. The term “bidder” is used to identify where specific responses to the RFP are required.

The Contractor must respond to each requirement or question and explain how it will fulfill each requirement. Attach any supplemental information and appropriately reference within your response.

**IMPORTANT NOTE TO CONTRACTORS/BIDDERS: There are specific requirements for which acceptance must be simply acknowledged through a checkbox(es), and others that require further explanation. Click one checkbox and complete the entries as identified.**

#### BACKGROUND

The Native American Boarding School era began with funding allocated through the Indian Civilization Act of 1819. Through this act, dollars were appropriated to “civilize” and “assimilate” Indigenous children. These boarding schools were operated in part by the federal government and, in many cases, in conjunction with churches, private entities and other government systems. The federal government adopted child removal policies and erected boarding schools throughout the country in an effort to remove Native children from their communities and remove the Native languages and culture from the children. Boarding schools existed in two categories: federal industrial boarding schools and mission-based boarding schools. While many entities and structures existed and operated with the sole purpose of civilizing and assimilating Native children, not all of them received federal funding. Per the initial federal investigative report issued in May of 2022, the Department of the Interior identified five (5) such schools that operated in Michigan and did so according to criteria established for the purpose of guiding the investigation. It is anticipated that this number may increase as the investigation continues.

Again, while there were many other institutions, such as orphanages, day schools, group homes, etc., that operated in Michigan with the same purpose, the five (5) schools identified in the federal investigative process are as follows:

Native American Boarding School in Michigan	Other Names	Location	Date Opened	Date Closed
New L'Arbre Croche Mission School	Holy Childhood of Jesus Catholic Church and Indian School; Holy Child	Harbor Springs, MI	1889 as this school. The building	1983

	Harbor Springs Boarding School; Holy Childhood of Jesus Church		originally opened in 1829	
<b>Baraga Chippewa Boarding and Day School</b>	Chippewa Mission; Holy Name Boarding and Day School	Baraga, MI	1884	1902
<b>Mount Pleasant Indian Industrial Boarding School</b>	Michigan Indian Industrial Boarding School; Mount Pleasant Indian School; Mount Pleasant Training	Mount Pleasant, MI	1893	1934
<b>Mackinac Mission School</b>	Mission House; Michilimackic or Michillimackinac School; Mackinaw Mission School for Native American and Metis Children	Mackinac Island, MI	1823	1837
<b>Catholic Otchippewa Boarding School</b>	Otchippewa Day and Orphan Boarding	Schoolcraft County, MI	1883	1888

## SCOPE

This study should serve as a preliminary and exploratory assessment of Michigan's boarding school history. This study will provide an overview of the boarding school system and how it operated in the state of Michigan, including the role the state had in its operation; will highlight the conditions, experiences, enrollment and financial mechanisms for said operation; and will identify unexplored areas and unanswered questions that will require additional time, funding and resources. The design of this study will also incorporate collaborative efforts with Tribal communities, which will be critical to gaining insight, guidance and authentic contributions to the project. The study will also produce recommendations, which will be developed – in part – with guidance from Tribal Nations and Indigenous communities.

The study will result in a final report which describes and illustrates the landscape of Michigan's boarding school history and which presents the proposed recommendations.

### 1. Requirements

#### 1. General Requirements

##### A. The Contractor must demonstrate the following in the proposal:

i.Understanding and experience in Tribal engagement and inter-governmental collaboration through:

- a. The use of approaches informed and guided by cultural sensitivity and respect, historical awareness, an understanding of Tribal sovereignty and a working knowledge of building and upholding of positive government-to-government relationships
- b. Access to resources (or the ability to secure such resources) and capacity to engage Tribal governments and communities
- c. An ability to work in concert with the Department of the Interior's federal boarding school investigation and to collaborate with other governmental agencies and non-profit organizations

ii.Experience in historical preservation, research, analysis and report writing which should demonstrate:

- a. Evidence of experience in preservation, protection, curation, repatriation, and management of historical research, archival research, records and cultural information

- b. Evidence of experience in analyzing research, data and historical records
- c. Writing samples (publications, research paper, etc.)
- d. Project management experience with emphasis on government-to-government relationships
- e. Research experience related to intergenerational trauma, Native American child removal policies and boarding school history

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	I have reviewed the above requirement and agree with no exception.
<input type="checkbox"/>	I have reviewed the above requirement and have noted all exception(s) below.

**List all exception(s):**

**Bidder must describe how they comply with the above requirement(s):**

**B. The contractor must provide the following as part of the proposal:**

- i. A strategic yet thoughtful plan by which the study will be designed, implemented, and completed, which should identify:
  - a. Desired goals and outcomes
  - b. Project team members (or subcontractors); including how they will be chosen and on-boarded, how their roles will be defined and fulfilled, their qualifications and their individual knowledge and experience working with Tribal communities
  - c. Approaches to be employed by the team which collectively address the critical need for prioritizing an Indigenous-centered approach and perspective Method(s) by which collaborative efforts with Tribal Nations and Indigenous communities will be developed and implemented
- ii. A summary of the resources, skills and capacity to engage with Tribal governments and Tribal communities which should include
  - a. Procedures to preserve and protect Indigenous intellectual property rights
  - b. Culturally responsive methods for addressing the sensitive nature of the topic
  - c. Methods and approach by which the contractor will engage Tribal governments, communities and individual community members
  - d. Indigenous-centered approaches to seeking and collecting feedback and guidance from Tribal Nations and Indigenous communities
- iii. A timeline for completing the project outcomes to include:
  - a. Project benchmarks
  - b. Final report
  - c. Recommendations
- iv. A detailed budget which should identify:
  - a. How funds will be allocated
  - b. Anticipated expenditures related to:

- Subcontractor services
- Travel
- Compensations and honorariums
- Research

v. A final written report containing the findings, identifying recommendations for next steps and providing guidance for moving forward.

## Appendix B: Institutions for Future Study

The *Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report* identifies other institutions in Michigan that meet some but not all of the criteria of an Indian boarding school (Newland, 2024):

- Aemilianum Orphanage, Marquette
- Bay Mills Day School, Bay Mills
- Bradley Mission School, Mt. Pleasant
- Bradley Mission School, Mt. Shelbyville
- Burt Lake Schoolhouse, Colonial Point
- Carey Mission School on the St. Joseph River, Niles
- Grand Traverse Bay School, Traverse Bay
- Hannahville Indian Mission School, Wilson
- Holy Cross School Cross Village, Harbor Point
- Holy Family Orphanage, Marquette
- Indianville Schoolhouse, Elmhurst
- Isabella County Public Day School No. 1, Mt. Pleasant
- Isabella County Public Day School No. 2, Mt. Pleasant
- Isabella County Public Day School No. 3, Mt. Pleasant
- Isabella County Public Day School No. 6, Mt. Pleasant
- L'Anse Day School, L'Anse
- Lapeer County Day School, Lapeer
- Leelanau County Public Day School, Glen Arbor
- Middle Village Day School, Middle Village
- Munising Day School, Munising
- Old Wing Mission School, Holland
- Ottawa Baptist Mission School, Gull Prairie
- Point Iroquois Day School, Point Iroquois
- Saint Ignace Day School, Saint Ignac
- Sault Sainte Marie Methodist Indian Mission, Sault Sainte Marie
- St. Joseph's Orphanage and Home, Zeba
- St. Josephs Mission, Manistee
- St. Joseph's Orphanage, Baraga
- St. Mary's Mission School, Sault Sainte Marie
- St. Mary's Mission School, Cheboygan
- Sugar Island Day School, Sault Sainte Marie
- Thomas Mission Station School, Ada

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## Appendix C: Descriptions of Select Boarding Schools in Michigan

### Bradley Mission School

This school was created within the context of Indian removal during the 1830s. Michigan Territorial Governor Lewis Cass and Michigan Indian Agent Henry Schoolcraft were heavily involved in territorial politics and federal policy.

- School closed after the Potawatomi were successfully removed to Kansas and Indian territory.
- Further research is needed on whether this school obtained Civilization Act funds.

### Mackinac Mission School

This school was created with financial support from the American Fur Company during the late-stage fur trade era. In 1823, the Reverend William Ferry founded a mission on Mackinac Island on land now known as Mission Point. Two years later, he and his wife, Amanda, erected this building as a boarding school for Indian children (Widder, 1999). In 1827, 112 students attended the Mackinac Mission School, the majority of whom were Métis—children of Native American and Euro-American parents (Widder, 1999; Honoring Native Ancestors, 2020).

A list of total enrolled students was compiled by Keith R. Widder in the book *Battle for the Soul: Métis Children Encounter Evangelical Protestants at Mackinaw Mission, 1823–1837* (1999), from records held at the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions Archives. An online version of this list is also available (Honoring Native Ancestors, 2020).

According to Widder, the Ferrys' efforts failed after their work brought about a revival of Catholicism, and their students refused to abandon the fur trade as a way of life. The Treaty of 1836 necessitated a new Indian future and the schools to make that happen.

- Cass' push for statehood was a key dynamic in creating the school.
- Mackinac Mission School was closed in 1837, within a year of the treaty.
- Further research is needed into whether this school received Civilization Act funds.

### Holy Family Orphanage

Holy Family Orphanage was based in Marquette, Michigan, and operated from 1915 until 1967. There were up to 200 boys and girls at one time; children took a full day of classes. While the facility was intended originally only to serve White children, some of its first residents included 60 Native American children transferred from a Catholic home

boarding school named after St. Joseph in Assinins. In 1946, the building also housed Catholic Social Services; it was also used as a convent and for diocesan offices.

- Catholic archivists and allied parishioners created this source.
- Further research is needed on the involvement of the institution's board of directors in treaty negotiations with tribes and land transfers under the General Allotment Act (1887).
- Further research is needed on whether this school received Civilization Act funds.

### **Mount Pleasant Indian Industrial Boarding School**

Created in the immediate aftermath of the General Allotment Act (1887), this school opened to Native American students on June 30, 1893. The school building contained eight classrooms and an auditorium. The school emphasized academics and vocational training and operated until 1934. That year, the property was transferred to the State of Michigan becoming the Mount Pleasant branch of the Michigan Home and Training School. Student case files are held at the National Archives and Records Administration (n.d.).

Located in Isabella County, the school was near the Isabella Indian Reservation of the federally recognized Saginaw Chippewa Tribal Nation. The school was referred to often in local newspapers as "Indian Industrial." Eventually, Indian Industrial comprised about a dozen buildings over 320 acres and taught 300 students annually ([Elizalde](#), n.d.). Students from all over Michigan and other states were forced to live at Indian Industrial during this time.

While run by a religious organization, Indian Industrial school was Michigan's principal example of an off-reservation industrial boarding school. Federal and state government officials pushed the idea that massive land loss (and fraud) under the General Allotment Act necessitated preparing Indian youth for a future where they would become wage laborers in an American industrialized economy.

For breaking the rules, children were harshly punished. There were multiple deaths recorded at the school; the true number is in dispute as official documents only record five deaths, contrary to the knowledge of local Tribe members and researchers who state that there were over deaths at Indian Industrial (Stebbins, 2021; Walker, 2021). Conditions were harsh in other ways; overcrowding and unsanitary conditions led to outbreaks of diseases such as smallpox, and students had small food rations (Walker, 2021).

The historical marker at the former site of the Mount Pleasant Indian Industrial School provides important details about the school's establishment. It reads, "In 1891, Congress established the Mount Pleasant Indian Industrial School and appropriated \$25,000 for land and buildings. Local citizens contributed an additional \$3,400 for the

land." To preserve the legacy of those impacted by the Mount Pleasant School, the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe of Michigan maintains a YouTube channel to document stories and remembrances of their tribal members about Mount Pleasant school (Saginaw Chippewa Tribe of Michigan, n.d.).

- Started as a small school authorized by the federal government and operated by a mission of the United Methodist Church.
- Mount Pleasant and other off-reservation schools were phased out in 1933 as part of Commissioner of Indian Affairs John Collier's Indian Reorganization Act.
- Mount Pleasant School was closed July 1, 1934.
- Further research is needed on whether this school's property was configured within the General Allotment Act (1887) land allotments as allowed for by the statute and on the involvement of the institution's board of directors in treaty negotiations with tribes and land transfers.

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## Appendix D. Comparison of Religious-Run Schools, by U.S. Region

Table 6 lists the religious-run Native American boarding schools across the country by order of affiliation and location, including dates opened and closed, if applicable.

Table 6. Religious-run Native American boarding schools in the United States

Religion	Religious Order	School Name	Type	Opening Date	Closing Date	Region
Catholicism	Jesuit Order	Mackinac Mission School	Non-federal	1823	1837	Great Lakes
Catholicism	Roman Catholic Church	New L'Arbre Croche Mission School	Non-federal	1829	1983	Great Lakes
Catholicism	Benedictine Sisters	Covenant of Our Lady of the Lake	Non-federal	1884	1959	Great Lakes
Protestantism	Congressionalist Missionaries	Moor's Charity School	Non-federal	1754	1820	Northeast
Christianity	N/A (federal government)	Carlisle Indian Industrial School	Federal	1879	1918	Northeast
Christianity	Quakers	Thomas Indian School	Non-federal	1855	1956	Northeast
Catholicism	Jesuit Order	Holy Family Mission and School	Non-federal	1886	1954	Northwest
Catholicism	Jesuit Order	St. Ignatius Mission and School	Non-federal	1854	1920	Northwest
Christianity	N/A (federal government)	Chemawa Indian School	Federal	1880	Renamed, operating	Northwest
Presbyterianism	Presbyterian Church	Omaha Mission School	Non-federal	1857	1910	Plains
Presbyterianism	Presbyterian Church	Pine Ridge Boarding School	Non-federal	1888	1953	Plains
Catholicism	Benedictine Sisters	St. Benedict Mission School	Non-federal	1891	1967	Plains
Catholicism	Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament	St. Michael Indian School	Non-federal	1902	Operating	Southwest

## Native American Boarding Schools in Michigan

Catholicism	Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament	St. Catherine's Indian School	Non- federal	1887	1998	Southwest
Christianity	N/A (federal government)	Chilocco Indian Agricultural School	Federal	1884	1980	Southwest

## Appendix E: Study Plan

### Introduction and Purpose of Study Plan

The United States acknowledges the unique political and legal relationship with the 574 federally recognized tribes today as set forth in the U.S. Constitution, treaties, federal court decisions, and Presidential executive orders. Many treaties between tribes and the United States federal government include education-related provisions.<sup>2</sup> About two-fifths (40%), or 147, of the treaties between the United States and tribal nations contain specific educational provisions.<sup>3</sup> The text of many Indian treaties shows that Indian education was (and continues to be) an established priority in U.S.–Indian relations. This manifested in assimilation tactics used to overturn this very responsibility. While in 1871 Congress formally ended treaty-making with Indian tribes,<sup>4</sup> the existing treaty obligations have consistently been affirmed, including through state legislative solutions to previous treaty disputes over education.<sup>5</sup>

Formal federal responsibility for Indian education began with the Indian Civilization Act of 1819. The subject solicitation, posted by the Michigan Department for Civil Rights (MDCR), recognizes that funds were appropriated to “civilize” and “assimilate” Indigenous children with the official pedagogy to, “kill the Indian to save the man”—a direct quote from General Richard H. Pratt, the superintendent of the Carlisle Indian School.<sup>6</sup> These schools were operated in part by the federal government and in conjunction with churches, private entities, and other governmental systems like the State of Michigan. The federal government adopted child removal policies and institutionalized boarding schools throughout the country in an effort to remove Native children from their communities and forcibly strip them of their tribal languages, culture, religion, and their very identity. Boarding schools existed in two categories—federal industrial boarding schools and mission-based boarding schools.

While tribal nations have long pushed for a full accounting and reconciliation of the Native American boarding school experience, our nation’s historical first Native American cabinet member, DOI Secretary, Deb Haaland (Laguna Pueblo), announced a federal Indian boarding school initiative in June 2021. The initiative was said to include

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<sup>2</sup> Cohen’s Handbook of Federal Indian Law, § 22.03 (1)(a) (Nell Jessup Newton ed., 2019).

<sup>3</sup> Reinhardt, M., and Tippeconnic, J. (2015). American Indian Treaty Provisions Research Project: Education. Unpublished research data collection.

<sup>4</sup> An act of Congress of March 3, 1871 (16 Stat. 566).

<sup>5</sup> MI Attorney General (2007). *Letter affirming MI Indian tuition waiver pursuant the Comstock Agreement (1934) as obligation of the state for Indian education*. Retrieved: [turtletalk.files.wordpress.com/2009/03/l-cox-decline-opinion-7907.pdf](http://turtletalk.files.wordpress.com/2009/03/l-cox-decline-opinion-7907.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Perdue, T., & Green, M. (2010). *North American Indians: A very short introduction*. Oxford University Press.

“a comprehensive review of the troubled legacy of tribal nation boarding school policies” and “the Interior Department will address the intergenerational impact of Indian boarding schools to shed light on the unspoken traumas of the past.”<sup>7</sup> The results in the first volume of this report show that federal Indian boarding schools operated from 1801 to 1969 (in Michigan this was extended to 1983) and that the system was expansive, consisting of 523 schools.<sup>8</sup> These schools were located at 431 sites across 38 states. The twin federal policy of Native American boarding schools was territorial (land) dispossession and assimilation of Native Americans through militarized and identity-alteration methodologies to assimilate Native people—primarily children. According to the DOI Assistant Secretary, Bryan Newland, and former president of the Bay Mills Indian Community, these schools were, “places of punishment, including corporal punishment such as solitary confinement, flogging, withholding food, whipping, slapping, and cuffing.”<sup>9</sup>

The boarding school system made older Indian children punish younger Indian children. Many Native children simply did not survive this federal policy as the DOI’s investigation has so far identified marked and unmarked burial sites at approximately 53 different institutions throughout the country within the boarding school system. These assimilation mills focused on manual labor and vocational skills that left Native American graduates with employment options often irrelevant to the industrial U.S. economy, further disrupting tribal economies. The 2022 investigative report, issued under Secretary Haaland’s initiative, contextualizes the worst-of-the-worst statistical outcomes borne out in the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights Broken Promises Report.<sup>10</sup> Thus, healing through reconciliation of this experience is crucial to ameliorate the highest rates of suicide, substance abuse, accidental drug overdose, the lowest educational attainment rates, and additional adverse outcomes of historical and intergenerational trauma<sup>11</sup> instigated by the Indian boarding schools.

Initially, a federal strategy to dispossess Native people from their land, failed enforcement of land allotments, local county seizure of properties, and the desire of

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<sup>7</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior. (2021, June 23). *Secretary Haaland announces Federal Indian boarding school initiative* [Press release]. [doi.gov/pressreleases/secretary-haaland-announces-federal-indian-boarding-school-initiative](https://doi.gov/pressreleases/secretary-haaland-announces-federal-indian-boarding-school-initiative)

<sup>8</sup> National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition (2023, August). *List of Indian Boarding Schools in the United States*. <https://boardingschoolhealing.org/list/>

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior (2002, May). *Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative investigative report* (p. 94). [bia.gov/sites/default/files/dup/inline-files/bsi\\_investigative\\_report\\_may\\_2022\\_508.pdf](https://bia.gov/sites/default/files/dup/inline-files/bsi_investigative_report_may_2022_508.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. (2018). *Broken promises: Continuing Federal funding shortfall for Native Americans*.

<sup>11</sup> Brave Heart, M. Y. H. (2004). The historical trauma response among Natives and its relationship to substance abuse: A Lakota illustration. *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs*, 35 (1), 7-13.

settlers to acquire land all played a role in the shift of the federal strategy to extinguish claims at the state level. And Michigan is no exception. Regardless of the federal implementation of Native American boarding schools, the school operations occurred within the Michigan territory following the signing of the Chippewa Ottawa Treaty of 1836 and statehood for Michigan in 1837. Nearly 100 years later in 1934, the state accepted another level of responsibility for educating Native American students through the Comstock Agreement, which involved a negotiated land transfer between the DOI and the state, exchanging land at the Mt. Pleasant Indian School for the promise of Indian education. Specifically, despite “no direct educational services [being] provided to Michigan tribes by the federal government under the Comstock Agreement,” Michigan Governor Comstock “accepted the state’s responsibility to educate Indians without cost to the federal government.”<sup>12</sup><sup>13</sup> Thus, the federal motivation to assimilate and limit liability may have also transferred, in practice, to the state.

### **Purpose**

Kauffman and Associates, Inc., (KAI) is pleased to have the privilege of conducting a preliminary study of the Native American boarding school history within the geographical area that is located within the boundaries of the state of Michigan. The study will examine the implementation and remaining impact of the Native American boarding school system in Michigan related to the five sites previously identified, as well as other entities that operated with similar intent and purpose, including conditions, experiences, and operations (e.g., state’s role, enrollment, financial mechanisms). Guided by an Indigenous Evaluation Framework (IEF) and a research orientation specific to the Michigan Anishinaabe population, KAI will perform the research and develop recommendations based on extensive tribal engagement, survivor and descendant accounts and testimonials, as well as experience and expertise.

This study will serve as a preliminary and exploratory assessment, as well an opportunity to archive the stories of Native American boarding school history within Michigan, experiences, and the impact on the people of the *Three Fires*<sup>14</sup> and other Native children relocated from across the United States and Canada to Michigan. This

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<sup>12</sup> Reinhardt, M. (1998). The Pre-Legislative History of the Michigan Indian Tuition Waiver. Unpublished master’s thesis, Central Michigan University, Mt. Pleasant, Michigan.

<sup>13</sup> Kiesewetter, M. (n.d.). Michigan Indian tuition waiver presentation.

<sup>14</sup> The three Indian tribes most commonly associated with Michigan are the Ojibwa (Chippewa), the Odawa (Ottawa) and the Potawatomi. Closely related in language and culture, these three tribes interacted with each other like members of a family and are commonly referred to as the *Three Fires*.

study will provide a general overview<sup>15</sup> of the boarding school system, including conditions, experiences, and operations (e.g., state's role, enrollment, financial mechanisms).

KAI will produce recommendations developed primarily with guidance from tribal nations and Indigenous communities throughout the state. KAI will engage a tribal boarding school advisory group to make sure all aspects of this work remain respectful and trauma-informed, is led by a strong tribal voice, and acculturated to the survivors and descendants of the Native American boarding school (MiNABS) experience in Michigan.

The study will result in a final report, summary infographic, storytelling video, digital archive, and a “Remembering and Healing” video series that illustrates the landscape of the boarding school history in Michigan. The final report and dissemination materials will also include recommendations based on the data collected.

### **Research Objectives and Study Questions**

There are five main objectives and specific research questions for each objective that will frame this MiNABS Study. The first two objectives, described in more detail throughout this study plan, will guide the landscape analysis. The primary study, which will commence after the landscape analysis, comprises three main objectives, intended to generate a basis for a more comprehensive understanding of the boarding school system's impact.

#### *Landscape Analysis Objectives*

The landscape analysis will include a literature/document review including archival research, key informant interviews, and community engagement (e.g., talking circle forums). The aim of this component of the study is to establish the foundational knowledge and context necessary for ensuring that the study's approach and instruments are both trauma-informed and culturally appropriate while also addressing the research questions effectively. A tribal consultation will occur after the landscape analysis in order to receive feedback, hear concerns, and understand future directions tribal leaders believe are important to the study.

#### **Objective 1: Describe context of the experience of Native American Boarding Schools**

1.1 What characterized the overall experiences of children within Native American Boarding Schools in Michigan?

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<sup>15</sup> This study is intended to serve as a preliminary and exploratory assessment, and it will lend to a more comprehensive future study.

- 1.2 How were the Michigan Native American boarding schools similar or different than in other regions?

**Objective 2: Establish baseline knowledge to inform instrument development and data collection**

- 2.1 What are the historical events and federal policies that lead to the implementation of Michigan Native American boarding schools?
- 2.2 What knowledge exists regarding the context of Michigan Native American boarding schools and what needs further investigation?
- 2.3 What criteria determined which children were forcefully removed from their families, and which were allowed to stay at home?

***Study Data Collection Objectives***

The primary portion of the study will include up to 400 boarding school survivor questionnaires (up to 100 may be done by phone or Zoom), and additional archival research. In addition to describing the context of Michigan Native American boarding schools, the study aims to facilitate the sharing of stories from survivors and descendants, thereby enhancing societal understanding of Michigan Native American boarding schools impact on the Three Fires and other Native children; therefore, KAI will also record up to 100 testimonials. The objectives guiding the study are as follows:

**Objective 3: Collect the stories of survivors and descendants to inform curriculum improvements, legislative action, and service delivery**

- 3.1. How do the stories of survivors and their descendants illustrate their experiences within the Michigan Native American boarding schools?
  - 3.1.a. How can survivor and descendant experiences be used to improve K-12 curricula?
  - 3.1.b. How can these narratives be used to improve curricula in post-secondary settings (e.g., law enforcement, behavioral health, medical, legal programs).
- 3.2. How can survivor and descendant narratives inform legislative initiatives create healing-centered practices within human services departments to better serve affected communities?
- 3.3. How can the insights gained from the stories of survivors and their descendants contribute to the broader goals of reconciliation and healing, including the role of formal apologies, acknowledgement, and appropriations of federal or state funds to support healing (e.g., counseling for Native communities residing within Michigan and survivors and descendants wherever they reside)?

#### **Objective 4: Understand the perceptions of the Michigan Native American community regarding the Native Boarding School experience**

- 4.1 What historical significance and lasting impact do Michigan Native American boarding schools have on Native Communities?
- 4.2 To what extent do generational differences influence the understanding of the impact of Michigan Native American boarding school experiences within Native communities residing within Michigan and survivors and descendants wherever they reside?

#### **Objective 5: Understand the contemporary impact of the Native American Boarding Schools on Michigan Native communities**

- 5.1. How does the legacy of Michigan Native American boarding schools continue to influence the health and behavioral outcomes, economic, and educational landscape of Native communities residing within Michigan and survivors and descendants wherever they reside?
- 5.2. How do the perspectives of individuals among Native communities within Michigan, specifically around Michigan Native American boarding school experiences, intersect with broader discussions about preservation of culture and language and the need for understanding intergenerational trauma and healing?
- 5.3. How do the intergenerational effects of Michigan Native American boarding schools continue to shape the lived experiences of affected communities?

#### **Study Design**

An Indigenous research approach will be used to address the listed research questions. Tribal engagement is essential to the study plan process and implementation and will, therefore, be prioritized in developing and finalizing study instruments and protocols. The study will be guided by the IEF to ground the process in the context of common values important to tribal communities. The context is necessary to understand Indigenous Knowledge creation, the connection to place, community, and family, celebrating Indigenous Knowledge and expertise, and respecting sovereignty. Grounding a study in these values ensures the design, methods, instruments, data collection, and analysis align with Indigenous community values, language, knowledge, and ways of measuring and assessment.

Studies conducted with Indigenous communities that align with Indigenous values ensures respect and empowerment of the participants to use, learn, and adapt the findings. The IEF is an adaptable framework that begins with core values translated into evaluation best practices, further adapted for purpose, and operationalized through evaluation methods. Some of these methods are used in these studies and are further explained in the following sections of this plan, see Table 1. KAI's goal is to engage all

stakeholders throughout the study process as outlined in the Communications and Outreach Plan. Team KAI will use decolonizing research best practices to make sure that culturally appropriate adaptations and methods are employed.

Table 1: Indigenous Evaluation Framework Core Values, Best Practices, Adaptations, and Methods

Core Values	Evaluation Best Practice	Evaluation Adaptation	Evaluation Method
<b>Indigenous Knowledge Creation</b>	Know that context is important—use cultural metaphors	Keen observation, multiple perspectives, communal and individual experience	Listening, elders and youth, building relationships
<b>People of a Place</b>	Offer respect—use place-based programs	Creating the story	Narrative, storytelling, interviews, focus groups
<b>Centrality of Community and Family</b>	Connect evaluation to community	Building the scaffolding	Strengths-based approached
<b>Recognizing Our Gifts</b>	Consider the whole when assessing	Planning, implementing, and celebrating	Workplan, logic model, timelines, tracking outputs
<b>Sovereignty</b>	Recognize ownership and build capacity	Engaging community and building capacity	Knowledge belongs to the community, opportunity for input

It is important to frame the worst outcomes experienced by Native people through the lens of historical and intergenerational trauma,<sup>16,17</sup> Indian boarding schools, and forced

<sup>16</sup> Brave Heart, M. Y. H. (2000). Wakiksuyapi: Carrying the historical trauma of the Lakota. *Tulane Studies in Social Welfare*, 21(22), 245–66.; Brave Heart, M. Y. H. (2004). The historical trauma response among Natives and its relationship to substance abuse: A Lakota illustration. *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs*, 35(1), 7–13.

<sup>17</sup> Newbreast, T. (2011). *Historical trauma and Native Americans: Training of trainer workshop*. Chico: CA. Connecting Circles of Care. [nativewellness.com/events.html](http://nativewellness.com/events.html)

assimilation experiences—all of which have adversely affected social, economic, and inequitable educational opportunities. Team KAI's approach for this study is informed by prior Indigenous research, including the primary research conducted by Dr. Aaron Payment on the impact of historical and intergenerational trauma and cultural dilution/conformity that further perpetuates the state of social anomie (i.e., normlessness, disconnection) as evidenced by the worst of the worst socio-economic outcomes (Figure 1).<sup>18</sup> The future is not written but healing and fulfillment of self-determined education are dependent upon a full accounting and reconciliation of the Michigan Native American boarding school experience and practicable applications this study may have on curriculum design, teacher professional development, and educating policy makers of the need for trauma-informed and healing-centered education reform.

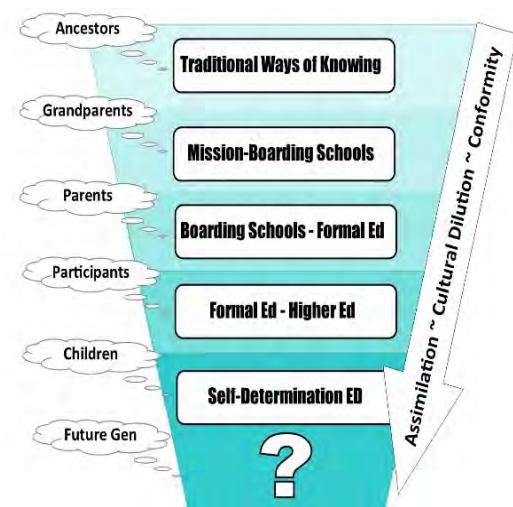


Figure 1. Cultural conformity conceptual model

<sup>18</sup> Payment, A. (2011c). *The Michigan Native American Experience in Educational Institutions Qualitative Proposal* (Unpublished Master's thesis). Northern Michigan University, Marquette, MI.

KAI's inquiry for the MiNABS Study begins with an Indigenous value that sustainable solutions exist not through hierarchical means but emanate organically from those who live out the legacy of Native American boarding schools and for whom our efforts are designed to benefit. The medicine wheel conceptual framework (Figure 2) was designed to depict the study as an iterative and cumulative process to proceed from information gathering, reflection of this information back to the tribal communities within Michigan, and presentation of options and choices to further articulate a culturally appropriate guided study. The use of socioecological modeling and application of easy-to-understand logic models like the IEF and the Anishinaabe Medicine Wheel framework, helps articulate how to achieve the desired outcomes and how the outcomes may be examined, developed, and proposed.

The framework begins in the center of the adapted medicine wheel to envision what we hope to accomplish, which is to better understand the boarding school experience in Michigan; conduct a deep archival examination of Michigan Native American boarding schools including public, private, and parochial records; understand and identify necessary repatriation opportunities; and development of outcome products like a final report and content for community dissemination. In the eastern direction (the color yellow), the overall study design will be developed and informed by a landscape analysis and creation of a tribal boarding school advisory group. KAI will look at historical records and accounts, related research, archival documents, and additional data. This information will be supplemented through engagement with key informant interviews guided by the advisory group and MDCR point of contact (POC) during regular project management meetings.

The southern direction (red), which represents our youth stage of development where new horizons and beginning enlightenment emerge, signifies the community engagement efforts (via talking circle forums) and formal tribal consultations. Over a series of engagement sessions with survivors, their descendants, and through tribal consultation, KAI will work collaboratively to gather and process information, engage in dialogue to help provide contextualized

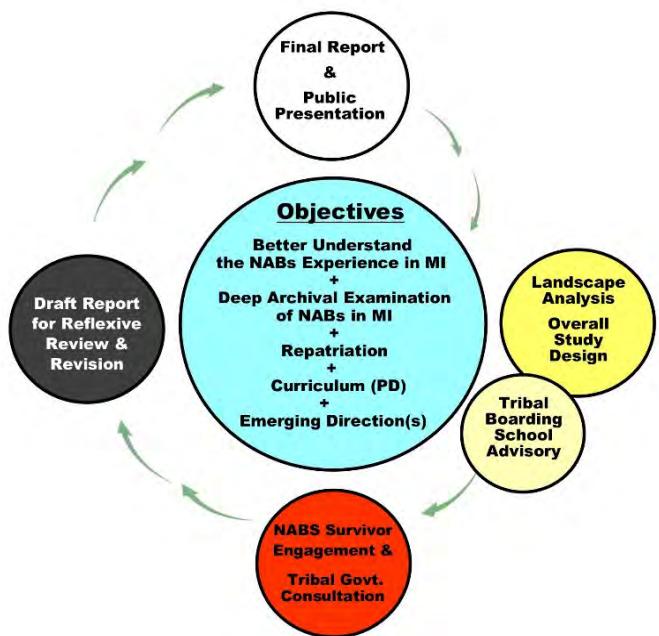


Figure 2. Medicine wheel conceptual framework helps articulate how to achieve the desired outcomes and how the outcomes may be examined, developed, and proposed.

information to shape the inquiry, build ownership, and flesh out emerging patterns deserving additional understanding and investigation.

The next stage is the western direction (black), signified by the adulthood of our lives, where our knowledge begins to solidify as we gather more information to strengthen or change perspectives. With the support and collaborative backing of tribal representatives through active community engagement, the advisory group will further advise KAI in identifying outcomes and proposed advocacy long past this study. Additional information and resources needed to build capacity for each milestone along the way to desired outcomes will be brainstormed, conceptualized, and then operationalized to identify products to support the development and sustainability of each objective.

Last but not least, the northern direction (white) reflects the wisdom of elders with pure white hair. With wisdom comes recognition that the sum of our efforts to achieve desired outcomes provides opportunities for continued improvement. Thus, comes reflexively evaluating and analyzing relative success with desired outcomes in consultation with the advisory group and tribal engagement. KAI will model and build capacity in visioning practice for tribal nations to collaborate with the state to build a better understanding of Michigan Native American boarding schools, establish a sustainable archival research process, respectfully repatriate or conduct ceremonies where Native children remain, and to establish a continuous improvement process for public understanding and school implementation of age and culturally appropriate curriculum.

### **Overview of Study Activities**

As described previously, a modified PAR study will involve KAI working directly with the 12 federally recognized tribes in Michigan, engaging with the United Tribes of Michigan as a conduit when appropriate, and by seeking counsel from a tribal boarding school advisory group.

The subsequent sections present a comprehensive overview of the planned activities that will guide the development of this study. Further elaboration and details about each activity will be expanded upon in other sections of the study plan, offering a more in-depth understanding of the strategic approach for each phase.

#### ***Tribal Boarding School Advisory Group***

KAI will collaborate with the MDCR POC to identify key experts to engage throughout the contract in an advisory capacity. Up to 12 individuals will make up the tribal boarding school advisory group and will include expertise in historical knowledge of the boarding school experience, archival/church record research, repatriation, behavioral health, and impact related to boarding schools, legal, and policy. Members will be encouraged to

attend each advisory meeting and will be provided with honorariums for their time and contributions.

Once established, the advisory group will meet monthly for up to 60 minutes each session. In the first 30 days, the advisory group will focus on providing guidance on the overall study plan, including methods, instruments, and approaches to ensure appropriateness of the study outwards into the community, while adhering to the overall goals of the contract. Throughout the duration of the study, monthly meetings will be used to provide study updates, including reflexive sharing of preliminary findings on an ongoing basis, allowing advisory group members to strengthen insights and perspectives. In the culmination of the study, the advisory group members will inform and guide the direction of the final deliverables. Ahead of each meeting, the KAI project coordinator will consult with the principal investigators to draft agenda items, assign a notetaker, and produce meeting summaries with an ongoing matrix of items to address and record when they have been completed or resolved.

### *Tribal Listening Sessions and Consultation*

KAI will support the MDCR in conducting two formal hybrid tribal consultations, one before data collection begins and the second to share preliminary results. KAI will use the same methods of meeting support, registration/virtual platform support, agenda/minutes/reporting transcription and audio recordings, and outreach and promotion. Tribal consultations may last up to 3 hours each. KAI is equipped to provide both virtual and in-person support during tribal consultations and will budget for two hybrid in person/virtual consultation sessions in order to meet tribal leaders face-to-face while accommodating their busy schedules by incorporating a virtual option. KAI is an experienced facilitator of federal, state, and tribal meetings and has witnessed a variety of practices engaged in by governments external to tribal nations. Many of the KAI researchers on this project come from tribal communities in Michigan and throughout the U.S. and are familiar with the diversity of tribal protocols.

KAI understands consultation as a journey that can be initiated by tribal leaders or agencies to ensure full communication and collaboration in sharing problem solving and identification of solutions while respecting government-to-government relationships. KAI has experience and clearly understand the many unique challenges facing tribal governments and organizations. KAI is proud of their accomplishments in Indian Country and among other underserved communities. KAI bring this experience, empathy, dedication, knowledge, skills, lessons learned, and best practices, as the team collaborates with MDCR to facilitate, develop and implement the MiNABS Study with key engagement from participating tribal nations in Michigan via formal tribal consultation, consistent with the very strong gubernatorial requirement for consultation in the state of Michigan.

### *Landscape Analysis*

#### **Literature/Document Review**

The KAI research team will initiate a targeted review of literature and key documents to understand existing information and related archival reports and overall exploration of Michigan Native American boarding schools. KAI will work with the MDCR POC and the advisory group to identify all relevant materials to support this analysis. KAI follows a systematic protocol for completing analyses to ensure the record of the process; justify the need for and set the scope of the review; and create a well-developed strategy to assess, elicit, synthesize, and summarize information. KAI will review materials recommended for examination by the MDCR POC and from the advisory group.

For the automated search strategy, KAI research team members will specify the search terms including the individual schools, Michigan Indian boarding schools, Michigan Native American boarding schools, Native American boarding schools and trauma, Native American boarding schools and survivors, etc. Additionally, KAI will define the digital libraries and search engines to be consulted. To acquire the most targeted results, KAI's research team uses a wide variety of open-source and subscription-only engines, including EBSCO Academic Search Complete, PsycINFO-ProQuest, ResearchGate, Google Scholar, and targeted Google searches of government, judicial and nonprofit websites. Because the Native American boarding schools had far reaching impacts, the KAI research team will include governmental, judicial, and legislative policy communication and materials.

Unique to Native American boarding school research, is access to and direct observation of archival records. Team KAI has contracted Dr. Veronica Pasfield, an expert in archival research, including church records. As part of the landscape analysis, Dr. Pasfield will travel to the national archives in Washington, DC, and Chicago, to establish a baseline understanding of the archival records available related to the Michigan Native American boarding schools. Additional data collection and analysis will be completed during the primary portion of the study.

#### **Key Informant Interviews**

KAI will work with the MDCR POC and the advisory group to develop instruments, including key questions and moderator guides, for the key informant interviews. The protocols will articulate questions that define who will participate, and where and how these interviews will take place (most likely virtually). Team KAI will develop the draft questions and protocols, will review with in-house and subcontractor subject matter experts (SMEs). Then the draft questions will be shared with the MDCR POC and advisory group.

## Community Engagement (Talking Circle Forums)

Four community engagement sessions (talking circle forums) will be held to foster a diverse dialogue on the Michigan Native American boarding schools. Three of the sessions will be in person and one will be virtual. “Talking circles are safe spaces where relationships are built, nurtured, reinforced, and sometimes healed ...”<sup>16</sup> Talking circles align with the medicine wheel’s southern direction (Figure 2); through this method of community engagement, KAI aims to create a space for dialogue and collaboration with survivors, their descendants, and tribal communities in a culturally appropriate way. The talking circle will employ the Anishinaabe Seven Sacred Teachings—wisdom, love, respect, courage, honesty, humility, and truth—to embrace the participant-as-expert approach.<sup>16</sup> Seven sacred teachings derive from the seven grandfather teachings and will be referred to throughout the document as the *seven grand* teachings. The physical space will be a quiet room that is free from additional noises. An effective and healing talking circle is built upon a circle of trust and community. Learning occurs when each person in that circle is open and engaged in listening to one another without judgment<sup>19</sup>. It is through listening to knowledge sharers that trust is formed. It is essential that this talking circle is started by an elder who says a prayer or sings a song to start in a good way. Also, confidentiality is also important so that people feel safe and able to trust each other in the talking circle process. During the four sessions, KAI will walk together with survivors and descendants as they share ideas about what the state of Michigan needs to know about the Michigan Native American boarding schools, how the results should be used to change the educational experience for Native Students in Michigan, and how we can collectively heal from the boarding school experience. Instead of serving as a data collection effort, talking circles will foster ownership of the investigation of MiNABS and elevate the voices of those with lived experience who want their stories to be heard.

### Primary Study

The overall study entails information gathering from multiple sources through various means using a grounded-theory participatory action research approach to allow for further exploration as preliminary and interim findings reveal additional areas of inquiry needed. Primary study data collection activities will involve the following:

1. Boarding school survivor and descendant questionnaire, via SurveyMonkey (online)
2. Up to 100 can be administered by KAI either by phone or Zoom
3. Survivor Truths (in person or by Zoom)

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<sup>19</sup> Brown, M. A., & Di Lallo, S. (2020). Talking Circles: A Culturally Responsive Evaluation Practice. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 41(3), 367-383.

## Boarding School Survivor Questionnaire

Acknowledging the sensitivity of the topic, and respecting individuals who wish to share their story privately, KAI will develop a questionnaire to gather anonymous perspectives from survivors and descendants from across the state. Questionnaire items will align with key objectives of this preliminary study. KAI developed the draft questionnaire, including basic background information and open-ended questions. The questionnaire is designed to accommodate a wide range of reading levels for questionnaire respondents whose preferred language may not be English.

The draft questionnaire includes a final open-ended question to, “tell us what else we should know” from the Michigan Native American boarding school experience so the respondent has the opportunity to share additional experiences or insights KAI did not anticipate. The questionnaire will be pilot tested, including deployment and implementation, to make sure valid and reliable data is collected and that the user experience is optimized. The draft survey will be provided to the MDCR POC and advisory group for one iteration of review and feedback, after which KAI will integrate feedback and finalize.

## Survivor Truths

The purpose of the survivor truth sharing is to honor the lived experience of the survivors (and their descendants) of Michigan Native American boarding schools. KAI honors the rich tradition of oral storytelling, and by providing a platform for passing down knowledge community resilience can be fostered. Survivors’ truths, recorded with consent, will be used to create video archives and amplify the voices of those impacted by Native American boarding schools.

## Data Collection Plan

To honor the knowledge of survivors and descendants who share their stories, the Anishinaabemowin word for “the one who tells (tells a story),” *Debaajimod*, instead of participant, will be used throughout. This section provides a description of the study sample plan, Debaajimodag, recruitment strategies, data collection methods and the analysis approach. A schedule describing the stages at which element of data collection will occur is also included. The sampling plan describes the process of selecting Debaajimodag for the talking circle forums and each of the data collection methods: key informant interviews, boarding school survivor questionnaire, and tribal community testimonials. An overview of the data collection instruments for activity is also provided. Debaajimod eligibility and recruitment is also explained in detail, including eligibility criteria and the sample selection approach. Finally, an overview of the entire study schedule and any anticipated challenges is provided, to facilitate a high-level understanding of the study process and any issues that may impact it.

## **Sampling Plan**

This first part of this section describes the intended participants for each activity and the desired size of the sample. Then, recruitment for each data collection activity is described.

### *Debaajimodag (the one who tell, tells a story)*

#### **Key Informant Interviews - Landscape Analysis**

As part of the landscape analysis, KAI will conduct up to seven key informant interviews (or focus groups) that may include scholars and survivors of Native American boarding schools. These individuals will be identified by connecting with the following list of organizations:

1. Tribes in Michigan
2. Michigan Anishinaabek Cultural Preservation and Repatriation Alliance
3. Confederation of Michigan Tribal Education Departments
4. Michigan Department of Education, Indigenous Education Initiative and *Gizhwaasod-Protector of the Young*
5. National Indian Child Welfare Association (board and staff)
6. National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition
7. U.S. DOI Secretary, and Assistant Secretary (or designee)<sup>20</sup>

#### **Community Engagement (Talking Circle Forums—Landscape Analysis)**

Debaajimodag will include individuals and families of those with lived experiences in Michigan Native American boarding schools. Preference in sharing during the circles will be granted to survivors and then descendants. The goal is to recruit approximately 100 people at each of the three events. Although fewer people are expected to attend the virtual event, the number of attendees will not be capped.

#### **Boarding School Survivor Questionnaire (online or by phone/Zoom)**

Debaajimodag will include individuals and families of those with lived experiences in Michigan Native American boarding schools. KAI anticipates 400 Debaajimodag, representing approximately 50 Debaajimodag for each of the 12 tribes in Michigan.

#### **Survivor Truths**

Debaajimodag will include individuals and families of those with lived experiences

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<sup>20</sup> Department of the Interior (2023). *Interior department launches effort to preserve federal Indian boarding school oral history: Grant to National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition will create permanent collection of stories from survivors of the federal Indian boarding school system*. Retrieved: doi.gov/pressreleases/interior-department-launches-effort-preserve-federal-indian-boarding-school-oral

regarding Michigan Native American boarding schools who are comfortable having their stories audio or video recorded to become a part of the archival record.

### *Debaajimodag Recruitment*

#### **Key Informant Interviews - Landscape Analysis**

Recruitment of key informants will depend on the personal networks of KAI's research team leadership, SMEs, and the MDCR POC. Initially, potential informants will receive an email introducing the study and inviting their participation. If no response is received within one week, a follow-up call will be made to inquire about their interest in being interviewed or if they can recommend a colleague for participation.

#### **Community Engagement (Talking Circle Forums)**

KAI will work with the MDCR POC to identify local tribal community centers or venues near the three primary Michigan Native American boarding schools to host the three in-person sessions across the state, including one near L'Anse/Baraga, on the Keweenaw Bay Indian Community reservation; and one on the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians reservation near Harbor Springs.

#### **Boarding School Survivor Questionnaire**

KAI will work with tribal nations to identify and promote the questionnaire in their respective tribal networks to achieve a robust sample. KAI will also work closely with the MDCR POC to develop a communication campaign with the short-term goal of increasing awareness of the questionnaire. Using strategic communications for the questionnaire release will aid with achieving the long-term outcome of increased participation for a representative sample across the state. KAI will:

1. Recommend outlets to disseminate and introduce the questionnaire with tribal websites as the principal sites for dissemination;
2. Develop culturally appropriate talking points about the questionnaire, the goals of this project, and the importance of gathering this information;
3. Maximize partnerships and trusted messengers to spread the word about the questionnaire;
4. Create targeted questionnaire marketing toolkits for partners to use to maintain consistent messaging and branding; and
5. Develop a social media plan for reaching priority respondents, including imagery, suggested posts, and marketing to promote questionnaire awareness and encourage responses.

KAI will work closely with the MDCR POC to monitor questionnaire responses to ensure representation from across the state is achieved. Snowball sampling will also be employed at the end of each questionnaire; respondents will be asked to share study information with those they believe may be interested in participating.

## **Survivor Truths**

Recruitment for survivor truth sharing will primarily use snowball sampling techniques. For instance, attendees of talking circles and respondents of the boarding school survivor questionnaire will have the option to connect with a KAI facilitator for an in-person truth sharing session or via Zoom to share their experiences at Michigan Native American boarding schools. Once a potential Debaajimodag expresses interest in sharing their truth, a member of the KAI research team will reach out via email, phone, or text based on their preferred method of contact to schedule a time for their testimonial. If email is the preferred communication method, they will receive a maximum of two emails inviting them to schedule a testimonial session. If there's no response, they will then receive a maximum of two texts or phone calls. This approach aims to make sure survivors do not feel pressured or coerced into sharing their testimonials.

Additionally, during in-person talking circle forums, there will be a designated table with study information and contact cards for Michigan Native American boarding school survivors interested in providing testimonials. These cards will also feature a QR code linking to an online registration form for those who prefer to consider their decision before committing. If completed onsite, the cards can be returned to the KAI team for follow-up. Upon receiving the information card, a KAI team member will put it into a sealed container to protect all personal information.

## **Informed Consent and Confidentiality**

Informed consent will be obtained from all debaajimodag before collecting any data. The consent statement will be written in easy-to-understand language to ensure everyone fully understands their rights before participating in interviews, talking circle forums, questionnaires, or survivor truth recordings. KAI facilitators will read the informed consent statement at the beginning of each data collection activity (and it will be displayed on screen during virtual data collection activities). Additionally, when scheduling data collection activities via email, the informed consent statement will be sent to debaajimodag so they can have a written copy. The informed consent statement will explain to debaajimodag that they have the right to refuse or end their participation at any time, and they may also refuse to answer any question or section. All debaajimodag will receive information about confidentiality procedures and the contact information of the project director.

## **Data Collection Instruments and Methodology**

### *Landscape Analysis*

#### **Literature/Document Review**

KAI will work with the MDCR POC and the advisory group to identify all relevant materials to support this analysis. KAI follows a systematic protocol for completing analyses to ensure the record of the process; justify the need for and set the scope of the review; and create a well-developed strategy to assess, elicit, synthesize, and summarize information. KAI will review materials recommended for examination by the MDCR POC and from the advisory group.

**Selection Criteria.** KAI will collaborate closely with the MDCR POC, the tribal advisory group, and SMEs to define clear selection criteria for sources. These criteria will ensure the inclusion of relevant, credible, and culturally appropriate materials. This collaborative approach, informed by diverse perspectives, will maintain the integrity and comprehensiveness of the landscape analysis and is in alignment with Indigenous research methodology and PAR.

**Study Quality Assessment (QA).** KAI will co-create a QA checklist with SMEs, describing how quality of sources will be evaluated. Additionally, the team will create a plan on how to resolve discrepancies between data extractors. All team members will be trained in how to use the QA checklists. A decision-rule log will be created and maintained to make sure all team members are using the same criteria during data collection and review.

**Data Gathering.** A data extraction form will be designed by the KAI team. KAI team members will use the form with three to five of the same sources, to check for interrater reliability. The goal of this process is to make sure each researcher uses the form in the same way, as well as making sure the form helps the team successfully extract the necessary data.

**Synthesis.** During synthesis, KAI will specify the analysis format, considering narrative, tabulation, and or meta-analysis, while evaluating threats to validity, including construct, internal, and external factors. Leveraging NVivo's cloud collaboration features, the team can seamlessly organize and analyze data from diverse sources in real time. NVivo facilitates efficient data exploration, pattern identification, and report generation, enhancing synthesis efficiency. This integrated approach ensures comprehensive synthesis of research findings while promoting effective communication of results.

**Study Limitations.** KAI is committed to identifying and disclosing any remaining validity concerns or limitations that impact the document reviews credibility, including potential conflicts of interest.

**Reporting.** The results from the key document and literature review, will be used to understand what is already known about Michigan Native American boarding schools

and survivors' experiences as well as to identify gaps in knowledge and areas for further investigation. KAI's reported results will focus on providing groundwork for facilitating engagement activities that foster conversation and garner input from survivors and descendants of Michigan Native American boarding schools. KAI will produce a literature/document review summary that will be shared with the MDCR POC and the advisory group. Additionally, summaries of this information will be prepared for review during a tribal consultation session held with elected tribal leaders in Michigan potentially through coordination and attendance at a United Tribes of Michigan meeting(s).

### Key Informant Interviews

KAI will conduct a total of seven virtual key informant interviews (or focus groups) with scholars and survivors of Native American boarding schools to inform the literature review and data collection. KAI's facilitator will engage with interviewees to understand their perspectives on Native American boarding schools. Each interview will last up to 60 -90 minutes. A KAI notetaker will also be present and audio recordings will be used to ensure accurate data collection and allow for maximum engagement during the interview.

Additionally, KAI will invite each key informant to also share their truth as part of the archival aspects of the study. Consent forms will be administered, and participants will have the right to refuse participation or recording. All information collected will be treated as confidential, de-identified, and aggregated, unless the participant provides explicit consent for their audio or video to be used publicly as part of the archives. Interviews will be transcribed, and common themes reviewed. The results will be analyzed using a modified PESTEL framework, and findings will be summarized.

Below are example questions that will guide the key informant interviews:

1. What knowledge, research, oral histories, or community stories are you aware of that might help us understand the experience of Native American boarding schools in Michigan?
2. Do you have any personal accounts of Native American boarding schools in Michigan you are willing to share? Please elaborate.
3. What would you be willing to share about your experience in a Michigan Native American boarding schools or the legacy impacts on you or your family?
4. What do you know about the role of the State of Michigan in the Indian boarding school system?
5. How do you believe the tribes should repatriate the remains of children left behind at Michigan Native American boarding schools?
6. How do you think knowledge about the Native American Boarding schools should be incorporated into K-12 and post-secondary education?

7. In what ways, do you hope to see the results of this study lead to healing in tribal communities?
8. Would you be interested in a follow-up interview or video testimonial to share more of your experience?

### Community Engagement (Talking Circle Forums)

Similar to the DOI *Road to Healing Tour* survivor forums,<sup>21</sup> tribal community engagement talking circle forums will involve participation of a broader audience allowing for sharing of multiple perspectives on Michigan Native American boarding schools. KAI will host a total of four engagement sessions—three in-person sessions on tribal lands near the Baraga Chippewa Boarding School and Day School, the Holy Child Boarding School, and one virtual session to accommodate those who choose not to travel or share their experiences in a public forum. Each session will last up to 120 minutes.

KAI developed the protocol for the community engagement sessions with input from the advisory group and SMEs. After receiving one round of feedback, KAI finalized the prompts, and community engagement protocols. Prompts will only be used when necessary (i.e., if the discussion halts) and may include the following:

1. What do you think the government of the state of Michigan needs to know about boarding schools?
2. How should the results of this study be used?
3. How should the results of this study be used to shape educational curriculum?
4. How can we collectively heal from the boarding school experiences?

For each of the community engagement sessions, KAI will provide a facilitator and a notetaker. At a check-in station, KAI will administer consent forms to all debaajimodag who take part in a session. The consent forms will explain the purpose of the effort, which is to inform the research team of the overall background of Michigan Native American boarding schools' survivors and descendants, as well as to help the team craft appropriate questions for the questionnaire and prompts for the testimonials. Additionally, the research team hopes that by providing a forum for survivors and descendants to share their experiences, it will be a catalyst for much needed community conversations that can help move toward healing. The consent forms will also delineate voluntary participation and confidentiality standards; identify risks and benefits, in

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<sup>21</sup> Native News Online (2023). *Final Road to Healing Listening Session Held in Bozeman, Montana*. Retrieved: <https://nativenewsonline.net/currents/final-road-to-healing-listening-session-held-in-bozeman-montana>

addition to compensation (see Honoraria/Compensation section for more information); and describe both audio and video recording of the session. Debaajimodag have the right to refuse to answer any questions and to refuse to participate at any point without consequence. Information collected is confidential, de-identified, and aggregated. KAI will digitally record each session, transcribe notes, and review common themes.

To recognize and honor Native American boarding school survivors and descendants and to memorialize those who did not make it home, KAI will offer *semaa* (tobacco) to an elder onsite to do an opening blessing. KAI will also collaborate with each community to identify and share land acknowledgement respectful of the local community. Then, the first 5–10 minutes of each session will be used to explain the project and make introductions for KAI and participants, 120 minutes will be used to ask questions, and 5–10 minutes will be used for general reflections and closing thoughts. At the end of each session, all attendees will have an opportunity to be entered into a prize drawing for a chance to win one \$200 gift card (one per session).

### *Primary Study Instruments*

#### **Boarding School Survivor Questionnaire**

Based on the findings of the landscape analysis and input from the advisory group, KAI will develop the draft questionnaire. The formats will be designed to gather perceptual, factual, and relevant demographic data. Field validation will be included in the design to ensure that only valid and reliable data can be entered into the online survey tool.

Questionnaire items will be organized and grouped into sections that flow smoothly, are relevant, and make sense to the respondents, yielding highly reliable data for analysis. The draft questionnaire will be provided to the MDCR POC for review. The advisory group will further serve to pilot test the questionnaire and provide feedback to modify questions for clarity and cultural appropriateness.

KAI will use SurveyMonkey, housed on secure servers, to design, deploy, and analyze questionnaire data. SurveyMonkey is a robust, sophisticated platform that allows for the creation of customized variables. This software allows for more than 30 values per variable as opposed to a standard 4– or 5– point Likert scale (e.g., strongly agree to strongly disagree). The questionnaire can easily be completed on any device—a feature that increases response rate. Upon completion of the questionnaire, participants will have the opportunity to: 1) be entered into a prize drawing for the chance to win one of three prizes (see Honoraria/Compensation section for more information); and 2) opt into participating in an audio/video recorded testimonial as part of the storytelling and archival component of the study. Up to 400 questionnaires will be completed, that is assuming approximately 50 questionnaires for each of the 12 tribes.

Additionally, 50 hard copy questionnaires and a flyer with a QR code will be made available to a POC person at each tribe for those who wish to fill out a hard copy of the

questionnaire and mail it to KAI. KAI will send these materials along with a self-addressed stamped envelope to each tribal POC. While these methods may seem unconventional, the questionnaire is intended to be supplemental to the community engagement sessions and to allow for participation by survivors or descendants who wish to remain anonymous or are otherwise timid in speaking publicly regarding their experience and lasting impacts of Michigan Native American boarding schools. KAI understands the possibility of duplication in responses but believes the value of additional participation outweighs the chance of duplicative efforts. A quality check will be used to ensure that questionnaire responses submitted by those who do not appear to be survivors or descendants will be segmented, evaluated, and shared with the MDCR POC and advisory group for disposition. Anonymity will be observed in any review of responses.

#### *Opt-in Conversation for the Questionnaire*

For potential participants who do not feel comfortable or are unable to complete the boarding school survivor questionnaire online or on paper, KAI will administer up to 100 of the questionnaires by phone or Zoom. This ensures equity and access for individuals who may face barriers due to technological challenges, low reading levels, visual impairment, or other factors. By providing alternative methods of participation, KAI strives to create an inclusive environment where everyone has an equal opportunity to contribute their perspectives and insights.

KAI will outline the key steps and protocol for conducting the telephone/Zoom questionnaire for review by the MDCR POC and advisory group. The KAI team member will ask each question, provide answer options, and will verbatim, enter the participant's information into SurveyMonkey to be included in the pool of all questionnaire data collected. KAI will record each session to review and confirm accuracy of entered data.

#### *User/Pilot Testing*

KAI will conduct initial online and hard copy user testing to make sure that the flow of the questionnaire and response process are user-friendly and easy to understand. Our team will use feedback from the user testing to revise the questionnaire before pilot testing. To make sure that valid and reliable data are collected, and that the user experience is optimized for both deployment and implementation, KAI will pilot-test the questionnaire with the tribal advisory group and the MDCR POC. This will help ensure that the questionnaire is culturally appropriate, and while the content is sensitive, that the approach to data collection is trauma informed.

#### *Data Monitoring*

On a weekly basis, KAI will use the quantitative progress reports generated from SurveyMonkey to ascertain the status of the data collected for the questionnaire. This

data monitoring process supports reaching sampling targets across the state. Additionally, the process will allow KAI to quickly identify instances where data collection deviates from the sampling plan (e.g., low response rates from specific tribes or regions of the state) and implement targeted actions, as needed. Across all data collection activities, KAI will also implement a screening process to make sure participants are 18 years or older. KAI will work with the MDCR POC to develop additional screening criteria to ensure appropriate participants in alignment with the study are achieved. All verbal and digital data will be kept confidential through secure password-protected computers and only accessible by KAI researchers. Videos interviews will be kept in a secure location on a password-protected server. Each survivor will be asked if they would like their video to be stored in a digital archive once the project has been completed.

### Survivor Truth

KAI worked with the MDCR POC and the subject matter to develop draft instruments, including key prompts and facilitator guide, for the Survivor Truths sharing opportunities. After receiving one round of feedback, KAI will finalize the prompts and facilitator guide. Table 2 summarizes each collection activity by type of intended audience and sample size.

Table 2: Data collection overview

Data Collection Activity	Intended Audience	Sample Size
<b>Landscape Analysis</b>		
<b>Literature Review/Archival Research</b>	Scholars and survivors of Native American boarding schools	N/A
<b>Key Informant interviews</b>	Scholars and survivors of Native American boarding schools	n=7
<b>Community Engagement (Talking Circle)</b>	Individuals and families of those with lived experiences in Michigan Native American boarding schools	n=300
<b>Primary Study</b>		
<b>Web-based Boarding School Survivor and Descendant Questionnaires</b>	Individuals and families of those with lived experiences in Michigan Native American boarding schools	n=400 *up to 100 conducted virtually
<b>Survivor Truths</b>	Individuals and families of those with lived experiences in Michigan Native American boarding schools	n=65 *up to 20 conducted virtually

### Trauma-Focused Aftercare

*“My ancestors denied their heritage in order to fit as peacefully as possible into communities where various forms of discrimination were practiced against Native American people.”<sup>22</sup>*

This troubling narrative may be a common experience with many of the boarding school survivors that KAI will be interviewing. Research finds that approximately one in four Indigenous Americans are experiencing daily thoughts of historical loss leading to psychological difficulty.<sup>23</sup> As such, KAI fully recognizes that difficulty that it may take for someone to discuss their experiences in the boarding schools. At each stage of the process, all survivors and descendants will have trauma-focused and historical trauma-trained support people there to support them should they need assistance. KAI researchers will also conduct follow-up calls at one week and one month after the survivor has shared their truth. The team will be prepared with resources and assist the survivor to make the initial connection with the resource (if requested). Additionally, because of the difficulty that these interviews and research entails, KAI researchers may experience secondary trauma. Trauma is contagious and many feel witness guilt by hearing another’s trauma. This happens when the interviewer or researcher witnesses or hears someone else’s distress but is not directly involved. One may have feelings of confusion and ambivalence as they are not able to identify specific ways to address the trauma for the individual.<sup>24</sup> This is called vicarious trauma or secondary trauma where one may re-experience the story in their mind through recall. The KAI research team will also have trauma-focused and historical trauma-trained support people available to them. The KAI team will take time to process and debrief as a team weekly. While trauma is often physical and verbal, it can become a part of one’s mental and emotional being; KAI is sensitive to this and proactive through each phase of this important project.

### **Communications and Outreach Plan**

A key element to ensure maximum participation in this study is to effectively communicate with tribal communities, survivors, and descendants impacted by the Native American boarding school experience. KAI’s plan is to coordinate communications with MDCR in collaboration with tribal governmental communications

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<sup>22</sup> Brunner, S. M. (2024). *Michigan Indian boarding school survivors speak out: A narrative history*. Modern History Press.

<sup>23</sup> Whitbeck LB, Adams GW, Hoyt DR, & Chen X, (2004). Conceptualizing and measuring historical trauma among American Indian people. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 33(3- 4):119-30.

<sup>24</sup> Rohman, K., Ingram, B., & Watkins, B. (2018). Trauma-informed interviewing in workplace investigations. *The AWI Journal*, 9(2), 7-12.

networks, including newspapers, websites, and social media networks to share the importance of this study and to engage participation. KAI is adept at communicating the purpose and value of tribal membership engagement. A communications outreach plan will be developed collaboratively between KAI and the MDCR to then share with each tribe for final approval and may include the following methods for communicating the project launch and throughout the study:

- Graphic facilitation ads on tribal websites;
- Through the tribe's constant contact e-news system to members;
- By way of drafted communications to share through internal communication networks;
- Prepared announcements and flyers for distribution at community centers; and
- Graphic ads for social media distribution where tribal members frequent and can share.

Additionally, key opportunities for communication throughout the project include:

20. At the inception and launch of the project;
21. Tribal community meetings before data collection events;
22. After the preliminary draft report is prepared and presented to tribes; and
23. When the final report is presented to the council and approved for distribution

KAI will design an effective communication strategy for increasing awareness and maximizing participation that includes the components described in Table 3.

### **Tribal Consultation**

KAI will support the MDCR in conducting two formal hybrid tribal consultations using the same methods of meeting support, registration/virtual platform support, agenda/minutes/reporting transcription and audio recordings, and outreach and promotion. KAI understands consultation as a journey that can be initiated by tribal leaders or agencies to ensure full communication and collaboration in sharing problem solving and identification of solutions while respecting government-to-government relationships.

A formal written component and notification to the consultation sessions is a strategic way to extend the reach of the MDCR's consultative capacities. Disseminating a Dear Tribal Leader Letter (DTLL)—a letter that conveys the consultation topics, offers appropriate background information, and requests written input—from the MDCR to tribal government officials from every tribe within Michigan provides an alternate way for every tribal government to participate in consultation efforts, even when attendance at hybrid or virtual consultation is not possible. Additionally, given the very sensitive nature of the topic, KAI will craft culturally appropriate and responsible outreach.

Table 3: Communications and outreach plan

Plan Component	Description
<b>Goal and Objectives</b>	The communication plan will identify goals and objectives. Working closely with the MDCR POC, KAI will determine the goal of the communications/outreach strategy.
<b>Tribal Audience Analysis</b>	KAI will categorize each tribal audience demographic to determine the best communication channels for promoting participation. Depending on the campaign, recommendations will be made for microtargeting and audience groupings to maximize efforts in communicating the importance of the study and impacted tribal member participation.
<b>Branding</b>	KAI's graphics team is well-versed in creating campaigns that stand out and resonate with the intended audience.
<b>Messaging</b>	The plan will seek to personalize and adapt existing messaging through cultural repackaging, slightly adapting the language to fit a tribal audience and making other adjustments as needed. KAI has extensive experience with developing interesting and culturally sensitive messaging for campaigns. Various messaging will target audiences—like tribal members population segments (e.g., council, elders, youth).
<b>Materials</b>	KAI will identify the types of print and electronic materials to be developed using information gathered from previous focus groups KAI has held with tribal target populations, as well as from any meetings conducted. Materials may include brochures/flyers, physical mailings, handouts, posters, social media infographics, videos, and other supplemental items to complete the campaign rollout, depending on the audience and the campaign goals.
<b>Strategies and Tactics</b>	The plan will identify a combination of strategies and tactics that will reach the target audience and be tied to each objective. Strategies will be based on background research, campaign goal, and audience analysis. KAI develops innovative strategies that are flexible and can be adjusted in response to campaign performance.
<b>Media Placement</b>	KAI will propose ideal placement of media advertising, based on suggestions for priority audiences identified in the strategic plan development (e.g., audience and demographics, geography, interests, and desired actions).
<b>Dissemination</b>	A dissemination plan will describe the process and timeline for dissemination of messages.

KAI is prepared to work closely with MDCR to develop content for the DTLL and for written formal tribal consultation that includes the following, at a minimum:

1. A clear description of consultation topics at hand;
2. An optional call to clarify the purpose;
3. A schedule indicating when input is required and all methods by which it may be provided (e.g., email, fax, letter);
4. Any supporting information necessary for tribes to understand the consultation intent, comparable to introductory and supporting information provided at the consultation event; and

5. A description of the MDCR's planned follow-up activities in response to tribal feedback, most notably the development of the post-consultation report.

KAI knows from our experience with federal- and state-tribal consultation activities that a frequent request from tribes is to receive consultation background materials as soon as possible. Appropriate notice on tribal consultation topics and the sharing of relevant background information allows tribal governing bodies, staff, and SMEs adequate time to gather information, consult internally, and develop thorough and thoughtful responses to the consultation topics. Because tribal governing bodies have full agendas and busy schedules, giving appropriate notice on consultation topics is essential in respecting tribal government processes and allowing tribes to contribute meaningful input. KAI recommends that the finalized agenda be distributed on schedule and no later than 30 days before each event. The DTLL and written formal consultation activities will be coordinated with material preparation and dissemination under this task, given that the DTLL is part of the preparation for the formal consultation.

Tribal consultation sessions will be held regionally throughout Michigan to accommodate up to three or more tribes per site in centralized locations. KAI will disseminate an approved electronic post-consultation report to all federally recognized tribes. KAI will create a PDF file of the report for electronic distribution and will email the PDF file, with the approved and signed cover letter, to all federally recognized tribal entities. KAI will also provide the PDF for posting on the MDCR website as well as for posting on tribal websites if requested. This dissemination will occur in a timely fashion after the reports are approved and finalized by the MDCR POC. The schedule for dissemination will be created by KAI, with review and approval by the POC, depending on the dates of consultations. The consultation report will be a standalone report given the formality of tribal consultations; however, the report will be incorporated into the accumulative results of all data collection methods for inclusion in the final report.

#### **Participant Honoria/Compensation**

KAI is budgeting the incentives and stipends listed in Table 4, to recognize the time and expense of participation in interviews, tribal consultations, and questionnaires.

Table 4: Participant compensation amounts

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Honorarium/ Compensation Amount</b>
<b>Tribal Boarding School Advisory Group</b>	\$100 stipend per meeting
<b>Key Informant Interviewees (Landscape analysis)</b>	\$100 stipend
<b>Community Engagement Debaajimodag (talking circle forums)</b>	Debaajimodag will be entered into a drawing to win a \$200 gift card

<b>Questionnaire Respondents (online or by call/Zoom)</b>	Entered into a drawing to win one of three gift cards (\$500, \$250, and \$150)
<b>Video Recorded Survivor Truths</b>	\$100 stipend

### **Data Analysis Approach**

Indigenist research begins from a principle of self-determination and is underpinned by “ceremony, respect, authentic engagement, critical reflexivity, reciprocity, relationality and responsibility.”<sup>25</sup> Therefore, the initial approach for analysis will use the Anishinaabe medicine wheel conceptual framework (Figure 2) to elevate the voices of Native American boarding school survivors and descendants. The researchers will conduct focus-coding on data collected through the landscape analysis, the advisory group, survivor and descendant engagement, and tribal consultation. The goal is to understand which emergent themes provide the strongest framework for categorizing data.<sup>26</sup> After each stage of analysis, the KAI research team will draft and discuss preliminary results with the tribal boarding school advisory group and the MDCR POC until consensus is reached on categories and themes. The different forms of data collected will offer a different perspective, one based on Indigenous review, understanding and trustworthiness—not a source of triangulation.<sup>27</sup>

KAI’s research team will conduct systemic comparative analysis throughout the entirety of data collection. Quantitative and qualitative data analysis will include descriptive statistics, inductive and deductive coding, and reflexive review with the advisory group and MDCR POC.

Quantitative data collected through SurveyMonkey will be downloaded into SPSS. KAI will conduct basic descriptive analysis of the initial questionnaire data, including measures of central tendency (mean, median, and mode); measures of dispersion (range, variance, minimum and maximum); and summary statistics (frequency and percentage). KAI will use cross-tabulation analysis to examine the relationship between specific questions, as needed. Given the sensitivity of the data collected and analyzed, questions will include some demographic questions for later cross tabs sorting and a short list of prompts with categorical responses to minimize the labor, coding, and categorization after the fact.

<sup>25</sup> Quinn A. L. (2022). Bridging indigenous and western methods in social science research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 21, (p.2). 16094069221080301.

<sup>26</sup> Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide through Qualitative Analysis*. London: Sage Publications.

<sup>27</sup> Patton, M. (2015) *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*. 4th Edition, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks.

Qualitative data obtained through key informant, engagement sessions (talking circle forums), and follow-up survivor truth sharing will be transcribed through Rev.com—an online transcription service—and then coded and analyzed using NVivo, a software designed for qualitative narrative analysis. After transcription, a KAI senior researcher will use NVivo to identify themes that emerge across the qualitative data collected. Coding trees and matrices, coupled with frequency analysis, will be used to identify common themes, mitigating factors, and latent traits evidenced. KAI will identify major themes, gaps, and recommendations for future planning and provide a summary of the interviews and engagement sessions for review. Use of NVivo will allow for word clouds to be produced for reflexive view, and by category and theme of archival data collected.

### **Project and Data Collection Schedule**

Based on KAI's understanding of the requirements and their experience with similar projects, KAI proposes the tentative project timeline shown in Table 5.

Legend: Task/Activity/Meeting = • Deliverable = △  
Table 5: Proposed project schedule

Task/Activity	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J
<b>Overall Study Plan</b>													
<b>Tribal Boarding School Advisory Group</b>													
<b>Landscape Analysis</b>													
Literature/Document Review	•	•	•	•	•	•							
Key Informant Interviews						•							
Tribal Community Engagement (Talking Circles)						•	•						
<b>Research Plan &amp; Study Instrument</b>					•	•	•	•					
Tribal Consultation						•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
<b>Data Collection</b>													
Boarding School Survivor Questionnaire						•	•	•					
Survivor Truths for Archival Library						•	•	•					
Comprehensive Archival Reviews	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Data Monitoring	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
<b>Data Analysis</b>													
Data Review & Cleaning					•	•	•	•					
<b>Data Analysis (archives/transcripts/questionnaires)</b>					•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Preliminary Findings								•	•	•	•	•	△

## Final Report &amp; Dissemination

## Final Report

Draft Report (due before Jan. 12, 2025)

Δ

Final Report (due before Jan. 20, 2025)

Δ

## Infographic

• • Δ

## Storytelling Video

• • Δ

## Digital Archival

• • • • • • • Δ

NABS Video Documenting and Digi-series

• • Δ

## Social Media

• • Δ

## Project Management

Kickoff Meeting

•

Weekly Touchpoint Meetings

• • • • • • • • • • • • • •

**Anticipated Challenges**

One of the primary challenges of the MiNABS Study lies in the inherent sensitivity of the topic. It's important to acknowledge that potential participants may feel hesitant to revisit painful experiences from their past. To overcome this obstacle, KAI has assembled a team primarily composed of Native American researchers, many of whom possess significant expertise in intergenerational trauma. KAI is committed to collaborating closely with the tribal advisory board and conducting tribal consultations to ensure the study proceeds in a culturally respectful and appropriate manner. Additionally, KAI remains flexible and ready to adapt strategies promptly should advisors recommend alternative approaches.

Along with the sensitivity of the topic, another anticipated challenge stems from the extensive amount of data collection activities and methods of data collection which will occur in a limited amount of time. To effectively manage this, KAI will have weekly internal meetings to monitor the progress of data collection and promptly address any challenges encountered. KAI will remain agile, be ready to problem-solve and augment the team if necessary. KAI will also communicate with the client during the biweekly check-ins and by email for any urgent adjustments.

## Appendix F: MiNABS Survivor Questionnaire

Appendix F includes the Michigan Native American Boarding School (MiNABS) questionnaire, developed to offer survivors and descendants an accessible option for sharing their experiences as part of the Michigan Native American Boarding School Study.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this up-to-30-minute questionnaire about MiNABS.

1. Please select your status as a Survivor a Descendant/family member of a Survivor of the Michigan Native American boarding schools.

- Survivor
- Descendant or other impacted individual
- None of the above

### Informed Consent

By completing this questionnaire, you give consent to use your information without revealing individual responses, which will remain anonymous and confidential. An added level of data sovereignty protection is provided through the use of signed agreements with each participating Tribe, which pledge not to disaggregate Tribal affiliation in any public document.

By proceeding, you also give consent to use responses of this survey for future reports, studies, and educational purposes.

### Benefit-Risk Statement

**Potential Risks:** Sharing your experience is sacred. It is recognized that there is potential for some risk or discomfort that you might face by participating in this questionnaire. Emotional distress, such as feeling sad or mad after talking about your experience, can be expected.

If you have any discomfort from this experience, supportive resources are available. You can access them by following the [MiNABS Trauma Resources Tool Kits](#) link.

These resources were compiled specifically for each Tribe and include information to seek support from Tribal, state, inter-Tribal, or national level resources.

**Potential Benefits:** Discussions about U.S. history and the experiences of AI/AN children who attended Indian mission and Indian boarding schools are important not only for gaining a greater understanding of history but also because of the impact they have on AI/AN people today.

The information you provide will help us better understand the lasting impact of Native American boarding schools on Survivors and Descendants, which may, in turn, positively and systemically impact public policy, legislation, K–12 curriculum, health, and behavioral health services in the State of Michigan.

As a participant, you have an opportunity to contribute knowledge that can improve the lives of Native American people across the nation. By proceeding, you acknowledge the potential risks and benefits of participating in this study.

### Reminders

- The questionnaire is confidential, anonymous, and completely voluntary.
- You can skip any questions you don't want to answer.
- If you choose not to answer a question, select "NEXT" and move to the next question.
- For open-ended questions, please write as much or as little as you would like.

In honor and respect for your time, we will provide you with an appreciation gift. After you finish the questionnaire, a link to a separate follow-up form to collect your contact details will appear, keeping your contact information separate from your questionnaire responses to protect your privacy.

You can find supportive resources by following the provided link: [MiNABS Trauma Resources Tool Kits](#).

If you feel taking this questionnaire has caused you harm or if you are experiencing emotional distress and need support, please call or text 988 or contact our study team.

### Section 1: Boarding School Experience Information

This section contains questions regarding your experience at a Native American boarding school in Michigan. All of your answers will be combined with those from other *Dibaajimodag* to understand an overall picture of the Native American boarding school experience in Michigan. We will not share your individual story.

2. What year you were first sent to a Native American boarding school (the boarding school or school)?
3. How old were you when you were enrolled in boarding school? *[An approximate age is fine.]*
4. Was your enrollment (attendance) in boarding school a voluntary choice by you or your parent or guardian?

Yes

No

Unsure

5. Do you remember who took you to the school?

Yes

No

Unsure

6. If you remember, which of the following people took you to the Native American boarding school?

Family

Government agent

Social worker

Court official

Police

Other (please specify)

7. How were you first brought to the school (car, bus, train, other)?

8. Is there anything else you'd like to share about how or why you attended the school (whether voluntary or forced)?

9. How many years in total did you attend the Native American boarding school(s)?

10. What was the name of the Native American boarding school you first attended?

11. What was the location of the Native American boarding school you first attended?

12. Did you ever run away or try to run away from the boarding school?

Yes

No

13. Is there anything you would like to share about why you ran away?

14. Were you ever kicked out or forced to leave a boarding school?

Yes

No

Unsure

15. After leaving your first boarding school, were you ever enrolled in another Native American boarding school?

Yes

No

Unsure

16. Is there anything you'd like to share about your re-enrollment/return to a Native American boarding school?

17. Please tell us the name(s) of the school(s) you went to and anything else you'd like to share.

18. Please tell us about the conditions at your boarding school that most impacted you, either positively or negatively.

19. How would you rate the quality of the teachers and staff at the boarding school(s) you attended?



20. Please share anything you would like us to know about the teachers and/or staff at the school(s) you attended. **Remember, your responses are confidential and anonymous.**

21. What types of classes did you take at the Native American boarding school(s)?

22. How would you rate the quality of education you received?

Horrible

Exceptional



23. How were you treated at the Native American boarding school(s) you attended?

Horribly

Very well



24. Is there anything specific you'd like to share about how you were treated at the boarding school(s)?

25. Were you allowed to speak in your Tribal/Native language at the school?

Yes

No

Unsure

26. What would happen if you spoke in your Tribal/Native language?

27. Were you allowed to practice your traditional Tribal ways at the boarding school?

Yes

No

Unsure

28. What would happen if you or other students tried to practice your traditional Tribal ways at the boarding school?

29. Please share anything you'd like about daily life (work duties, chores, outings) required by the school(s) you attended.

30. Please share anything you'd like about your relationships with other students at the school(s) you attended.

31. Please rate the quality of the food/nutrition at the Native American boarding school(s) you attended:



32. Please share anything you'd like about the food/nutrition at the school you attended.

33. Please rate the cleanliness and safety of the building(s) at the Native American boarding school(s) you attended:



34. Please share anything you'd like about the cleanliness and safety of the building(s) at the Native American boarding school(s) you attended.

35. Please rate the health care you received while attending a Native American boarding



school(s):

36. Please share anything you'd like about the health care you received at the school(s) you attended.

37. How do you think the boarding school(s) you attended prepared you (or didn't) for the rest of your life (further education, work, career, happiness, other)?

38. Do you think attendance in a boarding school(s) impacted your long-term mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional health?

Yes

No

Unsure

39. Please share anything you would like about how attendance at the boarding school(s) impacted your mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional health.

40. Please tell us how you think your experience in the Native American boarding school(s) continues to affect you and your family.

41. What do you think is the overall long-term impact of the boarding schools on Native communities in Michigan?

42. How do you think different generations (i.e., Elders, young people) think and talk about the impact of the Michigan boarding school experience?

43. How did you eventually leave the school?

- Graduated
- Went home for a break and didn't return
- Switched to public school
- Unsure
- Other (please specify)

44. Please share anything else you'd like to about when you eventually left the Native American boarding school(s).

45. This question is difficult: Are you aware of any boarding school students who died while they were at a Native American boarding school? [Remember: your responses are confidential and anonymous.] Also, please reach for assistance if needed through the provided link: [MiNABS Trauma Resources Tool Kits](#).

Yes

No

46. Can you please share what you know about those students and how they died?

*[Remember: your responses are confidential and anonymous.]*

47. In what ways do you think this study might help heal Tribal communities impacted by Native American boarding schools?

48. What types of activities or services do you think may help Native communities heal from the long-term impact of the boarding schools?

49. What role do you think the State played in implementing Native American boarding school(s) in Michigan?

50. Did/do you, your family members, or friends ever think about the Native American boarding schools as connected to Treaty obligations?

Yes

No

Unsure

51. What do future generations need to know about the experiences of Native American boarding school Survivors in Michigan?

52. What else do you think we should know about the Native American boarding school experience in Michigan?

## Section 2. Demographic Information

Providing your demographic information is optional but may help explain the collective experience of boarding school Survivors.

- Remember, your responses will remain anonymous.
- Please answer or skip as many questions as you wish.
- Select all of the categories you identify with.

Reminder: In honor and respect for your time, you will receive an appreciation gift. After you finish the questionnaire, a link will appear to a separate form NOT connected to your survey responses. We respect and will protect your privacy.

53. Are you an enrolled citizen/member of a Tribe?

Yes

No

Unsure

54. Please write the name of the Tribe of which you are an enrolled citizen/member.

55. Are you a Descendant of a Tribe but not enrolled in a Tribe yourself?

Yes

No

56. Please write the name of the Tribe(s) of which you are a Descendant. (You may indicate more than one.)

57. What year were you born?

58. Gender/Sex: (Please select all that apply.)

Woman

Man

Trans

Two-spirit

Genderqueer

Non-binary

I prefer not to respond

Another/Please share:

Thank you for participating in this study. We would like to invite you to share your experience to honor the lived experience of other Survivors and their Descendants of Michigan Native American Boarding Schools.

59. Would you be interested in participating in an interview to share your experience?

Yes

No

Follow-up Interview and Appreciation Gift

Thank you for taking the time to complete the MiNABS Survivor questionnaire!

We appreciate your willingness to share your experiences in an interview. To receive your appreciation gift and schedule a confidential interview, you will enter your contact details in a follow-up form. Please provide your email address below to begin the process.

60. Please enter your email address here.

Please use the link below to access the follow-up contact form.

You will automatically be redirected to the next page. Please note that your contact information will be collected separately from your anonymous MiNABS Survivor questionnaire responses.

Collect Your Appreciation Gift and Schedule a Follow-Up Interview

Sharing your story is sacred. If you feel that taking this questionnaire has caused you harm or if you are experiencing emotional distress and need support, please call or text or contact our study team at.

You can find additional supportive resources by following the provided link:  
[MiNABS Trauma Resources Tool Kits](#).

\*\*\*If not eligible to complete survey:

We apologize, but you do not appear to meet the criteria to participate in this study.

Please contact us if you believe you are eligible to participate in this study.

Please feel free to share the [MiNABS Trauma Resource Tool Kits](#) with anyone who may need supportive resources.

## Appendix G: MiNABS Descendant Questionnaire

Appendix G includes the Michigan Native American Boarding School (MiNABS) Descendant Questionnaire, designed to provide relatives, friends, and other impacted individuals with a meaningful way to share their experiences as part of the Michigan Native American Boarding School Study.

This questionnaire was developed as one of three data collection methods included in the Michigan Native American Boarding School (MiNABS) Study to provide relatives and friends of Survivors with multiple options for sharing their stories.

### Informed Consent

By completing this questionnaire, you give consent to use your information without revealing individual responses, which will remain anonymous and confidential. An added level of data sovereignty protection is provided through the use of signed agreements with each participating Tribe, which pledge not to disaggregate Tribal affiliation in any public document.

By proceeding, you also give consent to use responses of this survey for future reports, studies, and educational purposes.

### Benefit-Risk Statement

**Potential Risks:** Sharing your experience is sacred. It is recognized that there is potential for some risk or discomfort that you might face by participating in this questionnaire. Emotional distress, such as feeling sad or mad after talking about your experience, can be expected.

If you have any discomfort from this experience, supportive resources are available. You can access them by following the [MiNABS Trauma Resources Kits](#) link. These resources were compiled specifically for each Tribe and include information on seeking support from Tribal, state, inter-Tribal, or national resources.

**Potential Benefits:** Discussions about U.S. history and the experiences of AI/AN children who attended Indian mission and Indian boarding schools are important not only for gaining a greater understanding of history but also because of the impact they have on AI/AN people today.

The information you provide will help us better understand the lasting impact of Native American boarding schools on Survivors and Descendants, which may, in turn, positively and systemically impact public policy, legislation, K-12 curriculum, health, and behavioral health services in the State of Michigan.

As a participant, you have an opportunity to contribute knowledge that can improve the lives of Native American people across the nation. By proceeding, you acknowledge the potential risks and benefits of participating in this study.

Reminders:

- The questionnaire is confidential, anonymous, and completely voluntary.
- You can skip any questions you don't want to answer.
- If you choose not to answer a question, select "NEXT" and move to the next question.
- For open-ended questions, please write as much or as little as you'd like.

In honor and respect for your time, we will provide you with an appreciation gift. After you finish the questionnaire, a link to a separate follow-up form to collect your contact details will appear, keeping your contact information separate from your questionnaire responses to protect your privacy.

You can find supportive resources by following the provided link: [MiNABS Trauma Resources Tool Kits](#).

If you feel taking this questionnaire has caused you harm or if you are experiencing emotional distress and need support, please call or text 988 or contact our study team at [MINABS@kauffmaninc.com](mailto:MINABS@kauffmaninc.com).

#### Section 1: Boarding School Experience Information

This section contains questions regarding your family member's or friend's experience at a Native American boarding school in Michigan. All of your answers will be combined with those from other *Dibaajimodag* to understand an overall picture of the Native American boarding school experience in Michigan. We will not share the individual stories of your family members or friends.

1. What year was your family member or friend first sent to a Native American boarding school (the boarding school or school)?
2. How old were they when they attended boarding school? *[An approximate age is fine.]*
3. Was your family member's or friend's enrollment (attendance) in boarding school a voluntary choice made by them or by their parent or guardian?

Yes

No

Unsure

4. Do you remember who took them to the school?

Yes

No

Unsure

5. If you remember, which of the following people took your family member or friend to the Native American boarding school?

Family

Government agent

Social Worker

Court official

Police

Other (please specify)

6. How was your family member or friend first brought to the school (car, bus, train, other)?

7. Is there anything else you'd like to share about how or why they attended the school (whether voluntary or forced)?

8. How many years in total did they attend the Native American boarding school(s)?

9. What was the name of the Native American boarding school they first attended?

10. What was the location of the Native American boarding school they first attended?

11. Did they ever run away or try to run away from the boarding school?

Yes

No

Unsure

12. Is there anything you would like to share about why they ran away?

13. Was your family member or friend ever kicked out or forced to leave a boarding school?

Yes

No

Unsure

14. After leaving their first boarding school, were they ever enrolled in another Native American boarding school?

Yes

No

Unsure

15. Is there anything you'd like to share about their re-enrollment/return to a Native American boarding school?

16. Please tell us the name(s) of the school(s) your family member or friend went to and anything else you'd like to share.

17. Please tell us about the conditions at your family member's or friend's boarding school that most impacted them, either positively or negatively.

18. How would you rate the quality of the teachers and staff at the boarding school(s) they attended?



19. Please share anything you would like us to know about the teachers and/or staff at the school(s) they attended. **Remember, your responses are confidential and anonymous.**

20. What types of classes did they take at the Native American boarding school(s)?

21. How would you rate the quality of education they received?

Horrible

Excellent



22. How was your family member or friend treated at the Native American boarding school(s) they attended?

Horribly

Very well



23. Is there anything specific you'd like to share about how they were treated at the boarding school(s)?

24. Were they allowed to speak in their Tribal/Native language at the school?

Yes

No

Unsure

25. What would happen if they spoke in their Tribal/Native language in school?

26. Were they allowed to practice their traditional Tribal ways at the boarding school?

Yes

No

Unsure

27. What would happen if they or other students tried to practice their traditional Tribal ways at the boarding school?

28. Please share anything you'd like about their daily life (work duties, chores, outings) required by the school(s) they attended.

29. Please share anything you'd like about their relationships with other students at the school(s) they attended.

30. Please rate the quality of the food/nutrition at the Native American boarding school(s) they attended:



31. Please share anything you'd like about the food/ nutrition at the school they attended.

32. Please rate the cleanliness and safety of the building(s) at the Native American boarding school(s) they attended:



33. Please share anything you'd like about the cleanliness and safety of the building(s) at the Native American boarding school(s) they attended.

34. Please rate the health care they received while attending a Native American boarding school(s):



35. Please share anything you'd like about the health care they received at the school(s) they attended.

36. How do you think the boarding school(s) they attended prepared them (or didn't) for the rest of their lives (further education, work, career, happiness, etc.)?

37. Do you think their attendance in a boarding school(s) impacted their long-term mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional health?

Yes

No

Unsure

38. Please share anything you would like about how their attendance at the boarding school(s) impacted their mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional health.

39. Please tell us how you think their experience in the Native American boarding school(s) continues to affect them and your/their family.

40. What do you think is the overall long-term impact of the boarding schools on Native communities in Michigan?

41. How do you think different generations (i.e., Elders, young people) think and talk about the impact of the Michigan boarding school experience?

42. How did they eventually leave the school?

Graduated

Went home for a break and didn't return

Switched to public school

Unsure

Other (please specify)

43. Please share anything else you'd like to about when your family member or friend eventually left the Native American boarding school(s).

44. This question is difficult: Are you aware of any boarding school students who died while they were at a Native American boarding school? [Remember: your responses are confidential and anonymous.] Also, please reach for assistance if needed through the provided link: [MiNABS Trauma Resources Tool Kits](#).

Yes

No

45. Can you please share what you know about those students and how they died? [Remember: your responses are confidential and anonymous.]

46. In what ways do you think this study might help heal Tribal communities impacted by Native American boarding schools?

47. What types of activities or services do you think may help Native communities heal from the long-term impact of the boarding schools?

48. What role do you think the State played in implementing Native American boarding school(s) in Michigan?

49. Did/do you, your family members, or friends ever think about the Native American boarding schools as connected to Treaty obligations?

Yes

No

Unsure

50. What do future generations need to know about the experiences of Native American boarding school Survivors in Michigan?

51. What else do you think we should know about the Native American boarding school experience in Michigan?

## Section 2. Demographic Information

Providing your demographic information is optional but may help explain the collective experience of boarding school Survivors.

- Remember, your responses will remain anonymous.
- Please answer or skip as many questions as you wish.
- Select all of the categories you identify with.

Reminder: In honor and respect for your time, you will receive an appreciation gift. After you finish the questionnaire, a link will appear to a separate form NOT connected to your survey responses. We respect and will protect your privacy.

52. Are you an enrolled citizen/member of a Tribe?

Yes

No

Unsure

53. Please write the name of the Tribe of which you are an enrolled citizen/member.

54. Are you a Descendant of a Tribe but not enrolled in a Tribe yourself?

Yes

No

55. Please write the name of the Tribe(s) of which you are a Descendant. (You may indicate more than one.)

56. What year were you born?

57. Gender/Sex: (Please select all that apply.)

Woman

Man

Trans

Two-Spirit

Genderqueer

Non-Binary

I prefer not to respond Another/Please share:

Thank you for participating in this study. We would like to invite you to share your experience to honor the lived experience of other Survivors and their Descendants of Michigan Native American Boarding Schools.

58. Would you be interested in participating in an interview to share your experience?

Yes

No

Thank you for taking the time to complete the MiNABS Descendant or Other Impacted Individual questionnaire.

We appreciate your willingness to share the individual experiences of your family member or friend in an interview. To receive your appreciation gift and schedule a

confidential interview, you will enter your contact details in a follow-up form. Please provide your email address below to begin the process.

59. Please enter your information here.

Please use the link below to access the follow-up contact form.

You will automatically be redirected to the next page. Please note that your contact information will be collected separately from your anonymous MiNABS Descendant or Other Impacted Individual questionnaire responses.

#### **Collect Your Appreciation Gift & Schedule a Follow-Up Interview**

Sharing your story is sacred. If you feel that taking this questionnaire has caused you harm or if you are experiencing emotional distress and need support, please call or text 988 or contact our study team. You can find additional supportive resources by following the provided link: [MiNABS Trauma Resources Tool Kits](#).

Thank you for taking the time to complete the MiNABS Descendant or Other Impacted Individual questionnaire!

To receive your appreciation gift, you will enter your contact details in a follow-up form. Please provide your email address below to begin the process.

60. Please enter your information here.

## Appendix H: Survivor and Descendant Truths Protocol

The Survivor and Descendant Truths Protocol outlines the steps and guidance for conducting trauma-informed interviews to support storytelling and healing as part of the Michigan Native American Boarding School Study.

Prior to beginning the interview, ensure that the room is quiet, clean and that there is a box of Kleenex available for them. Make sure that a consent form is attached to a clipboard for them to sign. Check the video equipment and ensure that it is sufficient for 1-2 hours of recording time.

Welcome the MiNABS Survivor and their support person (if desired) to the room with a warm smile and quiet voice and invite them to sit down in front of the camera.

**Introduce yourself, tribal affiliation and role with KAI and ask them for their name.**  
**Introduce the videographer as well.** Go through the consent form with them and have them sign it prior to beginning.

### Introduction

I want to first off say that the strength and resilience you are showing by speaking your truth is commendable. Thank you for agreeing to take the time to share your boarding school experience with us. Our overall goal is to understand MiNABS further and contribute to reparation efforts that are needed for Survivors and Descendants.

Using an Indigenous Evaluation Framework, we always prioritize Indigenous knowledge, sovereignty, community and family, and the learning that occurs through these experiences. Additionally, we are giving you this safe space to explore your story and how you want to tell it. You are free to discuss anything related to MiNABS you would like, but if you have trouble and would like some assistance with what to talk about, we have prepared some ideas you can review [hand the participant the stack of cards]. There are fifteen different questions designed to elicit conversations and experiences. You do not need to answer them all or any of them, they are only meant to give you ideas if you don't know where to start.

We understand the difficulty of telling your experiences and how they may impact you. We want to make sure you have the support you need, we have traditional healers who are available afterward or throughout the day should you need to take some time for yourself to debrief or discuss the distress you are feeling.

Remember that we are videotaping you, but you have the choice to have it stored in our video archive. You can also ask us to stop the recording at any time. Do you have any questions before we begin recording?

### Cards for Question Prompts

1. Can you talk about memories related to the boarding school that stand out to you from your childhood?
2. Can you recall experiences you had at home with your family away from the boarding school?
3. What did conversations about the boarding school look like when you were with your family?
4. What impacts did attending MiNABS have on your family?
5. What impacts did attending MiNABS have on you as a parent and/or grandparent?
6. In what ways did MiNABS impact your life overall?
7. What lessons would you like to share with other Survivors and Descendants of MiNABS?
8. How did attending MiNABS affect your relationships throughout different points in your life?
9. How do you think that healing can look for Survivors and Descendants of the MiNABS?
10. What would you like to see the country do in reparation for the assimilative experiences that Survivors had by attending MiNABS?
11. What would you like others to know about your MiNABS experiences?
12. In what ways did attending MiNABS impact your ability to connect with your culture?
13. Can you describe the way that your family talks about MiNABS as a whole?
14. What would you want future generations of children in school to know about MiNABS?
15. There are many things that MiNABS took away from Survivors, but think about your life overall, what are you proud of?
16. What would your advice be for someone who attended MiNABS and is struggling with healing from their experiences?

## Conclusion

We want to thank you for taking the time to share your stories and experiences with us today. We honor you and the extraordinary strength and resilience it shows that you are here with us telling your truth. I hope you feel extremely empowered in knowing that you contributed to seeking justice and healing for Survivors and Descendants of MiNABS.

# Appendix I: Survivor Truths Informed Consent

## Michigan Native American Boarding School Study

### Survivor Stories Informed Consent Form

#### Statement of Consent

I have received an adequate description of the purpose and procedures for audio/video recording of interviews during the course of the proposed research study. I give my consent to be audio/video recorded during participation in the study, and for those recordings to be heard/viewed by persons involved in the study. I understand that these audio or video recordings will be used as part of a public archive and in a digital story to be shared with the public. I further understand that I may withdraw my consent at any time. **By checking the box below, you agree that your oral history will be used for the video archive and digital storytelling video, which will be visible to the public.** Should you just want to record your oral history and not allow it to be visible to others outside of KAI, do not check the box. As such, after the analysis is completed and the project has ended, your video will be erased. You are still required to sign below to consent to recording your oral history and participating in this project.

#### Consent for video or audio recording

- I agree to be **video-taped** and contribute to the video archive and digital storytelling video.
- I agree to be **audio-taped ONLY** and allow my audio to be included in the archive or the digital storytelling video.

#### Consent for use of name

- I agree that my **full name** can be used with the type of recording selected above.
- I agree that only my **first name** can be used with the type of recording selected above.

#### Signatures/Dates

---

Study participant's name (please print)

---

Participant's or legal representative's signature

---

Date

Please check one of the following boxes:

I accept the \$100 honorarium  a check *or*  an Amazon e-gift card.  
I do not wish to receive an honorarium.

---

Mailing address to receive honorarium (only for check payment)

---

Phone number

---

Email address

## Appendix J: Participant Tables

Appendix J includes three tables presenting participant totals, the average number of years spent attending boarding school, and average age by boarding school and location.

Table J1. Boarding schools attended or referenced by Survivors and Descendents in data collection

Boarding School	Location	Questionnaire		Survivor Truths		Row Total
		Survivor	Descendant	Survivor	Descendant	
Holy Childhood of Jesus School	Michigan	26	61	4	7	98
Mount Pleasant Indian Industrial	Michigan	--	43	--	2	45
Old St. Joseph Orphanage and School	Michigan	2	13	--	--	15
Unsure about name of MiNAB	Michigan	--	9	--	2	11
Spanish Indian Residential School	Ontario, Canada	--	3	--	--	3
Flandreau Indian School	South Dakota	--	2	1	--	3
St. Michael Indian Residential School	British Columbia, Canada	--	1	--	--	1
Eufaula Dormitory	Oklahoma	--	1	--	--	1

Boarding School	Location	Questionnaire		Survivor Truths		Row Total
		Survivor	Descendant	Survivor	Descendant	
Lac du Flambeau	Wisconsin	--	1	--	--	1
Baraga Chippewa Boarding and Day School	Michigan	--	1	--	--	1
Holy Family Orphanage	Michigan	--	1	--	--	1
Wahpeton Indian School	North Dakota	--	1	--	--	1
Unsure of school name in Minnesota	Minnesota	--	--	--	1	1
Unsure about the name of Canadian Residential School	Canada	--	3	--	--	3
Skipped question	--	--	11	--	--	--
Column Total		28	151	5	12	

Table J2. Average number of years attended in boarding schools as reported by Descendants or Other Impacted Relatives

Boarding School	Location	Average Number of Years Attended	Min	Max	Total Number of Students	Total Sum of Years Attended
Holy Childhood of Jesus School	Michigan	5.71	1	12	61	348
Mount Pleasant Indian Industrial Boarding School	Michigan	6.49	0	17	43	279
Old St. Joseph Orphanage and School	Michigan	5.92	0	17	13	77
Unsure about name of MiNABS	Michigan	7.00	3	16	9	63
Spanish Indian Residential School	Ontario, Canada	5.33	2	9	3	16
Flandreau Indian School	South Dakota	7.00	4	10	2	14
St. Michael Indian Residential School	British Columbia, Canada	8.00	8	8	1	8
Eufaula Dormitory	Oklahoma	6.00	6	6	1	6
Lac du Flambeau	Wisconsin	5.00	5	5	1	5

Boarding School	Location	Average Number of Years Attended	Min	Max	Total Number of Students	Total Sum of Years Attended
Baraga Chippewa Boarding and Day School	Michigan	4.00	4	4	1	4
Holy Family Orphanage	Michigan	4.00	4	4	1	4
Wahpeton Indian School	North Dakota	3.00	3	3	1	3
Unsure about the name of Canadian Residential School	Canada	5.00	5	5	3	15
Total					140	842

Table J3. Distribution of first boarding school attendance by age (based on grand total)

Boarding School	Location	0–3 years	4–8 years	9–11 years	12–15 years	18+ years	Unsure of Age	Total Responses
Baraga Chippewa Boarding and Day School	Michigan	—	1	—	—	—	—	1
Holy Childhood of Jesus School	Michigan	—	45	14	2	—	—	61
Holy Family Orphanage	Michigan	—	1	—	—	—	—	1
Mount Pleasant Indian Industrial Boarding School	Michigan	2	21	8	10	1	1	43
Old St. Joseph Orphanage and School	Michigan	1	4	4	4	—	—	13
Unsure about the name of the MiNAB	Michigan	—	5	3	1	—	—	9
Wahpeton Indian School	North Dakota	—	1	—	—	—	—	1
Eufaula Dormitory	Oklahoma	—	—	1	—	—	—	1
Flandreau Indian School	South Dakota	—	1	—	1	—	—	2
Lac du Flambeau Indian	Wisconsin	—	—	1	—	—	—	1

Boarding School	Location	0–3 years	4–8 years	9–11 years	12–15 years	18+ years	Unsure of Age	Total Responses
Boarding School								
St. Michael Indian Mission School	British Columbia, Canada	—	1	—	—	—	—	1
Spanish Indian Residential School	Ontario, Canada	1	—	1	1	—	—	3
Unsure about the name of the Canadian Residential School	Canada	—	—	2	—	—	1	3
Column Total		4	80	34	19	1	2	140