

## IN DEPTH: Aboriginal Canadians Indian residential schools

Agreement in principle: FAQs

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[CBC News](#)



*CBC News: Stolen Children*

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### What is a residential school?

In the 19th century, the Canadian government believed it was responsible for educating and caring for the country's aboriginal people. It thought their best chance for success was to learn English and adopt Christianity and Canadian customs. Ideally, they would pass their adopted lifestyle on to their children, and native traditions would diminish, or be completely abolished in a few generations.

The Canadian government developed a policy called "aggressive assimilation" to be taught at church-run, government-funded industrial schools, later called residential schools. The government felt children were easier to mould than adults, and the concept of a boarding school was the best way to prepare them for life in mainstream society.

Residential schools were federally run, under the Department of Indian Affairs. Attendance was mandatory. Agents were employed by the government to ensure all native children attended.

### How many residential schools and students were there?

Initially, about 1,100 students attended 69 schools across the country. In 1931, at the peak of the residential school system, there were about 80 schools operating in Canada. There were a total of about 130 schools in every territory and province except Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick from the earliest in the 19th century to the last, which closed in 1996.

In all, about 150,000 aboriginal, Inuit and Métis children were removed from their communities and forced to attend the schools.

### What went wrong?

Residential schools were established with the assumption that aboriginal culture was unable to adapt to a rapidly modernizing society. It was believed that native children could be successful if they assimilated into mainstream Canadian society by adopting Christianity and speaking English or French. Students were discouraged from speaking their first language or practising native traditions. If they were caught, they would experience severe punishment.

Throughout the years, students lived in substandard conditions and endured physical and emotional abuse. There are also many allegations of sexual abuse. Students at residential schools rarely had opportunities to see examples of normal family life. They were in school 10 months a year, away from their parents. All correspondence from the children was written in English, which many parents couldn't read. Brothers and sisters at the same school rarely saw each other, as all activities were segregated by gender.

When students returned to the reserve, they often found they didn't belong. They didn't have the skills to help their parents, and became ashamed of their native heritage. The skills taught at the schools were generally substandard; many found it hard to function in an urban setting. The aims of assimilation meant devastation for those who were subjected to years of mistreatment.

### **When did the calls for victim compensation begin?**

- More: [A timeline of residential schools](#)

In 1990, Phil Fontaine, then leader of the Association of Manitoba Chiefs, called for the churches involved to acknowledge the physical, emotional, and sexual abuse endured by students at the schools. In 1991 the government convened a Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. Many people told the commission about their residential school experiences, and its 1996 report recommended a separate public inquiry into residential schools. That recommendation was never followed.

Over the years, the government worked with the Anglican, Catholic, United and Presbyterian churches, which ran residential schools, to design a plan to compensate the former students.

In 2005, the federal government announced a \$2-billion compensation package for those who were forced to attend residential schools.

### **Under the federal compensation proposal, what will former students receive?**

Details of a proposal include compensation, called the Common Experience Payments, for all residential schools students who were alive as of May 30, 2005. Former residential school students will get an initial payout of \$10,000, plus \$3,000 for each year they attended school. Acceptance of the Common Experience Payment would release the government and churches of all further liability relating to the Indian residential school experience, except in cases of sexual abuse and serious incidents of physical abuse. Under the proposal's guidelines, about 86,000 are eligible for redress.

### **Is there anything for older aboriginal Canadians?**

Former residential school students 65 years old and older can receive an advance payment of \$8,000.

### **What will happen in those cases of alleged sexual or serious physical abuse?**

An Independent Assessment Process, or IAP, is intended to address sexual abuse cases and serious incidents of physical abuse. A former student who accepts the Common Experience Payment can pursue a further claim for sexual or serious physical abuse.

### **Is there more to the proposal than compensating the victims?**

The government will continue to fund a Commemoration initiative, which consists of events, projects and memorials on a national and community level. \$10 million will be invested in an existing commemoration program. The Aboriginal Healing Foundation will receive an additional investment of \$125 million.

The prime minister was scheduled to deliver an official apology in Parliament on June 11, 2008.

The proposed settlement also promised a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to examine the legacy of the residential schools. The commission was scheduled to begin its work on June 15, 2008.