



The Truth and Reconciliation Commission has a mandate to collect stories, learn the truth, and inform all Canadians about what happened in residential schools. The commission collected thousands of documents and stories including records held by those who operated and funded the schools, testimony from officials of the institutions, and experiences reported by survivors and their families and anyone personally affected by the residential school experience and its subsequent impacts. The commission hopes to guide and inspire FNMI peoples and Canadians to continue the process of truth and healing, leading toward reconciliation and renewed relationships based on mutual understanding and respect.

Bentwood Box

“Carved by Coast Salish artist Luke Marston and commissioned by the TRC, the TRC Bentwood Box is a lasting tribute to all Indian residential school survivors. The carved panels represent the unique cultures of former FNMI students.... The TRC Bentwood Box reflects the strength and resilience of residential school survivors and their descendants, and honours those survivors who are no longer living. The artist pays respect to his own grandmother by depicting her residential school experiences at Kuper Island in the carvings.”
(TRC, n.d.)



Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC)

Residential schools for Aboriginal people in Canada date back to the 1870s. Over 130 residential schools were located across the country, and the last school closed in 1996. These government-funded, church-run schools were set up to eliminate parental involvement in the intellectual, cultural, and spiritual development of Aboriginal children.

During this era, more than 150,000 FNMI children were placed in these schools often against their parents' wishes. Many were forbidden to speak their language and practise their own culture. While there are an estimated 80,000 former students living today, the ongoing impact of residential schools has been felt throughout generations and has contributed to social problems that continue to exist.

On June 11, 2008, the Prime Minister, on behalf of the Government of Canada, delivered a formal apology in the House of Commons to former students, their families, and communities for Canada's role in the operation of the residential schools.

The Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement

With the support of the Assembly of First Nations and Inuit organizations, former residential school students took the federal government and the churches to court. Their cases led to the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, the largest class-action settlement in Canadian history. The agreement sought to begin repairing the harm caused by residential schools. Aside from providing compensation to former students, the agreement called for the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada with a budget of \$60 million over five years.

The commission views reconciliation as an ongoing individual and collective process that will require participation from all those affected by the residential school experience. This includes FNMI and former students, their families, communities, religious groups, former Indian residential school employees, government, and the non-Indigenous people of Canada.

In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2015 published *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future – Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*. The report calls for all Canadians to engage in a process of reconciliation and has several Calls to Action.

With respect to reconciliation, the TRC states:

“To the Commission, reconciliation is about establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in this country. In order for that to happen, there has to be awareness of the past, acknowledgement of the harm that has been inflicted, atonement for the causes, and action to change behaviour.

We are not there yet. The relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples is not a mutually respectful one. But, we believe we can get there, and we believe we can maintain it. Our ambition is to show how we can do that.

In 1996, the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples urged Canadians to begin a national process of reconciliation that would have set the country on a bold new path, fundamentally changing the very foundations of Canada’s relationship with Aboriginal peoples. Much of what the Royal Commission had to say has been ignored by government; a majority of its recommendations were never implemented. But the report and its findings opened people’s eyes and changed the conversation about the reality for Aboriginal people in this country (TRC, 2015a, pp. 6–7).”

The TRC Calls to Action include seven recommendations that are specific to education. These range from efforts to bridge educational and employment gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians to providing culturally appropriate early childhood education programs for Aboriginal families. The following are the key principles:

- Providing sufficient funding to close identified educational achievement gaps within one generation
- Improving education attainment levels and success rates
- Developing culturally appropriate curricula
- Protecting the right to Aboriginal languages, including the teaching of Aboriginal languages as credit courses
- Enabling parents to fully participate in the education of their children

The TRC challenges all Canadians to engage in reconciliation and to work together to confront the challenges we face through the “It Matters to Me” initiative, which stated that “the time has come to bring reconciliation into the discussion.” Schools also need to be fully engaged in the reconciliation process and dialogue.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action report called on education systems to respond to the legacy of residential schools and the impacts of systemic racism on Aboriginal people. Therefore, it is incumbent upon schools and their staff to be knowledgeable about the Calls to Action and how to influence positive change in the relationships among children, youth, parents, and staff so that they are racism-free, and that they teach in our schools that allowing racism to occur is not an option.

Recently, Manitoba's school divisions were required to renew or develop some form of human diversity statement and/or policies, as well as to allow for student social justice clubs and groups. Many school divisions also have anti-racism, anti-bias, or anti-homophobia policies or programs. In addition, in many school divisions there are Aboriginal education support services, action plans, and strategies intended to improve their capacity to meet the needs of FNMI students and their families.

While we have made some progress in policies related to safe schools and inclusive education, we need to ensure that our divisional and school policies are strengthened and evolved to attend to changing societal needs and to reflect new understandings and developments. We need to collaborate and strive to make our schools truly equitable, inclusive, and reflective of our commitment to human rights and social justice. Divisional and school policies are an important aspect of building an educational system that attends to all students.