



Tribal Boarding School Toolkit for Healing

Overview and Best Practices





**Before we get started, let's
open in a good way.**



Summary

In January 2023, Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board (NPAIHB) and Indian Health Services (IHS) contracted with Kauffman and Associates, Inc. (KAI) to develop an electronic toolkit for teachers, public health professionals, mental health professionals, tribal administrators, and public safety professionals. This team conducted a literature review, spoke to boarding school survivors and descendants, consulted with individuals and organizations working in the field of American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) healing and resilience, and collaborated with educators to develop the toolkit.

The toolkit is intended to be a brief, reader-friendly resource with information on the historical trauma resulting from Indian boarding schools in the United States.



Tribal Boarding School Toolkit for Healing

Purpose

The purpose of the Tribal Boarding School Toolkit for Healing is to provide those who work in AI/AN communities with information, resources, and suggested activities for talking about and healing the generational traumatic impacts boarding schools have had on AI/AN individuals, families, and communities.

Topic-Specific Definitions

- **Boarding Schools:** residential educational facilities intended to force Western education upon the AI/AN people while also attempting cultural erasure and assimilation.
- **Forced Assimilation:** A process in which a dominant culture of a group imposes its customs, values, language, and way of life upon a minority culture of a group, with the goal of eradicating the minority culture's distinct identity and replacing it with the dominant culture's norms.
- **Forced Removal:** the collective United States government policies that removed AI/AN people from their historical lands or diminished their size and confined AI/AN people to reservations.
- **Historical Trauma:** A subtype of trauma that refers to group-level experiences which produce lasting psychological and physiological symptoms in group members.
- **Intergenerational Trauma:** A subtype of trauma like historical trauma, but which also impacts descendants of the original experiencers.
- **Resilience-focused:** A type of care provided or healing that takes place which emphasizes strength, integration of traumatic experiences into one's overall self-narrative, and ability to heal.
- **Trauma-informed Care:** An approach to providing support and services that recognizes and responds to the impact of past and ongoing trauma on individuals' mental, emotional, and physical well-being, with a focus on safety, trust, and empowerment.

Toolkit Format

The Tribal Boarding School Toolkit for Healing is divided into four primary modules with three supplemental information modules.

Toolkit Modules

- Opening in a Good Way
- The Past
- The Present
- The Future

Supplemental Information Modules

- Appendix
- Definitions
- References

Tribal Boarding School Toolkit for Healing

Modules contain historical information, quotations from survivors and descendants, discussion guides, highlights, and activities like reflection questions, calls to action, and experiential therapies.

Subsections of each module are emphasized for quick reference with these icons:



Call to Action – Activities for users of the toolkit to implement in their communities and with their clients



Highlights – Important information for users of the toolkit to keep in mind



Experiential Therapies – Creative outlets or practices that are proven to assist with healing from trauma

Module 1

Opening in a Good Way

Acknowledgment

The toolkit begins with an acknowledgment to the AI/AN children who were sent to U.S. Indian boarding schools and their descendants; as well as the users of the toolkit who work tirelessly to provide support, healing, and education to those affected by forced assimilation and cultural eradication policies.

“In community and ceremony, we can strive for healing, reclamation, and revitalization of AI/AN cultures and traditions these policies tried to extinguish.” (p.5)

Disclaimer

The authors felt it was imperative to include a disclaimer at the beginning of the toolkit as an act of service and care for its readers and practitioners. ***This toolkit contains sensitive material that may be emotionally and psychologically challenging for some readers.*** Within the disclaimer, the authors encourage caution and self-care for all readers, and to seek support as needed.

“Remember that the intention of this toolkit is to promote understanding, healing, and foster asset-focused community building, but it may not be suitable for all audiences... Proceed with sensitivity, compassion, and a commitment to promoting awareness and justice for AI/AN communities.” (p.5)

Discussion Guides

Within the Discussion Guides section of Module 1 are best practices for conducting conversations with survivors and their descendants, how to create a dialogue with children and youth, how to check internal biases, and where to find more resources for discussions. The “Growing Together by Going Deeper” discussion guide offers prompts and responses for those speaking to individuals unfamiliar with Indian boarding schools and their impacts on AI/AN communities today.

Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Tribal Boarding School Toolkit

Focus on Repair and Resilience. Discussions should move beyond being trauma-informed to focusing on being healing centered. This approach acknowledges that people are more than their traumatic experiences and emphasizes the possibility of well-being. Dr. Shawn Ginwright's model for **healing centered engagement** is a useful framework for these discussions. The framework provides a strength-based, social emotional learning strategy that includes five main elements: cultural relationships, meaning, and aspirations.

Teach the accurate history of Indian boarding schools. The National American Boarding School Healing Coalition offers developmentally appropriate curricula for students in elementary through high school. When teaching about boarding schools:

- Stick to the facts while explaining the government policies, creation of the schools, the experiences of the children, and the lasting impact on AI/AN communities.
- Provide information in small accessible developmentally appropriate chunks.
- Watch for signs students are disengaging or need to take breaks as needed and leave lots of time for processing.
- Take breaks as needed and leave lots of time for processing.

While preparing for the discussion, make sure to process your emotional reaction to the content. Remember that not all the answers to young people's questions. Remember that it's okay not to know how to find the answer they need and that it's okay to have an emotional reaction to difficult content.

Center the assets and strength of AI/AN people. Acknowledge the intergenerational trauma caused by boarding schools and its impact on AI/AN people. Share stories, music, art, and other cultural practices that are important to highlight the individual and collective strength of AI/AN people.

Create a safe space for youth and children. Be patient and make sure students are learning. Provide opportunities for healing. They might not have the words to express their feelings (Riley & Hayes, 2018), or they might need support for processing by offering options for processing and resources.

Offer support and resources. Remember that there are resources available to help you take action. Create a resource list to serve as facilitators of discussion.

Remember: Practice self-care when engaging in conversations about the Indian boarding school experience, in order to avoid re-traumatization and/or compassion fatigue.

START

So, you want to know more about the Indian boarding school experience in the U.S.?

Why do you want to know this information?

I'm genuinely interested and want to learn more.

I don't believe the hype and think you should get over it.

Indian boarding schools were established in the U.S. and Canada in order to assimilate Native peoples and erase Indigenous languages, cultures, and traditions. Children were forcibly removed from their families to attend these schools and were forbidden from practicing their cultures or speaking their Native languages. The legacy of Indian boarding schools is deeply painful, as many students suffered physical and emotional abuse, neglect, and cultural disconnection. Efforts have been made to break the cycle of intergenerational trauma, with calls for truth and reconciliation, and focused efforts to reclaim and revitalize cultural practices in Indian Country.

Indian boarding schools were real institutions in the U.S. and Canada during the late 19th to mid-20th centuries. Indigenous children were forcibly removed from their families to attend these schools in order to be "civilized," to believe, extensive historical documentation and numerous testimonies from survivors clearly demonstrate the brutality of that education. The consequences of these schools are deeply painful, as many students suffered physical and emotional abuse, neglect, and cultural disconnection. Many Native communities are still grappling with the cultural loss and intergenerational trauma today. I challenge you to dig a little deeper on this subject.

Module 2

The Past



Forced Assimilation and Its Impact on American Indians and Alaska Natives

Indian boarding schools were part of a much larger agenda of genocidal practices. To better understand the role of the Indian boarding school system and the context within which this genocidal practice was born, this section of Module 2 defines genocide and what constitutes a genocidal act.

“Indigenous people and individuals have the right not to be subjected to forced assimilation or destruction of their culture.”

- United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Article 7 (p.9)

A Long Legacy of Dehumanization

Indian boarding school is part of a long list of genocidal practices including:

- The Doctrine of Discovery,
- The Declaration of Independence,
- The Marshall Trilogy,
- The Monroe Doctrine, and
- Manifest Destiny.

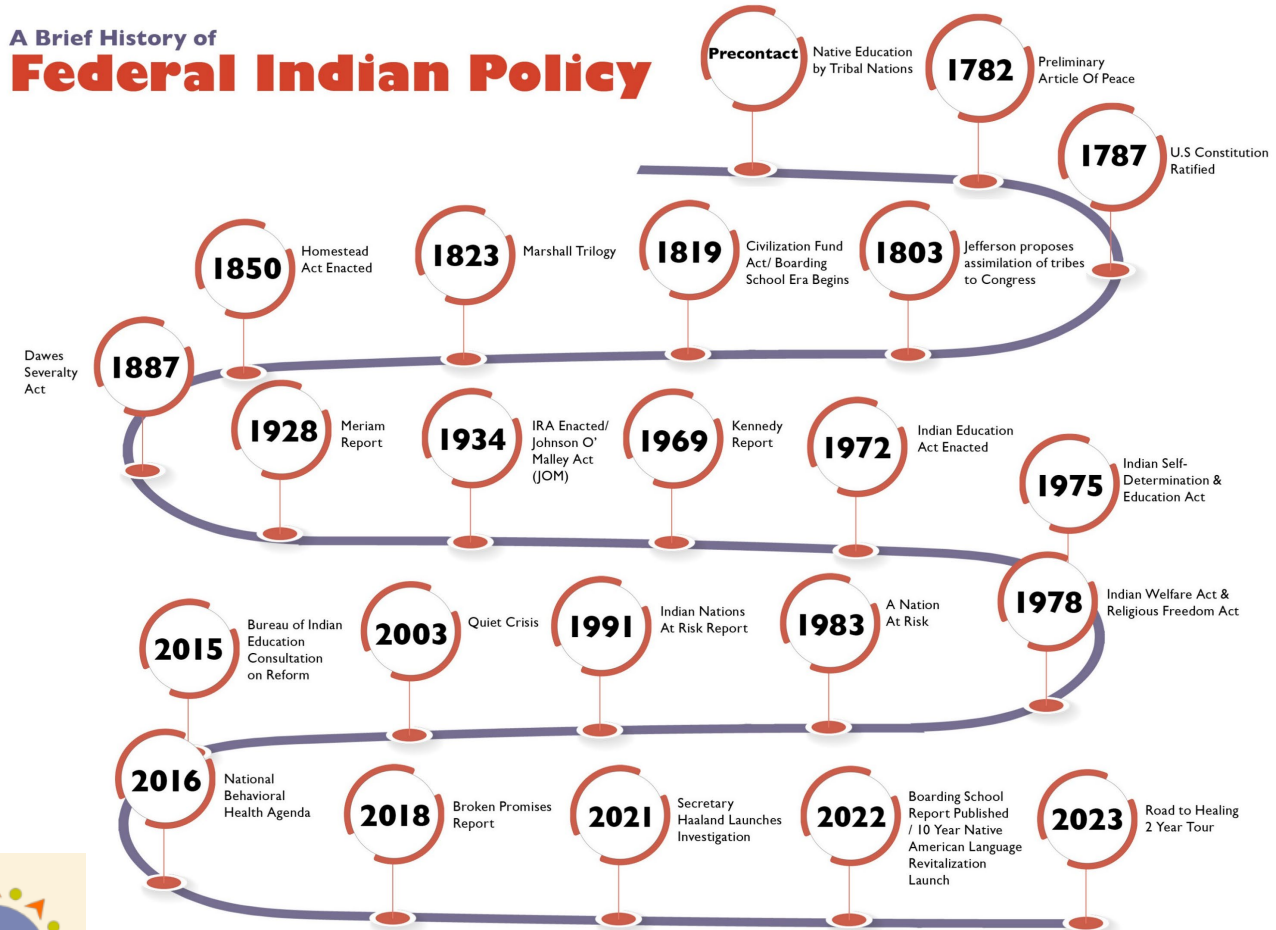
Avoid using stereotypes or forcing AI/AN people to endure microaggressions. Common examples of these include:

- But you don't look Indian?
- How much Indian are you?
- What are you?



A Brief History of

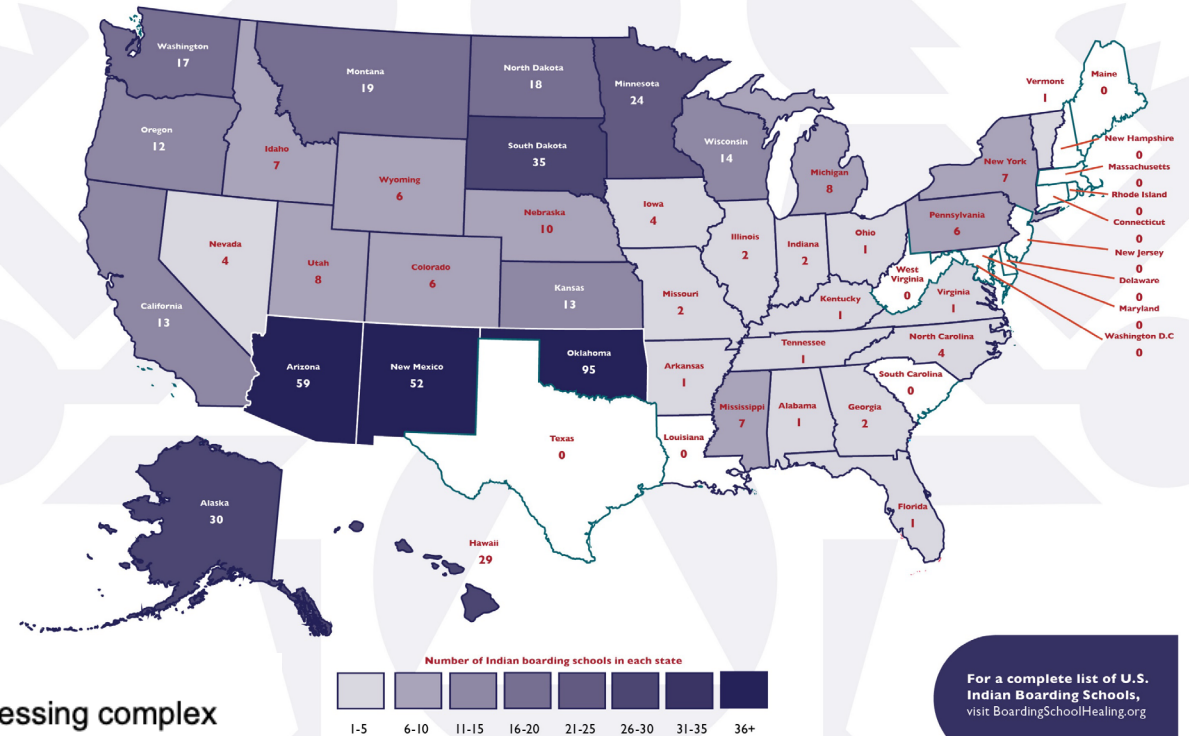
Federal Indian Policy



Overview of U.S. Indian Boarding Schools

Between 1819 and 1969, the U.S. Department of Interior operated 408 Indian boarding schools. This section of Module 2 details the assimilation tactics used by the boarding school system as well as what life was like for a student within the Indian boarding school system.

U.S. Indian Boarding Schools



For a complete list of U.S. Indian Boarding Schools, visit BoardingSchoolHealing.org



Digital Storytelling

Digital storytelling is a powerful tool for communicating and processing complex emotions using digital technologies. It combines narrative storytelling by way of voiceover with photography, animation, film clips, text, and audio to create a three- to five-minute-long video. Not only can digital stories be used for telling personal narratives, but they can be used to explain concepts, historical events, or make an argument.

National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition. (2023). Indian boarding schools in the United States. Minneapolis, MN: National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition

Historical Impacts

The Historical Impacts section of Module 2 details the efforts by the federal government to break up Native family units by way of the Indian Policy of Assimilation.

“Without griefwork—without a voice—trauma is passed from one generation to the next.”

—Jane Middleton-Moz, MSCP (p. 15)

Indian Land Cessions

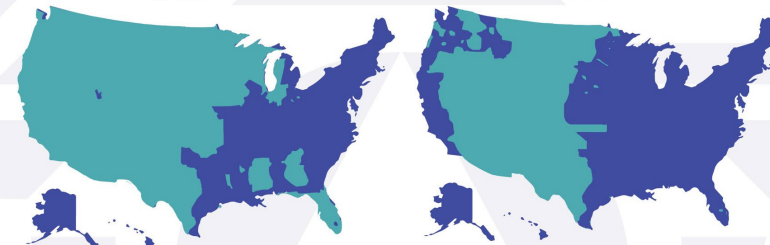
From first contact to today, tribes and nations across the U.S. have experienced land loss by way of western expansion.

Precontact

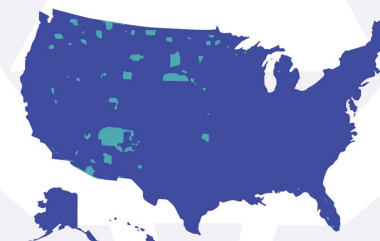


1784

1860



Present-Day Indian Reservations



National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition 2020.



Module 3

The Present

Current Status of U.S. Indian Boarding Schools

The Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) currently operates 24 residential schools, of which only four are off-reservation residential schools. The BIE provides education services to 47,000 students across nearly 200 elementary and secondary schools, many are directly controlled by tribes /tribal school boards.

Also covered in this section are:

- the Indian Adoption Project of 1958,
- Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978, and *Haaland v. Brackeen* and the lawsuits that have challenged ICWA since its inception.



AI/AN children are still removed from their families at disproportional rates. AI/AN children are up to four times as likely to end up in foster care as compared to non-AI/AN children. Additionally, only 38% of AI/AN children are placed in care with kin, and 52% of the children in the foster care system are adopted by non-Native families (Disproportionate, 2021 and Casey Family Programs, 2022).

★ ★ ★ ★ ★
**Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative
Investigative Report**

May 2022

Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs
Bryan Newland

Current Impacts

The Federal Indian Boarding School era is over, but the patterns of abuse are not.

The key data from the Current Impacts section of Module 3 are captured within the infographic to the right.

Current Impacts of **Indian Boarding School**

The Federal Indian Boarding School era is over, but *the patterns of abuse are not.*

American Indian and Alaska Natives have higher rates of:

- Suicide
- PTSD
- Violence
- Alcohol-related deaths
- Drunk driving accidents
- Substance use and dependence

Native children are

2x

as likely to experience serious psychological distress

3x

as likely to be in foster care

In Minnesota, that number jumps to 15x (NICWA, 2021)

Native women are

2x

as likely to be raped

3x

as likely to be murdered

More than **4 in 5 Native women** experience **violence** in their lifetimes

More than **Half** have experienced **sexual violence** (Rosay, 2016)

5,712

reports of missing American Indian and Alaska Native women and girls in 2016, but only 116 cases were filed in the Department of Justice federal missing person database.



Center culture on the pathway to health. This approach recognizes tribal sovereignty and self-determination. “Indigenous culture as treatment addresses not only physical and mental health disparities but also accounts for structural issues of inequality and policy injustices, medical discrimination, marginalization, and exclusion” (BlackDeer, 2023).

Trauma and Its Impacts

The Trauma and Its Impacts section of Module 3 delves into the differences between grief and trauma, the impacts of cultural discontinuity, as well as:

- Impact of Trauma on Brain Development
- Activating Latent Trauma
- How Trauma Shows Up in the Classroom
- Impacts of Trauma Later in Life



Protective factors for AI/AN youth include personal wellness, positive self-image, self-efficacy, family and non-familial connectedness, positive opportunities, positive social normal, and cultural connectedness.



Educators, medical professionals, and behavioral health providers should be sensitive to environmental cues that may cause a reaction from a child who has experienced trauma. By anticipating difficult times and providing support, professionals can help to create a safe and supportive environment for children and families who have experienced trauma.

Please note: these sections are full of experiential therapies, reflection questions, calls to action, and supplemental resources like contacts for substance use and behavioral health helplines.

Trauma and Its Impacts, continued



To create a supportive and healing-centered classroom, educators can employ some of the following strategies:

- Provide frequent breaks (including leaving class to seek support from a counselor or nurse)
- Break large assignments into smaller, chunked tasks
- Create an environment in the classroom that is less likely to cause the child to have a reaction (e.g., think about the lighting, noise, clutter)
- When possible, prepare the child in advance for situations that may be challenging and provide additional support (e.g., active shooter and fire drills)
- Provide and teach task management strategies (National Child Traumatic Stress Network Schools Committee, 2008)

Crisis Text Line

Text “Native” to 741741

Crisis counselors are available 24/7 for confidential support and resources.

Other Crisis Lifelines

988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline

Dial 988

Strong Hearts: Native Helpline

Dial 1-844-7NATIVE (762-8483)

Trans Lifeline

Dial (877)565-8860

The Trevor LifeLine

Dial 1-866-488-7386



Traditional Music

Traditional music, singing, and drumming hold profound significance for AI/AN people as vessels for prayer, community and family connection practices, and healing tools when confronting trauma. These cultural practices serve several important purposes:

- **Cultural reconnection:** Boarding schools aimed to erase cultures, languages, and traditions. Traditional music offers a means to reconnect with cultural roots, fostering a sense of identity and belonging that was forcibly stripped away.
- **Spiritual healing:** These cultural practices often have deep spiritual significance. Drumming, for instance, is a practice used to communicate with the ancestors and the spirit world. Engaging in these activities can help individuals find inner peace and spiritual healing.
- **Community and support:** Traditional music and drumming are communal activities, fostering a sense of unity and support among survivors and their communities. Coming together in song and dance can create a supportive environment for sharing experiences and healing collectively.
- **Emotional expression:** Music and singing provide a means to express complex emotions that may be difficult to articulate otherwise. Music allows survivors and their descendants to release trauma in a safe and culturally relevant way.
- **Resilience and empowerment:** Engaging in these practices can be an act of resilience and empowerment by reclaiming and practicing the traditions that were meant to be erased by forced assimilation. It demonstrates the survival of AI/AN cultures despite centuries of oppression and serves as a source of strength for individuals and communities.

If drumming or traditional music groups are not accessible, try integrating traditional music from your local communities into your classroom, office, or medical practice.

Module 4

The Future



Impacts

The Impacts section of Module 4 expands upon the *Road to Healing* Reports and the powerful first step that has been taken in engaging with this history and addressing its continued influence in AI/AN populations. As the reports are released, the potential for re-traumatization as new stories emerge is high. Health care providers, tribal administrators, and educators should be prepared for potential influxes of community members in crisis.

“We have the capacity to heal if we have the right structure and supports.

We don’t have to hide it.”

—Aaron Payment, EdD, EdS, Med, MPA (Sault Tribe of Chippewa Indians)
(p.36)



Resilience and Brilliance

The Resilience and Brilliance of AI/AN peoples are detailed in this section of Module 4 in the form of three things:

- Language Revitalization
- Cultural Reclamation
- Traditional and Contemporary Art

Activities:

Reservation Dogs: Deer Lady – Discussion Guide Season 3: Episode 3

How to use this guide: The questions below are meant to serve as prompts, not a script. Please feel free to change the language to best suit the participants in your group. We also encourage you to follow the natural flow of the conversation and only bring in additional prompts when the discussion seems to be losing steam. Please be mindful of any stress or trauma reactions AI/AN participants may be experiencing. The goal of these discussions is to move from being trauma-informed to healing-centered.

“They can’t stop you from smiling.” – Deer Lady

Deer Lady

- What do you already know about the Deer Lady (or Deer Woman) legend?
- Why do you think the writers felt that Deer Lady should be in this episode?
- Why does Bear stay safe during his time with Deer Lady?
- Did Deer Lady’s actions right a wrong? Why or why not?

General Prompts

- What emotions came up for you while watching this episode?
- What stereotypes were confronted in this episode?
- What did you learn about the role of the priests and nuns at the boarding schools?
- Why did the priest tell Deer Lady that “Most men who live like me are dead by now?”
- What questions do you have after watching? Where can you look to get those questions answered?

Prompt for Discussions with AI/AN Peoples

- In what ways can this type of media help us heal?
- What are the benefits or risks of bringing these hard conversations to more mainstream audiences?

Frameworks for Healing

AI/AN tribal communities have long practiced community-based and traditional healing. Traditional practices and ceremonies are important sources of healing for many AI/AN people, despite the complex task of integrating them with modern practice. Frameworks for Healing is broken into three subsections:

- Traditional Medicine Approach to Healing: “By addressing the disconnection caused by removal and assimilation, these methods heal wounds Western medicine is only beginning to acknowledge even exist.” (p. 43)
- Trauma-Informed Leader: “While not all tribal leaders are expected to be experts in everything, all who have care and compassion for their communities stand to benefit from their understanding of trauma-informed care.” (p. 43)
- Practices for Self-Care: “Providers must have their needs met, too, if they are to serve AI/AN children and families.” (p.43)

Advocacy at the Community Level

Advocacy for the necessary systemic change occurs at every level, from the individual, to the neighborhood, to the community, to national initiatives such as the Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative, announced in 2021 by Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland. This section of Module 4 gives examples of how community leaders can incorporate Indian boarding school awareness into their community events, pass resolutions to honor victims and survivors, as well as creating spaces for healing within their communities.

“In the end, the only thing that is going to make the change is when we go back to our culture. In good community prevention plans, they all go back to whatever the culture is.”

– Anna Whiting- Sorrell, MPA (Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes) (p. 44)

What questions do you have?



To download the Tribal Boarding School Toolkit for Healing, please scan the QR code below.



Or visit

<https://www.npaihb.org/tribal-boarding-school-toolkit-for-healing/>

Thank you so much!