

## Response to the final report of the Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative and U.S. President Joe Biden's historic apology to Indigenous Peoples

This past fall, President Joe Biden delivered an historic apology on behalf of the United States for the nation's Federal Indian Boarding School Policy, the impact of which has been widely recognized as one of cultural genocide and intergenerational trauma. The apology came after the summer release of the completed investigative report of the Department of the Interior's Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative, which not only called for this formal apology from the federal government, but also issued other recommendations, including the establishment of a national memorial to acknowledge survivors and descendants, financial support for tribal programs that contribute to healing, and "bold and actionable policies" to accompany that apology.

In 2023, a group of collaborators produced a [List of Catholic-operated Native Boarding Schools](#). As members of that group, we recognize the presidential apology and the DOI report as important steps toward national truth-telling. Like many Native people and tribal nations, we see these actions as only a beginning in the necessary reparative work still to be done by the government and churches who operated these schools.

We are grateful for the work that the Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative accomplished: updating the official list of Federal Indian boarding schools, identifying by name and tribal identity over 18,000 Indian children who attended the schools; providing detailed profiles of each school; confirming the deaths of close to 1,000 Indian children while attending these boarding schools; and confirming the locations of at least 74 marked and unmarked burial sites.

At the same time, we are disappointed that the DOI appears to consider its research complete, when the report itself acknowledges that, due to a lack of records, their research does not accurately reflect the number of all children who attended Federal Indian boarding schools, the number of deaths of Indian children that occurred in the boarding school system, or the existence of marked and unmarked burial sites at the schools. In fact, the report likely woefully underrepresents the true number of deaths of children and existing burial sites.

Although the Initiative's recommendations do call for investment in research regarding the present-day health and economic impacts of the boarding school system, , this recommendation for further research does not extend to addressing these lacunae. We believe that much more research can and should be done - with the consultation and collaboration of tribal nations - in order to account for, honor, and when appropriate, bring home each student who died while in the custody of the schools.

As the Initiative report acknowledges, records from the archives of religious institutions will be essential for identifying these children and understanding the full scope of the boarding school program. This work may take years. We are committed to continuing to work with our own Catholic institutions to assist in this important process, and advocating for long-term efforts to address this painful legacy.