



RECOGNIZED VS. NON-RECOGNIZED: A FULLER UNDERSTANDING OF RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS IN CANADA

Introduction

When the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (IRSSA) was initially approved in 2006, 130 schools were recognized by the “All Parties to the IRSSA” (this grew to 139 schools through subsequent appeals). These “recognized residential schools”, as they have become more commonly known, were those schools that all parties to the IRSSA (Anglican Church of Canada, United Church of Canada, Catholic Orders within Canada, the federal government, and the Survivors) could agree on as having been funded by the federal government and operated within an agreed upon timeframe. Based on the IRSSA, the Mohawk Institute in Brantford, Ont., was recognized as the earliest residential school to operate in Canada, having opened in 1828.

The schools recognized in the IRSSA are a fraction of the total number of these institutions that operated in Canada for the purposes of colonization, religious conversion, and assimilation of Indigenous children. We may never know the full extent of this system, but we do know that there is much truth left to tell. When it comes to residential schools, there are many gray areas, and we can find a much expanded, nuanced, and complex history of residential schools. According to some of the top residential school researchers in the country, the scope and extent of residential schools are much bigger than initially recognized in the IRSSA.

Survivors, Indigenous communities, and researchers have known for decades that there have been many versions of residential schools over the centuries, where Indigenous children had similar experiences to those at residential schools that were recognized under the IRSSA. Residential schools were formally recognized through the IRSSA process, leaving thousands of survivors and their families unable to access compensation and have their experiences recognized as valid and legitimate.

Many of the schools that we now refer to as “non-IRSSA recognized residential schools” were excluded from the formal recognition process based on legal, colonial, and/or technical criteria of residential schools that were approved by the federal government. The first criteria was that the federal government (standing in for the Crown) was directly responsible for funding the identified school. The second was that the school operated during a period of time that would ensure there were still survivors of that school who were alive at the time of the negotiation of the IRSSA to claim compensation under the Common Experience Payment and the Independent Assessment Process.

However, taking into account the actual experiences of survivors and the basic definition of a residential school in Canada, 61 non-IRSSA recognized institutions have been identified as residential schools in the Paths to Reconciliation learning program. These schools have been plotted on an interactive map showing the location of each school. The legend for the map identifies seven categories that help to explain how these schools were funded and operated.



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Focus Questions

Why were there Indian Residential Schools in Canada and what is the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (IRSSA)? Why were certain residential schools recognized for compensation and support while others were not? How can we continue our own personal journeys of learning and educate others?

Time

60-90 minutes

Grade Level

9-12

Learning Goals

- Students will learn about residential schools in Canada
- Students will learn about the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement
- Students will think of ways in which they can support survivors or intergenerational survivors of residential schools

Materials

- Electronic devices with internet access
- Paper
- Writing utensils

Lesson Implementation

Minds on

Begin the lesson by familiarizing students with the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (IRSSA). Have your students work in small groups to research the IRSSA and to answer the following questions:

- How did the IRSSA come to be?
- Who were the parties (i.e., who was involved and/or included) in the IRSSA?
- Did the IRSSA recognize the experiences of all students who attended Indian Residential Schools? How do you know if they did or did not?
- How many Indian Residential Schools were recognized at the time that the IRSSA was finalized in 2007?

Encourage students to explore the following resources in their research:

- [Canadian Encyclopedia: Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement](#)
- [An Overview of the Indian Residential School System](#)
- [Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada: IRSSA](#)
- [Research Guide: Truth and Reconciliation Commission](#)

Gather students for a class discussion to review what they learned. Have students share any questions they may have and share them on the board. Explain to your students that they will be learning more about residential schools as there are many former institutions that are still not recognized as residential schools and are not part of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (IRSSA).

Action

In the next part of the lesson, explain to your students that since the earliest days of the IRSSA, survivors have been appealing the decisions related to schools that were excluded from the IRSSA. Only nine schools were successful in their appeal to be recognized under the IRSSA. Many survivor groups continued their appeal quest even after the deadlines set by the IRSSA expired and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada came to a close. The TRC Call to Action 29 states: "We call upon the parties and, in particular, the federal government, to work collaboratively with plaintiffs not included in the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement to have disputed legal issues determined expeditiously on an agreed set of facts."

Share the website Call to Action # 29: Actions and Commitments: Settlements for Parties Excluded from the IRSSA with students and give them time to explore and draw their own conclusions. Then gather students together for a class discussion based on the following questions:



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Connection to the Canadian Geography Framework

Concepts of Geographic Thinking

- Patterns and trends
- Spatial significance
- Interrelationships
- Geographic perspective

Inquiry Process

- Interpret and analyze
- Evaluate and draw conclusions
- Communicate
- Reflect and respond

Geospatial Skills

- Spatial representations

1. What do you notice about the dates of the listed appeals?
2. What are some of the recurring themes and categories of excluded schools that you see in the list?
3. Why do you think the government allowed certain schools and not others?
4. Did the government ever concede to allow Indian Day Schools to be recognized under the IRSSA? If so, why? If not, what avenue did day school students pursue for recognition and compensation?

Ask your students to go to the [Paths to Reconciliation website](#) and choose one non-IRSSA recognized residential school. Have students work together in small groups to review the website [Applications and Canada's decision under Article 12](#) and conduct research to find out why the government of Canada has not recognized their selected school under the IRSSA. Next, ask students to write a shot proposal, based on their research, for why these schools should be recognized under the IRSSA. Have students present their findings and ask the rest of the class for their perspective.

Conclusion and Consolidation

Invite students to brainstorm together ways that they might play a role in supporting survivors or intergenerational survivors of residential schools as part of working towards reconciliation. Write a list on the board of your students' answers.

Once students have generated ideas, have them take action to implement their ideas. Examples might include creating a communication platform, writing to the school board to request the creation of a locally developed course on residential schools and colonialism in Canada, or presenting information sessions to community services outside of the school.

Explain to your students that to this day, many Indigenous families have direct or indirect connections to the legacy of residential schools. The way we view, treat, and support one another within our education systems has the potential to help create a more understanding and positive future across this country. Building mutual respect and understanding can potentially lead to changes in our systems across the land, including our legal system and the way it views the legitimacy of some residential schools in comparison to others.

Extensions

- Students can research the appeal processes in the early days of the IRSSA to find the names and stories of the nine schools recognized as a result of survivors' appeals.
- Students can research the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.
- Students can research the Resolution Health Support program related to residential schools.



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Modifications

- For younger grades, students can have a conversation about equality. Discuss what the term means and how students feel about it when applied to a person's lived experience and how equality is valued, acknowledged, and respected. The understanding of what is fair or unfair is universally felt, especially by young children.
- Students can conduct their research in groups instead of individually.
- Students can write down their answers instead of having class discussions.

Assessment Opportunities

- Teachers can assess students' participation in the class discussions.
- Teachers can assess students' small group activities.
- Teachers can assess students' research on residential schools.

Sources and additional resources

- [Applications and Canada's decision under Article 12](#)
- [An Overview of the Indian Residential School System](#)
- [Call to Action # 29: Actions and Commitments: Settlements for Parties Excluded from the IRSSA](#)
- [Canadian Encyclopedia: Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement](#)
- [Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada: IRSSA](#)
- [Research Guide: Truth and Reconciliation Commission](#)