

# OneFAB

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Recent Indian Boarding School Education and Investigation Initiatives

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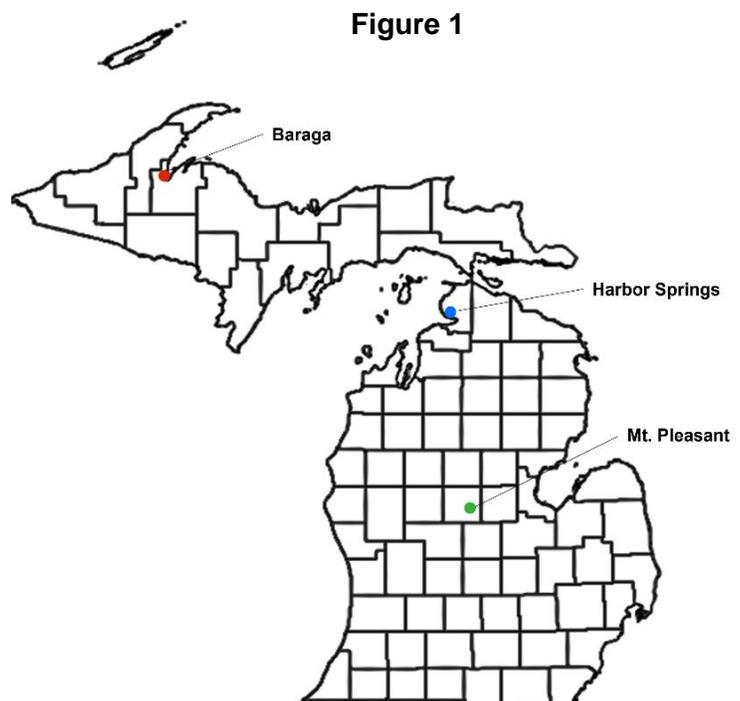
In May 2021, the Tk'emlúps te Secwepemc First Nation of Canada announced that researchers had located over two hundred underground anomalies characterized as possible grave sites near a former residential school for First Nation members in British Columbia. As of October 2023, no excavations have been conducted to confirm whether these anomalies contain any human remains. However, this revelation and similar findings generated significant news coverage that instigated an announcement by the United States Department of the Interior of its intent to investigate the history of neglect and abuse at Federal Indian boarding schools in the United States.<sup>1</sup>

Known as the Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative, this effort resulted in a report published in 2022 describing the establishment of more than 400 schools that operated for 150 years between 1819 and 1969. It also details the Federal policies and practices that separated Indian children from their families and birth cultures. The authors state that there were systemic attempts to discourage Native cultural beliefs, practices, languages, and social structures. The report found that incidents of neglect and abuse were a consistent feature of the boarding school system, rather than aberrations.

Although the Initiative was directly spurred by the findings in Canada, Indian representatives, activists, and historians in the United States have advocated for greater recognition of the civil rights violations and cultural suppression for many years. In Michigan, recent changes to boilerplate language in appropriations bills have attempted to address the history of the State's own Indian boarding schools and the experiences of its students. This paper gives a brief overview of these new undertakings, enacted as part of the appropriations budget process rather than amendments to Michigan Compiled Law.<sup>2</sup>

## Indian Boarding Schools in Michigan

Three major Indian boarding schools operated in Michigan.<sup>3</sup> As seen in Figure 1, these include: the Holy Childhood of Jesus in Harbor Springs in Emmet County; the Holy Name of Jesus Indian Mission in Baraga in Baraga County; and the Indian Industrial Boarding School in Mt. Pleasant in Isabella County. The Mt. Pleasant school was among Federal schools established by an 1891 act of Congress;<sup>4</sup> it closed in 1934. The Harbor Springs school was originally established as a church and school at the request of tribal members. Beginning in 1884, it was operated by religious societies and became part of the larger Federal system. It operated from 1829 to 1839 and again from 1884 to 1983. It was no longer receiving government funds as of



the 1920s.<sup>5</sup> The Baraga school was founded as a mission by Father Frederic Baraga. It existed as a mission from 1844 to 1957 and as a boarding school from 1843 to 1954.<sup>6</sup>

## **Department of Education**

Article 3 of Public Act (PA) 119 of 2023 appropriated \$750,000 in General Fund/General Purpose (GF/GP) funding for the Department of Education to work with the Michigan Tribal Education Department to develop and implement professional learning curriculum modules for teachers. The modules address Michigan indigenous tribal history and explicitly include the history of Indian boarding schools in Michigan as one of the subjects covered. This training would support educators' teaching of the Core Curriculum that already includes standards related to Michigan indigenous tribal history for grades 8 through 12. These funds were included in the Michigan Core Curriculum line item.

## **Department of Civil Rights**

Public Act 166 of 2022 appropriated \$500,000 in GF/GP funding for a Native American Boarding School Study. The accompanying boilerplate language, Section 421 of Article 5, requires the study to research the long-term impacts on the children and families of Michigan boarding schools and their consequences, including family separation and illness. The study also must include the actual numbers of individuals who were forced to attend the schools and how many experienced abuse or neglect, died, or are missing.

In addition, the language specifies that research materials, such as historical records, should be preserved. The study will include interviews with students and their families, experts, and tribal representatives. The due date for the report is January 30, 2025. An additional \$750,000 GF/GP was included for study activities in the fiscal year 2022-23 supplemental portion of PA 119 of 2023, Article 16. The study has a deadline of January 30, 2024, and will include recommendations related to the boarding schools and their effects on students, their families, and communities.

## **Conclusion**

As the new study will include recommendations on future private and State activities related to Indian boarding schools and their consequences, it is possible that additional actions on this issue may be undertaken following its publication and consideration. Public Act 119 of 2023 also included Section 406 in the boilerplate language for the Department of Civil Rights. Section 406 requires a "status update report" on the progress and expenditures of the study. No specific funds were appropriated for this purpose. The report is due October 31, 2023.

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<sup>1</sup> There is some disagreement over the appropriate English term to encompass the indigenous nations, tribes, and cultures of the area that is now the United States; this paper uses the term "Indian" because that term is used by the Federal government.

<sup>2</sup> Senate Bill 876 of 2022 contained language strongly recommending that the State Board of Education ensure that curriculum standards for grades 8 to 12 address Indian boarding schools. The bill also included language stating that it was the intent of the Legislature to recognize cases of separation, abuse, neglect, and death of Indigenous children at these institutions.

<sup>3</sup> Van Buren, April, "Stateside Podcast: The painful legacy of Michigan's Native boarding schools", Michigan Radio, 6-1-22.

<sup>4</sup> "Timeline - Mt. Pleasant Indian Industrial Boarding School", Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe. Retrieved on 9-19-23.

<sup>5</sup> Rickert, Levi, "Michigan Stop on Road to Healing Tour Expected to Draw 500 to Share Their Boarding School Experiences", *Native News Online*, 8-12-22.

<sup>6</sup> "Guide to Catholic-Related Records in the Midwest about Native Americans: Volume 2: Midwest United States, Michigan: MI-23", Repository Entry, Marquette University Raynor Memorial Libraries Archives. Retrieved on 9-19-23.