



EXECUTIVE ORDER # 136

**Relating to a Formal Apology for Wisconsin's History of
Indian Boarding Schools and a Declaration of Support for Federal
Investigations into the Same**

WHEREAS, Wisconsin is home to eleven federally-recognized Native Nations and one federally unrecognized nation, including Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, Forest County Potawatomi, Ho-Chunk Nation, Lac Courte Oreilles Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians, Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin, Oneida Nation of Wisconsin, Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa; Sokaogon Chippewa Community Mole Lake Band of Lake Superior Chippewa; St Croix Chippewa Tribe of Wisconsin, Stockbridge-Munsee Mohican Tribe, and Brothertown Indian Nation;

WHEREAS, the State of Wisconsin, through this Order and Executive Orders 18 and 50, reaffirms and recognizes the sovereignty of Wisconsin's Native Nations and the culturally and historically significant contributions of Indigenous peoples;

WHEREAS, for over a century, between the 1860s and 1970s, the United States government induced and coerced thousands of Native American children from their families and their homes and placed them into boarding schools operated by the federal government and religious organizations;

WHEREAS, Indian boarding schools sought to force assimilation of Native American children by isolating them from their cultural identities, punishing them for speaking their native language or practicing their traditions, prohibiting them from wearing traditional clothing, and requiring children to cut their hair;

WHEREAS, lack of documentation presents challenges for understanding the full scope and effects of boarding schools in Wisconsin and across our country, but identifying and collecting relevant, available information is an essential step in acknowledging this history and moving forward with truth and healing;

WHEREAS, records do indicate that, in Wisconsin, at least ten day and boarding schools were operated by the federal government and religious organizations, and thousands of Indian children are estimated to have been forced to attend day and boarding schools;

WHEREAS, it is also estimated hundreds of Indian children from Wisconsin were also forced to attend out-of-state boarding schools in places like Pennsylvania, South Dakota, and Virginia;

WHEREAS, conditions in Indian boarding schools were condemned by investigators in 1928 as “grossly inadequate” and in 1969 as “sterile, impersonal and rigid, with a major focus on discipline and punishment”;

WHEREAS, by 1926, nearly 83% of Indian school-age children were attending boarding schools in the United States, but because the majority of the schools’ records have been lost or destroyed, a full understanding of the Indian boarding school policy and its impact is unknown;

WHEREAS, through independent research, the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition has located records for only 38% of the 367 Indian boarding schools they found to operate between 1870-1970;

WHEREAS, on June 22, 2021, U.S. Department of the Interior Secretary Deb Haaland announced a Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative consisting of “a comprehensive review of the troubled legacy of federal boarding school policies”;

WHEREAS, the historical trauma inflicted upon Native American children, families, and communities by the federal government via Indian boarding schools resulted in a loss of language, culture, and identity, the effects of which have likely contributed to disparities in health, education, and economic well-being;

WHEREAS, despite the trauma Indian boarding school policies had on Native American communities, along with other acts of assimilation and systemic racism, Wisconsin’s Native Nations are still rich in culture and essential to the success of the state; and

WHEREAS, while it was the federal government who implemented, directed, or operated these boarding school initiatives and policies, we all bear responsibility for acknowledging the atrocities inflicted on Tribal Nations, and in pursuit of a more just and equitable coexistence, have a moral responsibility to reflect on our nation’s history, particularly past circumstances when we failed to live up to our highest ideals.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, TONY EVERS, Governor of the State of Wisconsin, by the authority vested in me by the Constitution and the Laws of the State, hereby:

1. Formally recognize and apologize for the tragedies inflicted upon Native American communities through the former federal Indian boarding school policies.
2. Commit to supporting the Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative by welcoming the U.S. Department of Interior to conduct research and investigate the boarding schools that once operated in Wisconsin.
3. Formally request that all investigatory efforts by the federal government be undertaken in consultation with Wisconsin’s Native Nations.
4. Renew the state’s commitment to promoting the well-being and growth of Wisconsin’s Native American communities.
5. Reaffirm the second Monday in October to be Indigenous Peoples Day in Wisconsin and encourage state businesses, organizations, institutions, governments, and citizens to recognize and celebrate Indigenous peoples, cultivate strong relationships with Wisconsin’s Tribal Nations, and in service to healing, encourage Wisconsinites to prioritize learning about the history of Tribal Nations in our state.

IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the Great seal of the State of Wisconsin to be affixed. Done at the Oneida Tribe Norbert Hill Center on the land of the Oneida Nation this 11th day of October in the year of two thousand twenty-one.

TONY EVERS
Governor

By the Governor:

DOUGLAS LA FOLLETTE
Secretary of State