

FNMI FAQ

What does FNMI stand for?

FNMI stands for First Nations, Métis and Inuit. This is how the Alberta government refers to the different groups of Indigenous people in Alberta. Section 35 (2) of the 1982 Canadian Constitution Act recognizes "Aboriginal peoples of Canada" to include the Indian (First Nations), Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada. Today, the term Indigenous has replaced Aboriginal as the preferred term.

What does Indigenous mean?

In 2015, the federal government changed to Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) from the previous Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. The federal government's move signified a shift towards embracing the term Indigenous and all of its legal ramifications.

Indigenous is a word that has come into widespread use through the recognition that those people who are the original inhabitants of a place, and who have been marginalized by ethnic groups who arrived later, have much in common with other peoples worldwide with the same experience.

Is it appropriate to use the term "Indian"?

A collective noun for the original inhabitants of Canada, this term has been a challenge ever since Christopher Columbus arrived in 1492. Believing he had landed in India, it followed that the existing population would be referred to as "Indians". Despite it being blatantly incorrect, it became the de facto collective noun.

Usage of the word "Indian" in Canada is significantly decreasing due to its incorrect origin and connections to colonizer policies and departments such as the Indian Act, the Indian Department (precursor to INAC), Indian Agent, Indian residential schools etc. Some communities continue to use Indian in their tribal name - Osoyoos Indian Band is an example. "Native" was also formerly a common term, but both terms "Indian" and "Native" are now rarely used in respectful conversations.

Joseph, B. (2016). Indigenous or Aboriginal: Which is correct? Retrieved from:

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/indigenous-aboriginal-which-is-correct-1.3771433>

Why is there a focus on First Nations, Métis and Inuit education in BTPS?

In Alberta, school boards have are required to include a focus on First Nations, Métis and Inuit education in their Three Year Education Plan. One of the key strategies from the Alberta Education Business Plan is, "Ensure all students, teachers, and system leaders learn about First Nations, Métis and Inuit perspectives and experiences, treaties, and the history and legacy of residential schools." One of the reasons for this focus is because there is a large gap between the achievement of Indigenous students and non-Indigenous students. For example, on provincial achievement tests in Alberta, First Nations, Métis and Inuit students are only achieving at 52%. The province and all school boards in Alberta are trying to improve the achievement of First Nations, Métis and Inuit students because, generally speaking, they are not doing nearly as well in school as their non-Aboriginal peers.

Why do non-Indigenous students have to learn about First Nations, Métis and Inuit culture?

In Alberta, all schools must provide a safe and caring learning environment that recognizes diversity and promotes respect. An important part of this is making sure that all of our students no matter their race, class, gender, physical abilities, etc. feel included at school and are given the chance to maximize their learning. Learning about Indigenous culture is an important part of appreciating this diversity and promoting respect.

What are students and school staffs learning about First Nations, Métis and Inuit culture?

They are learning about three main areas:

- Treaties
- Cultural awareness and understanding of First Nations, Métis and Inuit people, languages and cultures
- Residential schools and the impacts they had and continue to have on Indigenous people and their communities

What is a treaty?

Treaties between the government of Canada (the Crown) and Indigenous people are still, in 2017, legally and constitutionally protected agreements.

The Numbered Treaties are a series of eleven treaties signed between Indigenous Peoples in Canada and the reigning monarch of Canada at the time, between the years 1871 - 1921. Treaties provided benefits to both sides, the government and Indigenous people. Treaties were created to allow the Canadian Government to pursue settlement and resource extraction throughout modern day Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, Ontario, Saskatchewan, and the Northwest Territories. These treaties provided the Dominion of Canada with large tracts of land for settlements, railways, farming and future industrial development.

Specific terms differed with each treaty, but in exchange for these large areas of land, the treaties provided Indigenous Peoples with such things as reserve lands, benefits like farm equipment and animals, annual payments, ammunition, clothing and rights to hunt and fish etc.

How many treaties are there in Alberta and which Treaty area does Buffalo Trail Public Schools belong to?

There are 3 treaty areas in Alberta, Treaty 6 (signed in 1876), Treaty 7 (signed in 1877), and Treaty 8 (signed in 1899). In addition, Alberta also has 6 regional zones of the MNA (Métis Nations of Alberta) and 8 Métis Settlements. All of BTPS falls within Treaty 6 territory.



Why are we doing treaty recognitions at school and district events?

Treaty recognitions are part of the work on the provincial and district First Nations, Métis and Inuit goal. Treaty recognitions are an act of respect and reconciliation, to support the recommendations put forth by the federal Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015). They also recognize the history of Alberta (and Canada) prior to European colonization.

What happened to the treaties?

The numbered treaties (1-11) still exist today. While the Government of Canada has broken many of the terms of the treaties through the implementation of the Indian Act, and other government initiatives such as residential

schools, the treaties, as legally binding documents between two independent nations (First Nations and the Government of Canada) still exist.

What are residential schools?

The Canadian government developed an “aggressive assimilation” policy which it enforced at church run “residential schools.” Agents made sure all Indigenous children attended. “Throughout the years, students lived in substandard conditions and endured physical and emotional abuse. There have also been convictions of sexual abuse. Students at residential schools rarely had opportunities to see examples of normal family life. Most were in school 10 months a year, away from their parents; some stayed all year round. All correspondence from the children was written in English, which many parents couldn't read. Brothers and sisters at the same school rarely saw each other, as all activities were segregated by gender.”

CBC News. (2008). A History of Residential Schools in Canada. Retrieved from: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/a-history-of-residential-schools-in-canada-1.702280>

When did the last residential school close?

The last federally operated residential school was closed in Saskatchewan in 1996.

What impact did residential schools have on Indigenous people?

The policy behind the government funded, church-run residential schools was to “kill the Indian in the child” (Truth and Reconciliation. (2016). Retrieved from: <http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=39>). More than 150,000 First Nations, Métis and Inuit children were taken from their families and placed in these schools. Today, there are an estimated 80,000 former students still living.

When students returned to the reserve, they often found they didn't belong. They didn't have the skills to help their parents, and became ashamed of their heritage. The skills taught at the schools were generally substandard; many found it hard to function in an urban setting. The aims of assimilation meant devastation for those who were subjected to years of abuse.

While some former students had positive experiences at residential schools, many suffered emotional, physical and sexual abuse, and others died while attending these schools. The unresolved trauma suffered by former students has been passed on from generation to generation.

CBC News. (2008). A History of Residential Schools in Canada. Retrieved from: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/a-history-of-residential-schools-in-canada-1.702280>

What is intergenerational trauma?

Trauma can be a one-time event or a series of ongoing experiences over the lifespan of an individual, as well as across generations. Examples include life-threatening situations, such as: car accidents, fire, physical violence, threats or fear of harm to, or loss of, one's children or family members. It includes sexual abuse, separation from

family and/or community, war, extreme poverty, deprivation and chronic neglect, as well as racism, genocide and other forms of oppression.

The Aboriginal Healing Foundation Research Series. (2005). *Reclaiming Connections: Understanding Residential School Trauma among Aboriginal People*, pg. 49. Retrieved from: <http://www.ahf.ca/downloads/healing-trauma-web-eng.pdf>

Today, brain science helps us to understand the long lasting impacts of trauma on children's brain developments. Adverse Childhood Experiences, referred to as ACEs, were experienced by many residential school survivors. Harvard researchers discovered that the toxic stress of being exposed to chronic and severe trauma, can severely damage a child's developing brain. Exposure to 4 or more of the ACE indicators (things such as recurrent physical abuse, recurrent emotional abuse, sexual abuse, a mother who is treated violently, parental loss, or emotional or physical neglect) creates toxic stress and puts children at substantially higher risk of many diseases, suicide, violent behavior, or being a victim of violence. Unfortunately, many residential school survivors experienced some, if not all of the ACE factors, and so today, we continue to see an increased risk of high ACE scores across intergenerational Indigenous populations.

Alberta Family Wellness Initiative. (2016). Adverse Childhood Experiences: A measurement tool for public health practitioners and clinicians. Retrieved from: <http://www.albertafamilywellness.org/what-we-know/aces>