

It was not uncommon for the parents of an entire community or region to refuse to return their children to school. In the fall of 1926, for example, parents from communities in Manitoba's Interlake region announced they were not sending their children back to the Elkhorn school. According to the parents, the children were not well fed, the older boys compelled the younger boys to steal, and all children were poorly clothed.⁵²³ In October 1927, seventy-five school-aged children from the Blood Reserve in Alberta either had not returned to school or had not been enrolled in school. It took a letter from the police, plus a follow-up visit from the Indian agent, to fill the Anglican and Catholic schools on the reserve.⁵²⁴ Two weeks after the start of the 1940 school year, fifty-four students had yet to return to the Fraser Lake, British Columbia, school. The police were called in, and by October 2, twenty-five of the students had been returned.⁵²⁵ This form of parental action was common throughout the 1940s.⁵²⁶

Parents were eager to have their children properly educated, and often proposed realistic and effective solutions. In 1905, parents of children attending the Roman Catholic boarding school in Squamish, British Columbia, petitioned to have the school converted into an industrial school. The request was not granted, despite the fact that Indian Affairs officials recognized that the boarding school grant allowed for only "the bare necessities in the line of food and clothing."⁵²⁷

Some First Nations leaders who had originally supported residential schools later publicly regretted their decision. Chief Napahkesit of the Pine Creek Band in Manitoba said in 1917 that he was sorry he had ever supported the construction of the Pine Creek school. According to the local Indian agent, the chief felt "the children know less when they come out than they did when they went in." What was needed, the chief said, was a day school.⁵²⁸ Calls for day schools were, in fact, a common parental request.⁵²⁹ A 1949 call from parents for a day school at the Cowessess Reserve eventually proved to be successful.⁵³⁰

Parents might also demand the dismissal of a principal.⁵³¹ In 1917, to back up their call for the resignation of the Shoal Lake school principal, parents refused to return their children to the school.⁵³² In this case, the principal did resign.⁵³³ The parents of the Kahkewistahaw Band unsuccessfully petitioned the federal government to remove a teacher from the Round Lake, Saskatchewan, school in July 1949. They said that "the children's report cards are very unsatisfactory, worst ever received, and she abuses the children too much."⁵³⁴ Parents also complained that their children were not learning the skills they needed to survive. Chief Kejick of the Shoal Lake Band told Indian Affairs officials in 1928 that the students from his reserve "did not know how to make a living when they left school and would like trades taught."⁵³⁵ Eight years later, Charlie Shingoose of the Waywayseecappo Band sought to have his fifteen-year-old son discharged from the Birtle school so he could teach him to "work, trap, etc."⁵³⁶

Parents also hired lawyers to press their cases for investigations into the deaths of children who had run away, to complain about the harshness of discipline, to advocate on