

need during their childhood and adolescence. This failure applied to all students, but was of particular significance in the case of the growing number of social-welfare placements in the schools.¹⁷⁰ Some children had to stay in the schools year-round because it was thought there was no safe home to which they could return. The residential school environment was not a safer or more loving haven. These children spent their entire childhoods in an institution.

The closure of residential schools, which commenced in earnest in 1970, was accompanied by a significant increase in the number of children being taken into care by child-welfare agencies.¹⁷¹ By the end of the 1970s, the transfer of children from residential schools was nearly complete in southern Canada, and the impact of the Sixties Scoop was in evidence across the country. In 1977, Aboriginal children accounted for 44% of the children in care in Alberta, 51% of the children in care in Saskatchewan, and 60% of the children in care in Manitoba.¹⁷² In those residences that remained in operation, the percentage of social-welfare cases remained high.¹⁷³

The road to closure, 1969

In 1968, the federal government drastically restructured the residential school system by dividing the schools into residences and day schools, each with a principal or administrator.¹⁷⁴ In June of the following year, the federal government took direct control over all the schools in southern Canada.¹⁷⁵ Because churches were allowed to continue to appoint the residence administrators, their presence continued in many schools in the coming years. They were, however, no longer directly responsible for the facilities.¹⁷⁶ In 1969, the federal government also began to transfer the hostels and day schools in the Yukon and Northwest Territories to their respective territorial governments. Most of the small hostels in the eastern Arctic and Nunavik (Arctic Québec) were closed by the end of 1971. (Four small hostels were also operated in the western and central Arctic. The last of these, located at Cambridge Bay, did not close until the late 1990s.)¹⁷⁷

Having assumed control over the southern Canadian schools in 1969, the federal government commenced what would prove to be a protracted process of closing the system down. According to the Indian Affairs annual report for 1968–69, the department was responsible for sixty residences. Two years later, the number was down to forty-five.¹⁷⁸ The government takeover of the residential schools also coincided with the release of the federal government's White Paper on "Indian Policy." This document proposed a massive transfer of responsibility for First Nations people from the federal to provincial governments.¹⁷⁹ It called for the repeal of the *Indian Act*, the winding up of the Department of Indian Affairs, and the eventual extinguishment of the Treaties.¹⁸⁰ The recently formed National Indian Brotherhood (NIB) described the White Paper as a document intended to bring about "the destruction of a Nation of People by legislation and cultural genocide."¹⁸¹