



Boys cutting wood at the Williams Lake, British Columbia, school in either the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. In February 1902 Duncan Sticks froze to death after running away from the school. Museum of the Cariboo Chilcotin.

informing police or Indian Affairs.⁵⁴⁹ The boys were never found—community members continued to search for their remains decades after their disappearance.⁵⁵⁰

These deaths date back to the beginning of the twentieth century. However, the first system-wide policy outlining the procedures to be taken when a child ran away from school that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada has located in the documents it has reviewed dates from 1953. This was seventy-five years after the government began its residential school system. That policy simply stated, “The principal shall take prompt action to effect the return to school of any truant pupil, and shall report promptly to the Superintendent, Indian Agency, every case of truancy.”⁵⁵¹ The nature of the prompt action was undefined. In particular, there was no requirement to contact either the child’s parents or the police. It was not until 1971 that a more encompassing, nation-wide, policy was announced.⁵⁵²

In pursuing children to their parents’ homes, the actions of school employees could be both invasive and disrespectful.⁵⁵³ In the town of Lebret, Saskatchewan, “all the houses were checked” by the police as part of a search for two runaways from the File Hills school in 1935.⁵⁵⁴

Running away was not in itself a crime. However, most students were wearing school-issued clothing when they ran away, and, in some cases, principals tried, and even succeeded, in having them prosecuted for stealing the clothing they were wearing.⁵⁵⁵ Students