

In its response, the NIB proposed “Indian Control of Indian Education.”¹⁸² In 1971, Indian Affairs Minister Jean Chrétien announced that, in the face of First Nations resistance, the federal government was abandoning the policy directions outlined in the White Paper.¹⁸³

By then, First Nations communities had already taken over one residential school. In the summer of 1970, parents of children at the Blue Quills, Alberta, school occupied the school, demanding that its operation be turned over to a First Nations education authority. They took this measure in response to reports that the school was to be turned into a residence and their children were to be educated at a nearby public school. The Blue Quills conflict was the result of both long-standing local dissatisfaction with the administration of the school and First Nations opposition to the policy of integration.¹⁸⁴ It was estimated that over 1,000 people participated in the sit-in, with rarely fewer than 200 people being at the school on any given day.¹⁸⁵ Seventeen days after the sit-in commenced, Minister Jean Chrétien announced that the school would be transferred to the Blue Quills Native Education Council.¹⁸⁶ In coming years, the Qu’Appelle, Prince Albert, Duck Lake, Lestock, and Grayson facilities in Saskatchewan were also taken over by First Nations authorities. The Christie residence in Tofino, British Columbia, was also operated briefly by an Aboriginal authority.¹⁸⁷

The federal government, however, remained committed to the closing of the facilities. Because of the government’s lengthy history of underfunding residential schools, many of the schools were in poor repair. Between 1995 and 1998, the last seven residences in southern Canada were closed.¹⁸⁸

Starting in the 1970s, territorial governments, in which former residential school students were serving as cabinet ministers, also began expanding the number of day schools as part of a campaign to close residential schools in the North. The last large hostel in the Yukon closed in 1985.¹⁸⁹ By 1986, there were only three large hostels operating in the Northwest Territories.¹⁹⁰ Grolier Hall, the last large hostel in the North, closed in 1997.¹⁹¹ If one dates the residential school system back to the early 1830s, when the Mohawk Institute first took in boarders, the system had been in operation for over 160 years. The closing of the schools did not mark the end of the history of residential schooling in Canada. By the 1990s, former students had begun to make Canadians aware of the tremendous harm that the residential school experience had caused to Aboriginal people and Aboriginal communities.