

Questions from Rep. Grijalva for Dr. Ramona Charette Klein, Boarding School Survivor, Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians

Your testimony notes that, despite your experiences with education at the boarding school, you became an educator later in life.

1. Can you elaborate on how your life story has impacted your work as an educator?

Rep Raul Grijalva, Thank you for your question.

As an educator, I consistently tried to be empathic to all of my students but especially those students who needed to be cared about and those students who had difficulty learning academically or socially. Early on in my career, I knew that I wasn't prepared to teach students with disabilities, yet I had students with disabilities in my classrooms therefore, I decided that I needed to gain skills so that I could teach all students. I went on to graduate school and earned a master of education in special education. Later, I went on to earn a doctorate in education leadership so I can gain skills to help make decisions to provide the best possible education for all students.

It was always my philosophy that all students can learn and educators had to find a way to teach so the students were able to learn. It is also my philosophy that it is extremely important to take time to establish a positive relationship with students from day one of the school session. I have found when a student has a positive relationship with educators, they are more likely to feel emotionally safe and learning is more likely to take place.

I have had the privilege of teaching and advising students in kindergarten through graduate school. I am pleased to share that I still have contact with some students from all of those levels. I continue to encourage and mentor people who seek me out. Just this week I have written recommendations for three people applying for graduate studies. I have been serving in education for over fifty years and I will continue to serve as long as I am able.

I believe that my life story has given me insight, sensitivity, compassion and humor and to be a lifelong learner with heart to work at being present when working with people.

Questions from Rep. Leger Fernández for Dr. Ramona Charette Klein, Boarding School Survivor, Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians

1. Your testimony mentions that your experiences at the boarding school made you hesitant to trust others with your story. I want to thank you for sharing your story with us today and your willingness to be here.

a. How can Congress help to address the trauma that boarding schools inflicted on individuals such as yourself?

What resources would you like to see?

2. While you were at the boarding school, were you able to connect with other students to speak about your shared experiences?

a. What about later in life

Rep Teresa Leger Fernandes, Thank you for your questions.

Congress can help to address the trauma that boarding schools inflicted on individuals by providing families and researchers access to records of the children who attended boarding schools. I believe this is very important so that families have the opportunity to get closure in the cases of children who never returned home.

I also believe that it is important to have a 24-hour national help line for survivors and family members to call for help as memories and flashbacks may arise from hearing others' stories of attending boarding school.

It will be very helpful to create educational materials to educate all people about the boarding schools and its impact on not only those of us who attended the schools but the generational trauma that resulted from that experience. It never ceases to amaze me how many people do not know that children were forcibly taken from their families and separated for years or life. It will be important to have funding to develop curriculum to be included in all levels of education.

I did not connect with other students about the shared experience; when I reflect back on that time in my life, the treatment at the boarding school became normalized. However, three of the four of my brothers who attended Ft. Totten Boarding School, ran away from the school in the dead of winter. I believe my brothers ran away from what was not normal treatment. All of my brothers are now deceased and we didn't talk about the school experience before they died. I am just beginning to talk about the experience at boarding school. Most of the children I went to school with at Ft. Totten Boarding School are deceased. I think the last of the girls, who shared the same dorm room, passed away this past year.

