

First Nation students death inquest: 5 questions it may answer

Inquest will examine circumstances of deaths, policies and programs that could have prevented them

By Jody Porter, [CBC News](#) Posted: Oct 06, 2015 7:00 AM ET Last Updated: Oct 06, 2015 7:00 AM ET

An inquest into the deaths of seven First Nations students who died while attending school in Thunder Bay, Ont., will hear months of evidence aimed at preventing other youth from dying in similar circumstances.

The first task of the five inquest jurors — four women and one man — is to determine the circumstances under which each of the seven young people died.

All of the students, aged 15 through 21, were from remote communities in Northern Ontario and had come to the city to attend high school. They died between 2000 and 2011. Their deaths have never been fully examined.

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- [Ontario calls joint inquest in aboriginal student deaths](#)
- [Coroner rules on scope of First Nation student death inquest](#)

A secondary task for the jurors, that is common, but not mandatory at inquests, is to make recommendations directed at preventing future deaths.

Here are five questions the inquest may answer based on the anticipated areas of evidence:

- **1. How do students from remote communities become eligible for school in Thunder Bay?**
- **2. What are the policies, procedures, qualifications and training of boarding home parents and supervisors?**
- **3. How well do police, boarding parents, First Nations high schools and families respond to reports of missing students?**
- **4. What programs are available to prevent the deaths of First Nations students?**
- **5. What obstacles and challenges were faced by the students who died, both in their home communities and in Thunder Bay? (This can include instances of discrimination and alcohol and substance abuse).**

The inquest jurors are also expected to hear contextual evidence about current models of funding and delivering high school education for First Nations students, and the history of the residential school system.

The inquest is expected to last at least six months and will be broken into three phases.

Phase one includes evidence about the circumstances of each death and will likely last until a Christmas break. Phase two will start in the new year and deal with the evidence related to policy and context. Phase three will provide information for jurors on potential recommendations.

[Proceedings got off to a rocky start on Monday when court officials scheduled the inquest in a room that was too small to accommodate all of the family members who wished to attend.](#)

A bigger courtroom was expected to be made available on Tuesday.

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