

## EDITORIAL

“Long ago, when the elders gave lectures, they had knives on the ground: ‘Use this if I get you mad.’ That’s what the young people listened to before the coming of the white man.”

William Paddy, (78 years old)  
Thunderchild Reserve

### P.I.C.S.S.

For two years, I have been an educational and communication advisor to the Plains Indian Cultural Survival School (P.I.C.S.S.) - an Alternative School in Calgary, Alberta designed to accommodate native students living in or around Calgary. Two questions worth answering are: What makes this school different, and will it survive?

With funding from government and private sources, the Plains Indian Cultural Survival School has become Canada’s first Indian initiated and controlled educational program for grades 7 - 12 in an urban centre. Benefitting from the support of the Metis and Indian Associations of Alberta, P.I.C.S.S. offers a full program of accredited Academic and Indian Culture courses leading to an Alberta High School Diploma. Each week P.I.C.S.S. has a class on legends, old medicines, hand sign language, and other topics conducted by Indian elders. It has a wilderness survival camp twice a year on one of the Reserves in the Calgary area. While teaching the languages of the Cree, Blackfoot, and Sarcee, P.I.C.S.S. also provides training and practice in Indian skills. The students come from all over Western Canada, but most are from Southern Alberta. The program aims primarily at native students who have dropped out of school or have difficulties with the regular school programs. P.I.C.S.S. encourages in native students a feeling of worthwhileness, Indian identity, and high self-esteem. Focusing on Indian heritage and culture, P.I.C.S.S. explores Indian and Canadian values and needs. Providing personal life skills, the school helps students become competent and independent within the community.

Although many find such a school interesting, they question the need for it, until they learn that over 90% of Indian children will never graduate from high school. In fact, by grade 9, about 80% of all Indian students have already dropped out. In June of 1978, the Trustees of the Calgary Board of Education passed the P.I.C.S.S. proposal. After months of negotiations, the Plains Indian Cultural Survival School came to life. On February 1, 1979, P.I.C.S.S. opened to 53 native students who were 14 years or older and who had completed at least grade 6. Presently operating out of a school building shared with an existing Junior High School, P.I.C.S.S. hopes to have its own facility in 1980 and to expand to all grades in the next few years as well as enlarge its present course offerings. Will P.I.C.S.S. survive? We hope so, and we believe so. For those interested in knowing more about this Alternative School, please write to Richard Simaganis, President, P.I.C.S.S., 140 - 2nd Avenue S. W., Calgary, Alberta.

R. A. Fiordo,  
Editor