



Smudging

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Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning Smudging Protocol and Guidelines for School Divisions

Background

Aboriginal Education is a priority for Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning. School divisions are working diligently to help First Nation, Métis and Inuit students succeed in all areas, and to ensure that all students have an opportunity to learn about the important role First Nation, Métis and Inuit peoples have in the past, present and future of Canada.

School divisions have taken steps to ensure their schools are inclusive and culturally responsive by integrating First Nation, Métis and Inuit perspectives into school planning and programming in partnership with the school community. This includes welcoming all students to learn about First Nation, Métis and Inuit traditions.

It is understood and acknowledged that First Nation, Métis and Inuit people are diverse in their languages and cultures. However, within this diversity, there are common characteristics that can be referred to as:

The “**Aboriginal worldview**” - *guiding principles and traditional values of Aboriginal societies. This suggests the way Aboriginal peoples see themselves in relation to the world. It is a holistic process where learning takes place across different spheres of human experience including spiritual, physical, emotional and mental dimensions. Worldviews may also consider relationships and experiences of the past, present and future as interconnected.*

WNCP: *The Common Curriculum Framework for Aboriginal Language and Culture Programs, Kindergarten to Grade 12 (2000)*

The “**Aboriginal perspective**” - *based on the distinct worldview of the Aboriginal cultures. This worldview has humans living in a universe made by the Creator and needing to live in harmony with nature, one another, and with oneself. Each Aboriginal culture expressed this worldview in a different way and with different practices, stories, and cultural products.*

WNCP: *The Common Curriculum Framework for Aboriginal Language and Culture Programs, Kindergarten to Grade 12 (2000)*

Many First Nations share the concept of “mino-pimatisiwin”, which means “good life” in both Cree and Ojibwe. Implicit in this is the understanding that all of life is a ceremony; that the sacred and the secular are parts of the whole; that people are whole beings (body, mind, spirit, emotion); and that “mino- pimatisiwin” is achieved by taking care of all aspects of one’s self. School divisions are working to share this perspective with their staff, students and community to foster an atmosphere of respect, understanding and inclusivity. Many divisions offer learning experiences about First Nation, Métis and Inuit cultures. One of the most commonly shared experiences is the First Nation tradition of smudging.

What is Smudging?

Smudging is a tradition, common to many First Nations, which involves the burning of one or more medicines gathered from the earth. The four sacred medicines used in First Nations’ ceremonies are tobacco, sage, cedar and sweetgrass. The most common medicines used in a smudge are sweetgrass, sage and cedar.

Smudging has been passed down from generation to generation. There are many ways and variations on how a smudge is done. Historically, Métis and Inuit people did not smudge; however, today many Métis and Inuit people have incorporated smudging into their lives.

A community Grandmother presented the following as the steps and rationale for this cleansing process we call smudge to Niji Mahkwa School in Winnipeg:

- We smudge to clear the air around us.
- We smudge to clean our minds so that we will have good thoughts of others.
- We smudge our eyes so that we will only see the good in others.
- We smudge our ears so that we will only listen to positive things about others.
- We smudge our mouths so that we will only speak well of others.
- We smudge our whole being so we will portray only the good part of our self through our actions.

Smudging allows people to stop, slow down, become mindful and centred. This allows people to remember, connect and be grounded in the event, task or purpose at hand. Smudging also allows people to let go of something negative. Letting go of things that inhibit a person from being balanced and focused comes from the feeling of being calm and safe while smudging. The forms of smudging will vary from nation to nation but are considered by all to be a way of cleansing oneself. Smudging is part of “the way things are done” and is part of living a good life.

Smudging is always voluntary. People should never be forced or pressured to smudge. It is completely acceptable for a person to indicate that he/she does not want to smudge and that person may choose to stay in the room and refrain or leave the room during a smudge. Respect for all is the guiding principle in any Aboriginal tradition.

How Do We Smudge?

The act of clearing the air, mind, spirit and emotions may be accomplished in a variety of ways but according to First Nations' practice, **a smudge is led by a person who has an understanding of what a smudge is and why it is done.** That person may be an Elder or cultural teacher who has been invited into the school; it can be a staff person who is knowledgeable about the tradition of smudging; it can be a parent/guardian; and/or it can be a student.

The medicine is placed in a smudge container. The container may be a shell, a ceramic or stone bowl, a copper, brass or cast iron pan. The medicine is lit with a match. Once the medicine is lit, the smoke may be pushed forward with a feather or a fan. The person who lights the smudge is first.

The commonly used medicine in schools is sage. A "smudge ball" is created mainly from the leaf of the plant, which is rolled into a ball for burning. It is important to understand that this particular medicine can create a significant billow of smoke, which emerges from the smudge ball. It is not necessary to create enough smoke to fill the entire space where a group is smudging. Only a small stream of smoke for the person who is smudging is required. Therefore, it is important for the helpers who create the smudge ball to keep it relatively small.

When we smudge, we first cleanse our hands with the smoke as if we were washing our hands. We then draw the smoke over our heads, eyes, ears, mouths and our bodies. These actions remind us to think good thoughts, see good actions, hear good sounds, speak good words and show the good of who we are.

What Does Smudging Look Like in a School Environment?

Many schools are making the tradition of smudging a part of their practice during particular events or as part of the school day.

Guidelines for School Divisions

1. When introducing the tradition of smudging, include an Elder or traditional teacher who can explain smudging, the medicines, the teachings and the protocols.
2. Communicate with parents/guardians, staff and students about what smudging is, why people smudge, and when and where smudging will be taking place. Continue to educate and inform throughout the school year. Embrace and encourage dialogue within the school community.

3. Decisions need to be made regarding when and where smudging will be allowed. Posting signs to indicate that smudging occurs at the school may be helpful in letting community know that it happens as part of the school function. Smudging may be part of a learning experience in a classroom, part of a course, during an event or a regular part of the school day. It may be done in a classroom, a gym or outdoors, depending on the guidance from the person who is leading the smudge. The most important thing is that when a smudge is lit, it is done with respect of those who choose not to be involved, as well as those who choose to be involved. The school community should remember that at one time, First Nations cultural traditions were illegal and smudging was a practice that had to be done in secret. Those who choose to smudge need to feel welcome and respected in learning environments.

Some schools and community organizations have posted signage in their facilities such as:

- *This is a smudging environment and smudging occurs regularly in this facility.*
 - *Smudging occurs in this room.*
 - *Smudging is part of the school and classroom function. All are welcome to participate as a matter of choice.*
4. Ensure that smudging does not pose a health risk to students, particularly students with severe asthma and respiratory issues. Communicating with parents and students prior to holding a smudge in a well-ventilated room can help to accommodate such concerns.
 5. Give all parents/guardians, staff and students advanced notice that a smudge will be lit on a particular day, time and place. Parents/guardians and staff should feel free to ask questions and express any concerns they may have about the process.
 6. Ensure students who are smudging have written permission from parents/guardians to do so.
 7. It is recommended to use sage to smudge because all people can smudge with sage during anytime of the month. This is particularly important for the young women in the class or school especially when they are on their moon time (menses). During this time, women can only use sage as a way to smudge. As students learn more about smudging, they can be introduced to the other medicines as well.

Appendix A

Evergreen School Division

Date:

Dear Parent/Guardian:

Many school divisions in Manitoba offer learning experiences about First Nation, Métis and Inuit cultures. One of the most commonly shared experiences is the First Nation tradition of smudging.

Smudging is a tradition, common to many First Nations, which involves the burning of one or more of the following: tobacco, sage, cedar and sweetgrass. The most common are sweetgrass, sage and cedar.

A smudge will take place on **(date/time)** at **(location at the school)**. Smudging is always voluntary. If you have any questions or require more information, please contact the school at **(phone number)**.

Please complete the permission form below and return it to the teacher by **(date)**.

Teacher

Smudging

My child has permission to participate in a smudge that will take place on **(date and time)** at **(location at the school)**.

Student's Name

Parent/Guardian Signature

Date