

# SMUDGING PROTOCOLS AND GUIDELINES FOR SCHOOLS

**“Making a difference by working together”  
Me7 n7ek re Swe7eckt e Txwimimentmes**

Aboriginal Education is a priority for School District No. 73 (Kamloops-Thompson). School District No. 73 (Kamloops-Thompson) is 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 District No. 73 (Kamloops-Thompson) is taking 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 Local First Nation Bands and Métis. This includes welcoming all students to learn about First Nation, Métis and Inuit traditions.

Smudging is one of those traditions that has some shared concepts and teachings based on Aboriginal Worldviews. Implicit in this is the understanding that all of life is a ceremony. School District No. 73 (Kamloops-Thompson) is working to share this perspective with their staff, students and community to foster an atmosphere of respect, understanding, inclusivity and belonging. One of the most commonly shared experiences is the Aboriginal tradition of smudging.

## **Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement**

School District No. 73 is committed to the Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement four goals of Student Success, Language and Culture, District School and Culture, and Aboriginal Parent and Community Engagement. School District No. 73 works hand-in-hand with our local Aboriginal communities to create and foster cross-cultural awareness for all learners.

## **What is Smudging?**

Smudging is a tradition, common to many Aboriginal people including Secwepemc, Metis, and other First Nations and Inuit in our School District. Smudging involves the burning of one or more medicines gathered from the earth. The most common sacred medicines used in smudging in this area are sage, cedar, and juniper; sweetgrass is also used but is less common.

Tobacco and kinnikinnick (also referred to as elk, bearberry or Indian tobacco) are also considered common sacred plants used for ceremonies or gifts, but are not used in smudging.

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.

Our Elders and Knowledge Keepers have taught steps and rationale for this cleansing process called smudge:

- 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 arms to do the good work that we do in a loving and caring way.
- We smudge our feet so that we walk in a good way.
- We smudge the bottom of our feet to cleanse the connection between ourselves and Mother Earth.
- We smudge our heart to cleanse it of negativity.
- We smudge our hair to cleanse away any negativity we may be carrying.
- We smudge our back to release any negativity we may carrying and let it go (turn clockwise and complete the circle once back is done).
- We smudge our whole being so we will portray only the good part of our self through our actions.
- We smudge to cleanse negative energy within our own being or any negative energy in a space.

*Once you have finished your smudge, the person that is doing the smudge must let it burn out completely. You can take care of it right away or empty the bowl in a metal can and at a later date take it outdoors onto the land and find a tree. Empty the can at the base of the tree or dig a hole and empty it into the hole. Location should be away from schools, homes, or parks where it can be left undisturbed.*

**The concept** is that 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. Some local Elders also use smudging as a way to help heal the spirit of the people or as a blessing or forgiveness from the Creator.

**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. School District No. 73 allows for smudging. Although there should not be a reason to use tobacco for smudging as it can be replaced by any of the other

medicine plants indicated above. If there is a situation where tobacco plays a role, please refer to Policy 1012.1 – Smoking and Vaping Free Environment Section 5 which states:

*The Board of Education encourages a safe and healthy learning and teaching environment. The Board is committed to its responsibility of enforcing a tobacco and vapour products free environment, as required under the Tobacco and Vapour Products Control Act.*

*In accordance with Section 2.2 of the Tobacco and Vapour Products Control Act, the use of tobacco and vapour products is banned on all public Kindergarten to Grade 12 schools in British Columbia. A person must not smoke or use tobacco/e-cigarettes, or hold lighted tobacco/activated e-cigarettes in or on school property.*

5. This policy does not apply to the ceremonial use of tobacco in or on school property in or on school property if the ceremonial use of tobacco is approved by the Board and is performed:

- a) in relation to a traditional Aboriginal cultural activity; or
- b) by a prescribed group for a prescribed purpose, if this has been given the authorization of the school's Principal and aligns with this policy.

## **Procedures for Smudging**

### **Purpose:**

These procedures outline how smudging will be managed on School District No. 73 (Kamloops-Thompson) grounds.

### **Smudging Sites**

It is recommended that schools who plan on doing regular smudging designate one or more smudging sites each year that will provide a dedicated site to allow individuals to conduct smudging ceremonies.

Agreement on location of smudging sites should be made in a consultative manner with the Principal of the school that the smudge is taking place at, the District Principal of Aboriginal Education, Aboriginal Support Workers and Operations Manager.

In order to reduce the number of enquiries regarding the smell of smoke in buildings and in recognition of the health concerns of the school, when a smudge is planned during the regular operating hours of the school, a notification email will be sent to staff with classes near the location of the ceremony at least forty-eight (48) hours before any smudging ceremonies. Consulting with the Operations Manager is important because many district buildings have

central air systems. If they are not properly ventilated, smudging can impact the air quality in the whole building. To avoid air quality issues, it is often recommended that a respectful permanent smudging area be set up outside.

Ceremonial smudges are most commonly held by members of the First Nations community, local resource people, and Aboriginal Education Workers. If a school would like to set up a location that has been designated as a more permanent smudging location, approved signage can be placed in that area. The signage should indicate that the site is a smudging ceremony location and provide central contact number for individuals to call for further information.

### **Occasional Smudging and Other Ceremonial Use of Smoke Location Procedures**

There may be occasions when a smudge is planned for a non-permanent location. When a smudge or other ceremony using smoke is planned for a location other than a permanent site, school staff should be notified at least forty-eight (48) hours before the ceremony.

It is recommended that when possible, signage should be posted at the site of the smudging ceremony.

### **Guidelines**

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 outdoors on school property, part of a course, during an event or a regular part of the school day. 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, Aboriginal 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 area.
  - Smudging is part of the school and classroom function held outdoors. All are welcome to participate as a matter of choice.
4. Ensure that smudging does not pose a health risk to students or staff, particularly students or staff with severe asthma, respiratory issues or allergies. Communicating with parents, students and staff 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. 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. However, it is recommended never to use tobacco and only when Policy 1012.1 is referenced and approved beforehand by the Board.
  7. Smudging may be provided to students under the age of consent with parent permission. Students who are above the age of consent may choose to take part without parent consent.

**Resources used:**

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

UNBC – University of Northern British Columbia Policies and Procedures for smudging.

Introduction to British Columbia’s Redesigned Curriculum – BC Ministry of Education.

School District No. 58 (Nicola-Similkameen), Smudging Protocol and Guidelines, January 2016