SMUDGING IN SCHOOLS

Belief

The focus of school is to be a place of learning. The inclusion of relevant cultural, spiritual and traditional knowledge and practices in schools can positively impact student success. Smudging is a relevant Aboriginal practice.

Guidelines

1. The term Aboriginal is in reference to the descendants of the original inhabitants of North America. The Canadian Constitution recognizes three groups of Aboriginal people — Indians, Métis and Inuit. These are three separate peoples with unique heritages, languages, cultural practices and spiritual beliefs.

2. Aboriginal practices in Wetaskiwin Regional Public Schools respect the agreement of Treaty 6 with the Plains Cree people and local cultural, spiritual and traditional knowledge in the Maskwacis territory.

3. 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 to the school; it may be a knowledgeable staff member; it may be a family member or guardian; it may be a student.

4. Smudging is used to begin ceremonies, meetings or other gatherings, though it can also be performed on its own. Smudging is used to commence a new day. The smudge is lit and the resulting smoke is regarded as a purifying agent for the mind, body and spirit.

5. Smudging is done with a sacred native plant, such as sage or sweet grass. The plant is placed in a smudge container. It may be a shell, a ceramic or stone bowl, or a copper, brass or cast iron pan. The plant is lit with a match. Once lit, the smoke may be pushed forward with a feather, fan or by hand.

6. When smudging, the person who lights the smudge is first. Hands are initially cleansed with the smoke as if by washing them. Then the smoke is drawn over the head, eyes, ears, mouths and bodies. The actions are reminders to think good thoughts, see good things, hear good things, speak good things and show the good of who we are.

7. Smudging is a sacred practice that is honoring of culture. It is important to educate and inform students, staff and families about smudging. An invitation for any students, parents or staff to participate is extended with that understanding. Schools will embrace and encourage dialogue.
8. Smudging will occur in a respectful manner and place that recognizes the needs of all students and staff in the school building. There is acknowledgement that requiring a smudge to occur outdoors or in an out-of-way location can be an historical reminder when Aboriginal practices were illegal, forbidden or unwelcome.

9. Smudging is a voluntary informed act.

10. Communication about smudging will occur with students, staff and families. They will be informed about why people smudge, what smudging is, when it will occur and where it will take place. This will be an ongoing process.

Procedures

11. Request for smudging will be reviewed by the School Principal to determine how to proceed.

11.1 Requests may be made by an elder or cultural teacher who has been invited to the school, a staff member, a family member or guardian, or a student.

11.2 Requests will identify participants, location and time.

11.3 Requests will identify who will be leading the smudge. When it is a student, the request will identify who is supervising.

12. The School Principal will inform the Director of Plant Facilities of the smudging request. The Director of Plant Facilities will maintain a record of the request, assess the requested location and:

12.1 when approved:

12.1.1 evaluate the need for portable air filters and provide as required;

12.1.2 evaluate the request for additional portable air filters, and provide as required.

12.2 when denied due to facility problems recommend:

11.2.1 alternative locations at the site; or

11.2.2 renovations to the facility.
13. Provision to address costs associated with portable air filters are as follows:

13.1 Plant Facilities provides the units and the initial filters;

13.2 Schools are responsible for replacement filters.

14. The School Principal will provide written notification to students, staff and families that smudging will be occurring in the school. Notification will:

14.1 identify approved locations and times.

14.2 address awareness and consent using fair notice.

15. When notified of smudging:

15.1 Parents / guardians / students with independent status will report and verify any sensitivity or health matters related to smudging and the degree to which it impacts their participation or attendance to the school.

15.2 Staff will report and verify any sensitivity or health matters related to smudging and the degree to which it impacts their work to the principal.

15.3 Principals will ensure the development, implementation and communication of appropriate accommodations.

16. The School Principal will ensure teaching about smudging in the school to students, staff and families through classroom instruction, student assemblies and school council meetings.

17. The School Principal will ensure a standardized notice is posted in the school that identifies locations for smudging.

18. The School Principal will communicate any concerns or issues regarding smudging to the Associate Superintendent Instruction who will review them with the Maskwacis Education Council.

References:

Words First - An Evolving Terminology Relating to Aboriginal Peoples in Canada
(Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada)