

SMUDGING AND THE CEREMONIAL USE OF TOBACCO

Background

Smudging is recognized as a spiritual and cultural practice within many Indigenous traditions. It is not associated with organized religion. It is a practice that has been passed down through generations and remains common among many Indigenous peoples. Smudging involves the respectful burning of traditional medicines gathered from the Earth, most commonly sweetgrass, tobacco, sage, and cedar. There are variations in how a smudge may be conducted. Schools may offer smudging in a respectful, safe, and inclusive manner, and participation shall remain voluntary.

The Northwest School Division Board of Education supports the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge, customs and practices in its schools for the purpose of creating an atmosphere that is affirming to Indigenous students and families and that promotes respect for, and understanding of, the Indigenous peoples of Saskatchewan among all students. The general prohibition against the use of tobacco in school facilities or on school grounds does not apply to the ceremonial use of tobacco when approved by the Principal.

Smudging and the ceremonial use of tobacco are permitted within the Northwest School Division school facilities and on school grounds under the following procedures.

Procedures

A. Requirements for Smudging

- i. Smudging must be approved by the principal, whether it is a one-time or occasional event or a regularly scheduled practice.
- ii. Local Elders and/or Knowledge Keepers should be consulted before undertaking any Indigenous ceremonies. There may be local protocols for conducting a smudge and for handling the materials, including the disposal of smudge remnants, that need to be respected.
- iii. The smudge should be conducted by someone with a thorough cultural knowledge of the appropriate traditions and an ability to transfer this knowledge to others, including children and youth. This person could be an Elder, Knowledge Keeper, cultural teacher, member of the school staff, parent/guardian or even a student.

B. Participation

- i. Smudging is always voluntary. No one (student or staff) is to be compelled or pressured to participate.
- ii. Parents/guardians should be given advance notice in writing of a smudge, either before a specific event or at the beginning of the school year if smudging will be a regular occurrence.
- iii. A student must have written permission from a parent/guardian to participate in smudging using AP 212-1 Smudging Parental/Guardian Consent form.

C. Facilities

- i. The room or area where a smudge is taking place must be supervised by a member of the school staff, regardless of who is conducting the smudge.
- ii. It is preferable to have a designated room within a school for smudging, with appropriate signage indicating how and when the room is used. Signage at the school should reference provincial laws and/or local bylaws regarding the use of tobacco.
- iii. An indoor smudge requires mitigation of the health risks posed to some students by smoke and the safety risks posed to all. The room must have:
 - adequate ventilation, e.g., a window or stand-alone air exchange (i.e., separate from other air exchange units in the building);
 - adequate room capacity; and
 - zero or minimal combustible materials.
- iv. If a school facility is being used by a community group for an event that includes smudging, written consent must be obtained from the Northwest School Division Board of Education, and the event must comply with this administrative procedure.

Reference: The Saskatchewan Employment Act
The Tobacco and Vapour Products Control Act, section 11(3) c,4 (5)
Inspiring Success Comprehensive School Community Health

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