

Smudging Ceremony in School:

Information & Guidelines

Edited: January 17, 2025

Subject: Smudging Ceremony in Schools

Application: All schools in Anglophone School District North

Rationale: Anglophone North School District resides on traditional Mi'kmaq territory and partners with nine different Mi'kmaq communities whose children transition into the provincial school system at various grade levels. In the spirit of reconciliation, ASD-N is committed to providing quality educational opportunities that respond to the needs of First Nation youth. One such need is the promotion of positive and differentiated mental health strategies that reflect and support the culture and worldview of the First Nation students ASD-N serves.

The practice of smudging ceremony is a foundational piece of Mi'kmaq culture and its availability in schools is a positive mental health strategy for Mi'kmaq students but also a wonderful learning opportunity for non-Mi'kmaq students. As outlined in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's report, the public school system needs to be infused with Indigenous perspectives and celebrate the teaching of Indigenous cultures in schools.

This initiative is further supported by the commitments in the DEC Policy E-11, and the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples which recognizes the right of Indigenous peoples to maintain and develop their culture and traditions in schools.

At one time, such First Nations cultural traditions were illegal, and smudging ceremony was a practice that had to be done in secret. Today we strive to make First Nations students feel safe, welcome, and respected by embracing smudging ceremonies in District facilities.





Purpose: Positive mental and emotional health and wellness are pivotal to student success in the school community. Smudging cleanses the environment and creates a positive and open atmosphere. A smudging ceremony helps in reducing stress, rebalances focus and promotes mindfulness. The use of smudging in public schools for wellness and ceremonial reasons will recognize the culture of Indigenous students and offer non-Indigenous students an opportunity to experience another aspect of Mi'kmaq culture and way of life.




For more information regarding the science behind smudging please consult the following link: <http://thespiritscience.net/2015/11/26/the-science-of-smudging-how-sage-actually-cleans-bacteria-in-the-air/>

Examples of when this practice would be used: A smudging ceremony is a practice that can occur in the following ways:

- Individually
- School Ceremonies
- Meetings
- Small Group
- Traditional Ceremonies

Definition/Description:

	<p><u>Smudging Ceremony:</u> The practice of smudging is used to purify and cleanse the participants and the environment, which is the process of burning traditional medicines that produces smoke. According to traditional teachings the smoke attaches itself to negative energy and as the smoke clears negativity does as well.</p>
	<p><u>Sweetgrass:</u> One of the four sacred medicines, sweetgrass can be burned in a smudge but also burned on its own. Sweet grass is true to its name and has a sweet smell. The Mi'kmaq describe sweetgrass as the hair of Mother Earth. Sweetgrass attracts positive energy. It is used to cleanse our minds, our body, and our spirits.</p>
	<p><u>Sage:</u> One of the four sacred medicines, sage is also burned as part of the purification process of a smudge. Sage is used for healing.</p>
	<p><u>Cedar:</u> One of the four sacred medicines, cedar can also be used in a smudge to purify and help cleanse the person and/or the environment. Cedar is a medicine of protection. Cedar trees are very old, wise, and powerful spirit beings.</p>

	<p><u>Tobacco:</u> One of the four sacred medicines, tobacco is commonly used for an offering that can be later burned in a sacred pipe or fire. Tobacco can also be offered to plants and animals to give thanks and acknowledgement, respecting the interconnectedness of the natural world. Tobacco is used to honor the wisdom of our Elders and to show respect to our Mother Earth.</p>
	<p><u>Smudge Bowl:</u> An abalone shell is commonly used as a smudge bowl which is where the sacred medicines are placed and lit to produce smoke. The abalone shell is very popular today because of its beauty and resistance to high temperatures. The abalone shell represents the four elements: the shell for the water; the match of the fire; the medicines and its ashes for the earth, and the smoke for the air.</p>
	<p><u>Feather:</u> The eagle is held in high regard and flies the highest and is said to bring messages to the Creator. Often eagle feathers are used as a fan when smudging, however, any feather can be used to smudge. A single feather or collection of feathers can be used during the smudging ceremony.</p>

Guidelines/Recommendations:

To begin, a collaborative discussion between the school administration/staff and the First Nation Community/workers should take place to explore the practice of smudging ceremony in your building. Whenever possible, it is recommended that an Elder or traditional knowledge keeper be brought in to explain the teachings, medicines, and protocols associated with smudging and support next steps.

- 1) Provide school families with information about the value and importance of a smudging ceremony at your school.
 - a) Provide an informed consent document at the start of each school year to inform parents about smudging ceremonies that may occur at the school throughout the year. *A sample informed consent document is attached in Appendix A.*
 - b) Throughout the school year, take any opportunity to continue to educate, inform and include school families in the conversation around embracing and celebrating First Nation cultural activities such as a smudging ceremony.

- c) People in the school (Staff & Students) should be made aware to ensure understanding and respecting for Mi'kmaq culture and its values and beliefs. An Elder will be able to assist with this protocol, if necessary.
- 2) Designated person(s) - one who can lead and/or supervise smudging ceremony:
- a) Elder/Knowledge Keeper
 - b) Elder in training
 - c) Cultural Support Worker (with knowledge of teachings, medicines, and protocols associated with smudging)
 - d) Indigenous Student (with knowledge of teachings, medicines, and protocols associated with smudging)
- 3) Identify specific locations within the school where a smudging ceremony may safely take place.
- a) Ensure facilities have been informed of these locations and can confirm their safety and take steps to prevent unnecessary engagement of any fire suppression systems.
 - b) Have a handheld fire extinguisher available at each smudging location.
 - c) Consider if area can be ventilated either via window or system, if ever needed. Engage facilities for support if necessary.
 - d) Post signage, at a minimum the following is recommended:
 - i) At school's main entry/foyer: Signage stating that the school is smudge friendly. *A sample sign is attached in Appendix B.*
 - ii) At the entrance of school smudging location(s): Signage identifying that the location is safe for smudging ceremonies and indicates the designated person.
- 4) Ensure smudging supplies are housed in a specific, safe location, but readily available to the designated person(s) as needed.
- 5) Be sensitive to those who may have environmental allergies or bronchial sensitivity or other respiratory conditions that may be triggered by the burning of ceremonial plants. In some cases, advanced notice or additional ventilation may be necessary to prevent exposure of susceptible individuals.
- a) Important note: The designated person will be knowledgeable about the amount of medicine required for use in the smudging ceremony, as a small stream of smoke is enough for the purpose of its cleansing power and therefore not necessary to fill a room with smoke.

- 6) Smudging is always voluntary. People should never be forced or pressured to smudge. If a person chooses not to participate, they can either leave the room or observe respectfully. Be aware that students may choose to abstain from smudging for personal reasons.
- 7) There are many ways to smudge. There is no right or wrong way to smudge. Indigenous teachings do not seek to provide any definitive answers, only to provide guidance towards living in a good way and to give thanks for all the gifts of life the creator has given us. In this spirit, the smudging ceremony, is a practice that changes to fit every individual's needs.
- 8) Non- indigenous people can also smudge; however, they should not lead a smudge or smudge others without the appropriate training and permission.

Related resources and policies

1) Tobacco-Free Schools:

With this document, Anglophone School District North acts in accordance with the *Tobacco-Free Schools Policy 702* and the *Smoke-free Places Act* where the restricted use of tobacco is limited to products intended to be smoked. Therefore, the holding of lighted tobacco for the purpose of carrying out traditional Indigenous cultural ceremonies is not a violation.

- **Policy 702 - Tobacco-Free Schools** [Policy 702 - Tobacco-Free Schools \(gnb.ca\)](#)
- **Policy 703 - Positive Learning and Working Environment** [Policy 703 - Positive Learning Environment \(gnb.ca\)](#)

2) Fragrance Free/Reduced Environment:

Anglophone School District North's policy on the reduction of fragranced products within its facilities aims to reduce the use of fragrance chemicals in our facilities through increased awareness about the potential impact of fragrance chemicals on the health, wellbeing, productivity, and lifestyle of those affected. This policy advocates that individuals voluntarily refrain from chemical-based scented products but does not apply to smudging, which involves the burning of sacred and natural medicinal plants.

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Appendix A: Informed Consent - Sample

Parent/Guardian

Date

Re: Mi'kmaq Culture and Language Initiatives

Message

Dear Parents and Guardians,

Throughout the INSERT YEAR school year, INSERT SCHOOL NAME will be expanding on their acts of reconciliation.

As our school district and school are situated in Mi'kma'ki, the unceded and unsurrendered territory of the Mi'kmaq people, INSERT SCHOOL NAME community honours, amplifies and celebrates all aspects of the rich and vibrant Mi'kmaq cultural way of life.

Through the Truth and Reconciliation's 94 Calls to Action the INSERT SCHOOL NAME works to ensure that the student body has meaningful engagement with learning about reconciliation and being active allies in the reconciliation work identified by the TRC. This work is done through the guiding lens under the 10-Year Education Plans objective 6: Meet the needs of First Nation learners and ensure that provincial curriculum is reflective of First Nation history and culture (p. 15).

Utilizing the new Holistic Curriculum Framework woven with Wabanaki worldviews, INSERT SCHOOL NAME students and staff will be engaging in a wide range of Mi'kmaq culture and language initiatives throughout the year. Valuable learning experiences include but are not limited to:

- Smudging Ceremony
- Drumming (the heart beat of our Mother)
- Lessons on Residential Schools
- History and realities of Indigenous peoples across Canada

We invite you, INSERT SCHOOL NAME families, along our journey of reconciliation. Engage in conversations with your children about the variety of activities throughout the year and share your knowledge and ideas for reconciliation with the school. Together anything is possible! Please communicate with administration if you have any questions.

Appendix B: “Smudge Friendly Space” Sign - Sample

