

INDIGENOUS CULTURAL PROTOCOLS

Background

Black Gold School Division (BGSD) supports initiatives that actively promote the successful implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action, Competency 5 of Alberta Education's Teaching, Leadership, & Superintendent Quality Standards, and the spirit of reconciliation between Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous Peoples. To that end, the Division recognizes the importance of cultural protocols for many Indigenous Peoples and acknowledges reconciliation as an active process requiring time to create safe and ethical spaces that embrace Indigenous ceremonies in our school communities.

Definitions

Smudging:

Smudging is a cultural practice which involves the burning of one or more medicines gathered from the earth. The most common sacred medicines First Nations in Alberta use for smudging are cedar, sage, and sweetgrass. The sacred plants are burned to cleanse the body, mind and spirit of any negative feelings, thoughts or energy cleansing both physically and spiritually. Smudging also allows people to remember, connect and feel grounded in the present.

Elder:

The term Elder refers to someone recognized by their community as having attained a high degree of understanding of First Nations, Métis or Inuit history, spirituality, traditional language, cultural teachings, ceremonies or healing practices. Elders have worked and studied over a period of time with other Elders to earn the right to pass on this specialized knowledge and give advice on personal and community issues. Elders are highly revered and respected role models and mentors for all people. They embody First Nations, Métis and Inuit culture through their words, actions and being. Gender and age are not factors, nor are they criteria in determining who is recognized as an Elder. Some Elders may be female, and others may be comparatively young but very well-versed in ceremonial and cultural practices.

Knowledge Keeper:

An individual recognized and identified by Elders and their community as being knowledgeable about cultural practices, customs, history, values, and language. A Knowledge Keeper is also sometimes referred to as a Cultural Advisor.

Procedures

1. When cultural protocol occurs in a Division building or for a Division based activity, the Principal and/or administrator shall ensure staff are aware of the Indigenous Cultural Protocols in Black Gold School Division (See Appendix A, B, C & D).

2. Before the first smudge can occur at a school or BGSD facility, the Principal shall contact the BGSD-based First Nations, Métis and Inuit Lead to ensure cultural protocol is followed as outlined in Appendix C – Smudging in Division Facilities.
3. The area designated for the smudging shall follow proper fire-safety precautions as outlined in Appendix C.
4. Before the smudging occurs, the Principal shall notify the Director of Facilities about the ceremony in case there are implications for the building, the alarm, or fire detection.
5. When smudging occurs in a Division building, appropriate signage shall be displayed outside the area designated for the smudging and any other appropriate location, such as the main entrance or main office. An example of appropriate signage can be found in Appendix D – Smudging Protocol Checklist.
6. To follow Indigenous values, participation in a smudging ceremony is always voluntary. Students who choose to participate in a smudging ceremony shall receive and complete the Consent for Smudging In School form, signed by a parent or guardian and returned to the school before the start of the ceremony.
7. When inviting an Elder or Knowledge Keeper into a Division building, the Principal and/or administrator shall ensure cultural protocol is followed as outlined in Appendix B – Working with an Elder.
8. When an Elder is officially invited to take part in a Board and/or Division event/meeting, their expenses shall be paid, and they shall receive honoraria for the event/meeting. The honoraria and any costs incurred shall be paid from the Division budget. Amounts for honorarium are as per Appendix B – Working with an Elder.
9. The principal shall be responsible for the procedures and payment of honoraria and expenses to Elders, if any, for school events and paid for from school budgets.

Reference: Section 16 & 197, Education Act
ATA, Stepping Stones, Elder Protocols, 2018
ATA, Stepping Stones, First Nations Traditional Plants and Uses, 2019
ATA, Teaching Quality Standards, 2018
ATA, Leadership Quality Standards, 2018
ATA, Superintendent Quality Standards, 2018
Government of Manitoba, Smudging Protocols and Guidelines, 2019

Form: 159-1 – Consent for Smudging in School