

## **602.4 Indigenous Education**

### **Background Information on Smudging**

Indigenous Education is a priority for the Lethbridge School Division. Supporting Indigenous students to succeed in all areas requires cultural visibility, recognition, and celebration.

Lethbridge School Division has taken steps to ensure that schools are inclusive and culturally responsive to all learners in our Division. This means that all students are learning about Indigenous culture and traditions.

Smudging is a tradition common to many First Nations including the local context of the Blackfoot First Nations. The four sacred medicines used in First Nations' ceremonies are sweet pine, sage, cedar and sweet grass. Smudging involves the burning of one or more traditional or sacred medicines to bring the smoke over the participants' head and body. This is an indigenous cultural ceremony passed down from generation to generation. For more information on the purpose of smudging, consult the Coordinator of Indigenous Education, an Elder or a Cultural Knowledge Keeper. There are alternative methods to smudging that can be considered to meet personal needs and support self-assessment.

Depending upon the Indigenous context, there are many ways to perform a smudge and different variations exist. Smudging is a voluntary experience and it is acceptable for a person to indicate that they do not wish to smudge. The person can remain in the room or leave during smudging. Respect for all is the guiding principle in any Indigenous tradition. A smudge is led by a person who has an understanding of what smudging is and why it is done. Typically the length of a smudge can take from 15 to 30 minutes and varies depending on the number of individuals present.

### **Guidelines for Smudging**

1. First Nations ceremonies are welcome in all schools. Rooms need to be pre-approved by Occupational Health and Safety, Administration in the school, and the Division of Business Affairs as recommended spaces for ceremony to provide and improve accessibility, and to mitigate the potential of fire and false fire alarms. Classroom windows are recommended to be opened if possible, consideration should be given to any activities that may take place later in the room where smudging is to take place.

2. Recommended spaces can be used at any time for ceremonies. Rooms must be booked ahead of time and signs must be posted outside of the room while the smudging is taking place.

Suggestions for door signage:

- “This is a smudging environment and is currently in process”
- “This room is currently being used for smudging”

3. Ensure communication to employees in the building happens 24 hours in advance of smudging. Some employees are impacted with respiratory issues or anaphylaxis and will need advance notice of possible air quality issues. The Department of Facilities or Business Affairs can inform the school as to whether the room selected is appropriate. To ensure that the smudge is extinguished appropriately at the end of the smudge, fire safety regulations should be followed.
4. Smudging is led by a person who practices, has an understanding and knowledge of what smudging is and why it is done. That person may be an Elder, employee, parent/guardian or a student.
5. Communication with parents/guardians, staff, and students about what smudging is, why it is done and where the ceremony takes place should occur.
6. Ensure students who are smudging have written permission from parents/guardians to do so.

**Resources:**

Ceremonial (Smudging) Guidelines, University of Alberta, 2018

Smudging Protocol and Guidelines for School Divisions, Manitoba Education and Training, 2018

Smudging in Schools Guidelines, Alberta Health Services, July 7, 2017