

## **SRPSD Guidelines for Working with Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers**

### **Purpose:**

Saskatchewan Rivers Public Rivers Division, SRPSD believes that First Nations and Métis students should experience First Nations and Métis culture and traditions within the context of public education, and that all students benefit from an enhanced understanding of First Nations and Métis ways of knowing and being.

At SRPSD we strive to be responsive to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action including, but not exclusive to:

62 (i) Make age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal peoples' historical and contemporary contributions to Canada a mandatory education requirement for Kindergarten to Grade Twelve students

63 (i) Developing and implementing kindergarten to grade twelve curriculum and learning resources on Aboriginal peoples in Canadian history, and the history and legacy of residential schools.

63 (ii) Sharing information and best practices on teaching curriculum related to residential schools and Aboriginal history.

63 (iii) Building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect.

63 (iv) Identifying teacher-training needs relating to the above.

Honouring the diversity among Indigenous peoples is critical as cultural traditions and ceremonies reflect their language and worldview. However, one commonality is the importance of Elders in Indigenous communities. Elders provide life-long learning and teachings that must be honoured and recognized.

### **Who is an Elder?**

- Elders have explicit knowledge of traditional teachings. Elders are keepers of stories and oral teachings that have been passed down for generations within their community.
- Elders share teachings and values in sweat lodge ceremonies and other sacred ceremonies; through talking and healing circles; through individual or group learning sessions; and when counseling community members. The community looks to them for guidance and direction.
- Not all elders are Elders. To be given the title Elder, it must be earned through lifelong role modeling and service. Knowledge Keeper is the title earned by one who continues to learn from and works alongside an Elder in traditional ways of knowing and being. Elders give the Knowledge Keeper their blessing to share the teachings they have shared with them.
- A genuine Elder usually will not self-identify as an Elder. Community members are the ones who will identify certain individuals within the community as being individuals with special gifts and well-developed attributes associated with Eldership.

### **Elders can provide the following services:**

- Start meetings/workshops/special events in a good way through prayer
- Describe/teach and/or perform traditional ceremonies
- Share traditional knowledge and protocols
- Give spiritual advice to individuals
- Demonstrate traditional art and other practices

## Recognizing Elders' Gifts

Elders have different gifts to offer school communities. Before you invite an Elder, decide on the intended purpose of the Elder's visit and invite an Elder with those gifts. Recognizing that all Elders have different teachings and gifts is important. Some Elders have traditional plant and medicine knowledge while others have sacred ceremonial knowledge. Some are comfortable traditional storytellers to large groups while others prefer small group settings. If you are unsure, ask the Elder in advance and adjust your plan accordingly. For support with this, contact the SRPSD Indigenous Perspectives team.

## PROTOCOL

### Inviting an Elder/Knowledge Keeper into Your School

Proper protocols must always be followed. Protocols may vary from community to community among First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples. Honorariums and gift giving are honored traditions founded in the teachings of reciprocity: when you take, something must be given in return.



### Honorarium/Gift

- Honorariums/Gifts should be given to express gratitude and appreciation.
- Gifts can be left under the discretion of the school (school mug, pen, etc.). Tobacco protocol (see below) must be offered.
- It is important to remember the Elder's travel expense and time commitment.
- SRPSD honorariums must be honoured - \$150/half day and \$300/full day. For time less than a half day, \$150 will be gifted. (updated Sept 2022) Travel expenses, if outside city limits may also be reimbursed. Before the Elder's visit ask the Elder if gift cards for fuel/groceries is preferred on day of or if they wish to wait for a cheque for honorarium. If the latter is preferred a Special Consideration Expense form needs to be completed. If they prefer a gift card, present the gift card in an envelope at the same time as the tobacco (see tobacco protocol).

### Food Protocol

- Offering Elders a snack or a meal while they are a guest in your school is essential, especially if they are in your school over the noon hour. Ask prior to their arrival if they have any dietary concerns.

### Tobacco Protocol

- Providing tobacco to Elders and Knowledge Keepers is a respectful practice.
- Prior to an Elder's visit, find out if an offering of tobacco is appropriate. Most Elders in our community appreciate tobacco offering. If you are unsure, ask.
- Invitation by phone or email - Preferably, requests are made to an Elder in person. However, many Elders also accept requests by phone or email. If you make a request to an Elder by phone or email, let the Elder know you have tobacco to offer when you see them, then make your request.
- An Elder will need to know what their role is at the time of their visit. It is imperative to respectfully ask the Elder either for assistance, prayers, guidance, or specific lessons. This

should be done prior to their arrival, and it should be asked a second time during the exchange of tobacco so as to begin the visit in a good way. Be specific.

- When presenting tobacco as a gift/offering it should be passed to the Elder using the left hand, while using the right hand to shake the Elders hand. During this exchange both sets of arms and hands will form an infinity symbol – symbolizing the coming together of two cultures, two groups, or two people. Your left hand with the offer of tobacco is also closest to your heart.
- Acceptance of the tobacco will indicate the Elder's willingness to participate as requested.
- Elders will use tobacco prior, during, and after when sending prayers to the Creator, 4 directions, the grandfathers and grandmothers. Tobacco has a spiritual significance that outlasts the day's event/Elder's visit.
- Tobacco can be offered in a variety of forms. The offering of tobacco can be in the form of a tobacco pouch or a tobacco tie (loose tobacco in a small cloth). The tobacco pouch or tie should be prepared by the person making the request. As the pouch or tie is being made it is good to think about what you are asking for, and put good thoughts and prayers into the offering. A recommended supplier for traditional tobacco is [www.motherearthtobacco.com](http://www.motherearthtobacco.com). For support with this contact the SRPSD Indigenous Perspectives Team.

### **Broadcloth Protocol**

- Broadcloth (also known as "print") is used in many traditional ceremonies and when offering prayers to the Creator. It is normally offered when participating in a ceremony such as a pipe ceremony or a sweat lodge ceremony.
- Broadcloth comes in many colors. When gifting with broadcloth ask your guest Elder prior to the event/ceremony what color of broadcloth is needed. Red, white, yellow, blue (sometimes green) are the colors of the four directions; purple and orange are also significant colors; and floral print, which is known as grandmother's cloth is very important as well.
- When offering broadcloth you must also offer tobacco.
- When gifting broadcloth it is expected that the cloth be one meter in length. Fabric Land has one meter pieces of broadcloth pre-cut for Indigenous protocol and ceremony.

### **Tea Protocol**

- There will be some Métis Elders who prefer a gift of tea over tobacco.
- Prior to arrival, it is acceptable to ask Métis Elders what they prefer as protocol.

### **Handshake**

- A handshake is a sign of respect. It offers a sense of inclusion and friendship.
- Indigenous people often greet one another with a handshake. It is a sign to show we are all connected, we are happy to have that sense of community and belonging, and we are honored to be together again, and to learn from one another.
- At the end of an Elder's visit it is also protocol to end with a handshake.

### **Tips**

- Greet and meet the Elder upon their arrival and introduce them to staff and students.
- Take care of the Elder until their departure (ie. Offer and assist with getting drinks, food, etc.)
- Photographs, audio and/or video recordings are often not acceptable when an Elders is conducting a ceremony, but it may be acceptable at other times. Explicit consent must be received from the Elder before any recordings are taken.

- Often Elders carry sacred items such as pipes, eagle feathers, medicine pouches, etc. – do not touch these items unless they give you permission.
- Seek clarification if there is something you do not understand. They are happy to answer questions and to share knowledge with you. Part of building a good relationship involves visiting with one another.
- When the Elder is finished offer your gratitude and thanks. It is important to end with a handshake.

Sentence Stems you can use when stating request:

- “We would like to have a good meeting for the benefit of all students about... and we’d greatly appreciate if you would start us off in a good way” or
- “I would be honored to benefit from your advice and guidance on... ” or
- “We would be honored if you would visit our classroom to share your knowledge on....”

### **SMUDGING IN SRPSD SCHOOLS**

A common shared experience among many First Nations and Métis peoples is the tradition of smudging. Smudging involves the burning of one or more plants gathered from the land. The four sacred plants commonly used in ceremonies are tobacco, sage, cedar, and sweetgrass. The most common sacred plant used in smudging is sage, which is sometimes referred to as the woman’s smudge as it can be used at any time of the month. It is a common teaching that people on their moon time, menstrual cycle should not smudge with sweetgrass because they are already on their own cleansing cycle. Therefore, it is recommended that only sage be used while smudging in SRPSD schools.

This ceremony has been passed down from generation to generation. A smudge invites people to become mindful and center themselves. This allows people to remember, to connect and to be grounded in the event, task or purpose at hand. It is considered a cleansing ceremony.

Smudging is always voluntary. One should never be forced or pressured to participate. It is acceptable for a person to say that he/she does not want to smudge and may choose to stay in the room while the ceremony takes place or leave the room before the ceremony begins. However, if this occurs during class time the teacher should accompany their students and show respect for the practice, even if they choose not to smudge. It is respectful to stand in the circle, cross your arms over your chest and the person will pass you by. Being present sends a positive message to your students and acknowledges an important cultural practice.

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, a knowledge keeper, or a cultural advisor. It may also be led by a school staff member, a caregiver, or a student, as long as they are aware of the teachings and protocols.

The sacred medicinal plant is placed in a smudge container such as a shell, a ceramic bowl or a metal pan and is lit with a match. Once it is lit, the smoke may be pushed forward with a feather or fan or hands. The person who lights the smudge smudges themselves first.

There is no right or wrong way to smudge. One way is to cleanse our hands with the smoke first, as if we are washing our hands. We then may draw the smoke over our heads, eyes, ears, mouths and

our bodies. These actions remind us to think good thoughts, see good actions, hear good sounds, speak good words and show the good of who we are.

### **Smudging In Schools Guidelines**

1. When introducing the smudge ceremony, it is the responsibility of the principal to ensure the participation of an Elder or traditional teacher (one who has the smudge teachings) to explain smudging teachings and protocols. The Indigenous Perspectives team are available to assist with securing a resource person or to provide the appropriate teachings. Once you establish this practice, you do not need to have an Elder present each time. However, if a common time and location is arranged you may want to have an open invitation for Elders and caregivers to join, as it is an excellent opportunity for family engagement.
2. A smudge does not produce a large volume of smoke and will dissipate quickly. However, one must be mindful of people in the building who may have sensitivities when choosing the location (outside, open window or door to outside with door to rest of school closed, turn off HVAC system, etc.). If Principals have questions about the school's HVAC system's ability to accommodate a smudge in the school, they are to contact the Superintendent of Facilities.
3. The principal is responsible to communicate with parents/guardians, staff and students regarding the purpose of the smudge and when and where the smudging ceremony will occur.
4. Parents may choose to have their child opt-out of the classroom or school-wide smudge. These students must be accommodated with a respectful and productive alternative.

**Inviting Indigenous Dignitaries Guidelines** – in progress

**Drumming in Schools Guidelines** – in progress

**Traditional Sweat Guidelines** – in progress

In the meantime, if you have any questions regarding any of this, please feel free to contact the Indigenous Perspectives Team!

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