

# Renfrew County District School Board

## Smudging in Schools Guidelines

### **Introduction**

The Renfrew County District School Board supports efforts to include Indigenous Ways of Knowing, Learning, and Being. As a District, we honour and show appreciation for Indigenous cultural practices and ceremonies. This fosters an atmosphere of reciprocity, respect, understanding, and inclusivity, and upholds the Ontario Human Rights Code. One of the most commonly shared experiences is the practice of smudging.

### **What is Smudging?**

Smudging is a traditional ceremony practiced by First Nations and Métis Peoples. Forms of smudging can be different from place-to-place, but are commonly considered a way of cleansing. Smudging can encourage people to become mindful and centered, to let go of negative emotions and thoughts, and to be connected to the event, task, or purpose at hand.

Smudging involves the burning of one or more medicines gathered from the Earth. There are four sacred medicines: ceremonial tobacco, sage, sweetgrass and cedar. Smudging has been passed down from generation to generation. There are many ways to perform a smudge and different variations exist. Smudging is one of the traditional practices that honour the lands and waters of this territory and all life within it.

### **Who Can Lead or Support a Smudge? What is the Difference?**

#### ***Who can lead a smudge?***

A smudge is led by a person who has an understanding and experience of what a smudge is and why it is done. That person may be any of the following:

- an Indigenous Elder, Knowledge Keeper, or Helper, or a Métis Senator; or,
- a cultural teacher who has been invited into the school by the Indigenous Education Team.

#### ***Who can support someone who requests to smudge?***

There are times when a student may request to smudge individually. In the event that a student requests to smudge, a person with experience and knowledge about the tradition of smudging can support the student. These persons include:

- a supportive staff member who is experienced and knowledgeable about the tradition of smudging;

- a parent/guardian of a RCDSB student; or,
- a student who is experienced and knowledgeable about the tradition of smudging may support a younger student, although supervision is still required by an experienced and knowledgeable adult within the building.

**Group Smudging** (reference that this info is covered in the AP)

Smudging can also be included at gatherings and larger cultural events. Smudging as a group might be a part of classroom or school-wide learning. A group smudge must be led by the appropriate people as listed above. Communication ([RCDSB Smudging in Schools Letter to Families](#)) will have been sent home at the beginning of the school year (or upon registration) to build awareness and understanding of smudging.

**Smudging in Schools Letter to Families**

This Smudging in Schools Letter to Families is to be sent home at the beginning of each school year (or upon registration).

**Smudging in School Signage**

Signage is to be displayed at RCDSB sites to identify designated smudging spaces within buildings.

**Where to Access Medicines for Smudging**

Please reach out to the Indigenous Education Team if you need medicines for smudging at your school, or if you have additional questions.

**FAQs**

- Will smudging set off the fire alarm?  
The smoke from a smudge is minimal. However, sites will be tested and designated spaces will be identified prior to smudging in the school.
- What about people with scent sensitivities/allergies/asthma?  
The smoke from smudging is minimal. Designated spaces are equipped with Hepa filter units, and/or ventilation. Windows will be open where and when possible to assist with reducing smoke. Doors in the designated space will be closed during smudging to minimize the volume of smoke throughout the building. Employees who have documented medical requirements to be accommodated for scent sensitivities, allergies and/or asthma will continue to be accommodated.
- Can non-Indigenous people smudge?  
Yes. Non-Indigenous people may be invited to participate in a smudge.
- Can people with different belief systems smudge?  
Yes, if they are comfortable. Participating in a smudge does not oppose any particular belief system.
- How do I politely decline participating in a group smudge?  
You can still choose to be part of the circle to respectfully learn about smudging,

however, when the smudge bowl is offered to you, you can politely take a step back. This will signal to the person leading the smudge that you do not wish to participate at that time. No explanation is needed.

- Are there times when it is not appropriate for someone to participate in a smudge?  
The person leading the smudge will provide guidance regarding this, based on which medicines are being used.

- Why do people need to smudge at school?

Smudging supports mental health and well-being and people require access to that support throughout their day at school. Human rights need to be upheld at school and all public spaces.

### **Legal References**

[The Ontario Humans Rights Code;](#)

[11. Indigenous spiritual practices | Ontario Human Rights Commission \(ohrc.on.ca\)](#)

[National Council for Reconciliation Act](#)

### **Acknowledgements**

Members of the Indigenous Education Advisory Council:

Judy Ellis, Community Member, Algonquins of Pikwakanagan First Nation

Joanne Haskin, Community Member, Algonquins of Pikwakanagan First Nation

Michele Whiteduck, Language Teacher, Algonquins of Pikwakanagan First Nation

Trevor Pearce, Indigenous Graduation Coach

Amy Charbonneau, Indigenous Education Instructional Coach

Kaley McMillan, Vice-Principal - Eganville & District Public School

Tina Nelson, Principal - Indigenous Education

Bill Murray, Manager of Facilities