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## **Purpose / Background**

The Division supports the implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action and Competency 5 of Alberta Education's Teaching Quality Standard and recognizes the spiritual needs and practices of the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit community. The Division recognizes that the use of plants and medicines in pipe ceremony and smudge are a part of traditional ceremony and ways of being for many Indigenous Peoples and are, therefore, permitted in Division schools, subject to proper ceremonial protocols, permissions, and safety measures. This includes the use of tobacco in pipe ceremony.

## **Definition**

Smudge is an Indigenous ceremony which involves the burning of traditional medicines such as sage, sweetgrass, sweet pine, and/or cedar. Smudge produces a distinct aroma, which dissipates after a short period of time. A smudge is burned to cleanse the body, mind, spirit of any bad feelings, negative thoughts, or negative energy - cleansing both physically and spiritually.

A pipe ceremony is a sacred Indigenous ceremony which is led by an Elder or Knowledge Keeper with knowledge, often referred to as a pipe carrier using a sacred pipe and tobacco. Pipe ceremonies are guided by spirit and are intended to bring people together. They are shared for various reasons, such as establishing the beginning of new work together, committing to collaboration and cooperation, communicating honour, and seeking guidance.

## **Procedures**

1. If smudging is to take place in a Division building, principals/supervisors must ensure staff understand the associated protocols and importance of smudging and pipe ceremonies as part of the Indigenous traditional way of life. It is expected that staff and students participating in smudge have developed an understanding of the sacred nature and reverence for the medicines used, where they come from, and their meaning from the Elder or Knowledge Keeper leading the smudge.
2. Smudging in RVS should be offered after consultation with the Indigenous learning branch and led only by an Elder or Knowledge Keeper. Exceptions may be made for persons of Indigenous background who have been given teachings and permission to lead smudge by family experience or by formal teachings from an Elder or Knowledge Keeper. It should be noted that distinct differences exist between various Indigenous communities and cultures and that the protocols and medicines used in smudge may vary depending on the background of the person leading the smudge.
3. Although several different types of medicines are used for smudge, only sage and/or sweetgrass may be used in the Division per the guidance of Elders participating in the Rocky View Schools' Indigenous Advisory Circle.

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4. Medicines should be obtained in a culturally appropriate manner under the guidance of the Elder or Knowledge Keeper leading the smudge or the Indigenous learning branch.
  5. The person organizing the smudge should make administration aware of the date and time in advance if smudging is to take place in a Division building. Administration will make staff in the building aware of the smudge taking place the day of the event.
  6. Notification will be provided to the parents/guardians of the students in the class in which smudge will occur. Notification should be created in consultation with the Indigenous learning branch. To preserve the understanding of smudge as a safe practice, rather than sharing a permission form, notification should include a procedure for parents/guardians who wish for their student to abstain.
  7. Administration in a school hosting or leading Smudge should consider connecting with the Director of Operations should they have any questions about areas in the school in which smudging will be shared.
  8. Staff leading or hosting smudge should be aware of the location of the closest fire extinguisher prior to beginning the ceremony.
  9. Staff responsible must be instructed on the use of fire extinguishers.
  10. When smudging ceremonies are completed the materials must be disposed of in an appropriate manner according to the guidance of the Elder or Knowledge Keeper leading the smudge.
    - 10.1. Smudge remnants and matches are to be placed in a fire proof container such as a tin can and respectfully disposed of according to the person leading the Smudge.
    - 10.2. Smudge remnants are never to be placed in trash receptacle.
  11. Smudging should take place in the same space where teachings, work, or meetings occur. This practice honours the space and creates an environment of respect and openness. Acknowledging the importance of smudging in the central area reflects a commitment to Indigenous traditions and cultural healing, moving away from historical practices where these sacred rituals were once marginalized.
  12. Tobacco is used only in pipe ceremonies and only by a pipe carrier.

*Reference:*

- Alberta Education Teaching Quality Standard
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action