

FIRST NATIONS & MÉTIS ELDERS (kēhtē-ayak)

HANDBOOK

Courtesy of : REGINA CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

2012



**Regina
Catholic Schools**
www.rcsd.ca

An Elder has to be respected by the people. Elders have a PhD; they have a lifetime of learning. Elders in education are important because they have great teachings. Children need these teachings to guide them through life.”

Elder Mike Pinay

“The passing on of information is common with Elders. There is so much of our culture to learn. Values are passed down from generation to generation. It is important to share this information with our youth.”

Elder Lillian Piapot

“Elders believe in what they do, they take what’s given and value that.”

Denise Beaudin-Anaquod

“Elders provide lifelong learning and experience and we recognize that.”

Gerald Kleisinger

“An Elder should be in the school to go into classrooms to talk to the children...not once or twice, but over and over. They need a steady hand to guide them, to talk to them about what’s good and bad. Children need to be counseled and it needs to be on-going.”

Elder Rose Atimoyoo

“Every Elder is gifted, and when they come to talk in the classroom, there is unseen power in the circle. When you are in the circle you are in a sacred place.”

Elder Emma Sand

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 1. DEFINING ELDERS (KĒHTĒ-AYAK).....1
- 2. ELDERS ROLE.....2
- 3. PROTOCOL AND METHODOLOGIES.....2
- 4. RENUMERATION/GIFT-GIVING.....4
- 5. IN SCHOOL RESIDENT ELDER PROGRAM.....4
- 6. SCHOOL TIPS.....4
- 7. SCHEDULING.....6
- 8. SCHOOL CHECKLIST.....7
- 9. INTRODUCING AN ELDER.....8
- 10. ELDER REQUEST FORM.....9
- 11. GUIDING RESOURCES.....10

ELDERS (KĒHTĒ-AYAK)

A First Nations and Métis Elder is a male or female adult that has earned a reputation for being traditional wisdom and spiritual knowledge keepers. Elders seldom announce their status or position, however they are well known in their communities. First Nations and Métis Elder figures are recognized prominently in their urban and rural communities. Many First Nations and Métis peoples value their Elders and address them with the utmost respect. Although age is not a factor in distinction as an “Elder” they can be of any age but, typically seen as the older members of their communities.

The wisdom of Elders can be divided into two types. They can be either or both:

1. **Spiritual advisor**- an Elder that has knowledge of traditional ceremonies, songs and teaching of prayers to the Creator for personal well-being.
2. **Knowledge keeper**- an Elder that has the knowledge of traditional stories, teachings and understanding of how to live in a way that is respectful of Mother Earth.

Elders are keepers of stories and traditional spiritual ceremonies that have been passed down to them for centuries and from one generation to another. They are considered spiritual librarians of their communities and keepers and teachers of tradition and traditional cultural knowledge. There are some First Nations and Métis Elders that may practice Christian beliefs and values rather than traditional spirituality or the combination of the both.

Elders often perform such services as:

- Saying prayers before meetings
- Describing or performing traditional ceremonies
- Sharing traditional knowledge
- Giving spiritual advice to individuals
- Demonstrating traditional crafts and practices
- Teaching communities protocols

Some Elders may be seen with an Elder’s helper (*oskāpēwis*) who assists the Elder and acts on behalf of them as an interpreter, organizer and/or main contact person for planning the Elder’s schedule.

Oskāpēwis ("The Helper" in Cree) begins training at a young age to assist Aboriginal Elders. Individuals in this role take on more responsibility over time and one day may become Elders themselves.

AN ELDER'S ROLE

First Nations and Métis Elders are a very important resource to schools. It is an honor to have an Elder visit a classroom. They provide an understanding of First Nations and Métis traditions, beliefs, values and perspectives. An Elder's contribution to education is enormous because they possess specialized knowledge about First Nations and Métis history, society and spirituality. Elders are not only cultural and spiritual leaders but in recent years have been more involved in schools to provide guidance and support.

Elders can enhance the education process by:

- Developing in the students a positive First Nations and Metis identity
- Developing students' self-esteem by providing personal and social support from a traditional perspective
- Promoting cultural awareness
- Providing schools with First Nations and Métis ways of knowing and doing

One of the major strengths of the First Nations Community has been the involvement and leadership of First Nations & Métis Elders. Across the province, you will find many successful culturally compatible programs and services that are greatly enhanced by Elders interacting with students.

PROTOCOL AND METHODOLOGIES

Schools should be knowledgeable about this protocol and seek assistance from either an Elder's helper (oskāpēwis) or the First Nations and Métis Education Coordinator. Proper protocols must always be followed. Protocols exist among First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples but may vary from community to community. Not all Métis, Dene or Inuit Elders would be given the gift of tobacco. The gift of tobacco to the First Nations that live in Treaty __ (give number here) territory is a common form of invitation. Schools should familiarize themselves with proper and respectful protocol.

Providing tobacco and/or cloth to Elders/Elder's helpers (oskāpēwis) in a respectful way enhances working relationships and builds stronger partnerships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities. The tobacco and cloth have a spiritual significance that outlasts the event. If a person is offering cloth, then tobacco must also be offered. However, tobacco may be offered on its own without cloth.

Tobacco and cloth are common forms of invitations and customary practice as defined:

Tobacco

Offering tobacco (e.g., pouch, package) to an Elder or an Elder's helper (oskāpēwis) who is invited to attend an event in some capacity is honoring First Nations protocols. A Métis Elder may not practice in the same manner and may prefer a gift. The tobacco or gift symbolizes the contractual understanding between both parties.

Prior to the meeting/event, it is proper protocol to make personal contact with the Elder or Elder's helper. Under "normal" circumstances, it is expected to get to know the Elder/Elder's helper first and vice versa. This allows a relationship to develop where the Elder/Elder's helper is able to share his/her areas of specialization or personal Gifts and allow them to prepare for their role in the event (*see Remuneration/Gift-giving*)

Tobacco Protocol

Following appropriate protocol, the Elder/Elder's helper (oskāpēwis) will be provided with a gift of tobacco and respectfully asked for their assistance, prayers, guidance, etc. for a specific reason or upcoming meeting/event. (If circumstances do not allow for tobacco to be provided prior to the meeting/event, then a reason is provided and permission is sought from the Elder/Elder's helper (oskāpēwis) explaining that the tobacco will be provided at the meeting/event.) Acceptance of the tobacco will indicate the Elder's/Elder's helper's (oskāpēwis) willingness to participate as requested. The Elder/Elder's helper (oskāpēwis) prepares spiritually prior, during and after the event.

Cloth

Offering cloth, also known as "print" by First Nations people to an Elder or an Elder's helper (oskāpēwis) whose services are required by the individual, is honoring First Nations protocols. One meter of broad cloth is the usual amount and type of cloth that is provided to the Elder or the Elder's Helper (oskāpēwis).

Cloth Protocol

Many First Nations people are given a color(s) from an Elder upon receiving their (Spiritual) name. It is this color(s) that they use when offering cloth. Individuals who do not have a cloth color may ask the Elder/Elder's helper for advisement on color of cloth to offer.

Cloth (or print) is normally offered when participating in a ceremony (e.g., sweat lodge, pipe ceremony). Protocols vary from Nation to Nation and are best determined by the Elder or Elder's helper (oskāpēwis) you are seeking assistance from.

Proper and respectful behaviors are essential to attending First Nations' ceremonies and gatherings. Appropriate conduct is always required.

RENUMERATION/GIFT-GIVING

Honorariums and gift-giving are honored traditions founded on the principles of *reciprocity*: when you take, something must be given in return. Once the Elder has completed or fulfilled the request, an honorarium or gift should be given to express your gratitude and appreciation. Gifts can be left under the discretion of the school.

Elders provide life-long learning and teachings and must be recognized appropriately.

In consultation with various educational and governmental organizations there is an echoing response to be consistent with providing Elders with an honorarium flat rate of \$300 per day or \$150 half a day. Additional funds are added for mileage and/or out town travel expenses for such requests as student retreats and outdoor education experiences.

Pending yearly budgets, Elder costs can be jointly shared with schools and/or in consultation with the Cultural Liason Coordinator or equivalent.

Out of town Elders may require accommodations, mileage and an honorarium.

Additional tokens of appreciation or gifts are left at the schools discretion.

IN SCHOOL RESIDENT ELDER PROGRAM

Some school divisions have chosen to make a First Nations or Métis Elder as their school residence Elder and part of their employees within the school division. Elders are a vital component to supporting the schools and to make a big impact on student learning. Some schools are fortunate to have a resident Elder.

SCHOOL TIPS

- The First Nation and Métis Communities have tremendous respect for their Elders. Schools and School Divisions must exemplify this respect in their interactions with Elders by providing places of honor at school events such as graduation ceremony, school assemblies, awards events, etc.
- Many First Nations and Métis Elders specialize in various age groups. We cannot assume that a First Nations and Métis Elder can provide quality services to school age children.

There needs to be an ongoing dialogue with the First Nations & Métis Community or recommendations provided by the Cultural Liason Coordinator or equivalent.

- Although it is an honor to be invited to participate in a First Nations ceremony, teachers must understand that it is inappropriate for anyone to conduct the ceremonies without the guidance and supervision of a respected member of the community. If schools are interested in hosting a ceremony, you must contact the school division representative or liaison for guidance and advice.
- To protect the intellectual rights of Indigenous knowledge that is shared by an Elder or Elder's helper, an individual must seek permission from the Elder or Elder's helper to use the information for other purposes. For example, using a quote or statement requires permission.
- If you do not have a First Nations and Métis student in your classroom, then focus on the traditional Treaty ____ (give number here) territory on which your school is situated.
- Ask an Aboriginal community leader or school division's representative who has worked with Elders which Elder would be best suited for your school request.
- Prior to an Elder's visit, find out if an offering of tobacco is appropriate or required. It is important that an Elder understand what kind of guidance you are requesting; spiritual advice or traditional knowledge.
- When the Elder is ready and the introductions have been made, state your request in a respectful way. If you are requesting the Elder for prayers, be sure to be specific in what you hope from the prayers. For example:
 - *"We would be honored if you would speak to the Creator for us and..."*
 - *"We would like to have a good meeting for the benefit of all school children" or*
 - *"I would be honored to benefit from your advice and guidance" or*
 - *"We would be honored if you would visit our classroom to share your knowledge on...."*

SCHEDULING

Schools requesting an Elder visit for direct curricular connection should consider scheduling one half day or one full day (as per **Elder's request form**) and allow the Elder to visit a few classrooms if possible.

Elders (kēhtē-ayak) working in schools can help to re-establish the connection between Elders and children that can often be lost in a nuclear family. Their involvement in the school creates opportunities for children to build respect for Elders, their culture and themselves.

Schools with in-residence Elders should meet with their Elder and in consultation with a school planning team to determine the best delivery of their Elder program and expectation of their Elder. Involving the Elder in the initial planning stage and during the process of planning assists schools with a successful Elders program. Include the Elder in the planning of the schools calendar and activities.

Elders can offer guidance for students in areas such as (*as per request or approval of a parent or guardian*):

- Staying in school
- Family situations
- Drug and alcohol
- Death or suicide in a family
- Support systems available to First Nations and Métis students in the community

Elders can be called on for their wisdom and knowledge in the following areas but not limited to:

- First Nations and Métis cultural awareness (e.g. treaty teachings, tipi teachings)
- Pow Wow and cultural activities
- Leadership training for students
- Values and virtue teachings
- School cultural events – support to staff and students (e.g. retreats)
- Networking with Aboriginal resource people
- Welcoming and ending prayers
- Specific curricular outcomes and indicators

SCHOOL CHECKLIST

Have I considered the following for the Elder's visit?

- ___ Are there protocols that I need to understand before I invite an Elder/Elder's helper?
- ___ Why is an Elder's assistance required for the visit, meeting or event?
- ___ What role will an Elder take in the school visit, meeting or event?
- ___ Is the role active rather than passive?
- ___ Is the role meaningful rather than superficial?
- ___ What type of tobacco or gift does he/she require?
- ___ Have I met or spoken with the Elder/Elder's helper prior to the meeting/event in order to discuss their input into the school visit, meeting or event?
- ___ Have I met or spoken with the Elder/Elder's helper prior to the school visit, meeting or Event in order to offer tobacco or the gift?
- ___ Have I made sure that I submitted my honorarium form by the date required to the Business and Financial Department or Cultural Liason Coordinator or equivalent?
Allow up to two weeks to process payment.
- ___ Do I have all the contact information I need to process the payment?
- ___ Do I have the correct amount of remuneration?
- ___ How can I ensure that the Elder/Elder's helper receives his/her honorarium and or mileage (if applicable) on the date of the meeting/event?
- ___ Do I have the honorarium and/or mileage cheque ready for the Elder/Elder's helper?
- ___ Did I follow up with the Elder/Elder's helper after the school visit, meeting or event?
- ___ Did I consult the appropriate people if I have questions?
- ___ Who do I have to introduce the Elder and offer tobacco? (See *Introducing an Elder*)

INTRODUCING AN ELDER

1. Greet the Elder with a handshake
2. Meet the Elder at the entrance of the building and make introductions to the staff
3. Ask the Elder if they would like something to drink.
4. In the classroom, introduce the Elder and explain to students why the Elder is there. Then start by saying, *"I would like to welcome Elder _____ to the class."*
5. Have the tobacco in your left hand and offer the tobacco and say, *"thank you for coming today to speak to the grade ____ students, we are currently studying _____ and are very excited to hear your perspective as a First Nations Elder. Please accept this tobacco on behalf of our class."* **BE SPECIFIC** on the role you wish the elder to play and the expectations you have for the presentation.
6. The Elder will choose to accept the tobacco and in doing so they are saying that they are able to do the request. He/she will shake your right hand – the crossing of hands represents -an infinity symbol and the connection of two relationships. The Elder will take the tobacco as a sign of commitment for your request.
7. The Elder may ask how much time they have and you may want to tell them an approximate time.
8. At the end thank the Elder for coming and for sharing his/her knowledge and traditional teachings and shake their hand again. Students may wish to shake the Elder's hand when the presentation is over.

Sample: First Nations & Métis Elder Request Form

Please complete the questions below and forward your requests to the Cultural Liason Coordinator or equivalent.
at () - .

All requests must reflect _____ Catholic Schools Treaty Education and/or Saskatchewan Curriculum outcomes, indicators and objectives. (NOTE: Incomplete forms will be returned.)

Please submit your request two weeks in advance.

1. Date(s) for Elder (provide 3 date choices for the Elder):
2. School:
3. Grade (s):
4. Teacher name:
5. Please indicate the main reason for requesting Elder involvement:

| | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> School based planning | <input type="checkbox"/> Student Guidance / Conflict Resolution |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Direct Support for Classroom Instruction | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (State Reason) |
6. Please provide specific details on the topic or theme you would like the Elder to address, including curricular outcome or indicator.
IMPORTANT: Please be specific to allow for the Elder to prepare.
7. Please read and check the following carefully:
 I would like to have the FNIM Education Coordinator recommend an appropriate Elder
 I would like the following Elder:
8. Elder's protocol:
 I will present Elders tobacco or gift (with instruction)
 I would like the FNIM Education Coordinator to purchase and present tobacco (if available)
9. Principals signature _____

GUIDING RESOURCES

Aboriginal Workforce Participation Initiative: *Employer Toolkit*, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (for a copy visit www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ai/awpi/tkt_e.htm.)

Canadian Association for Pastoral Practice and Education 2007. *Aboriginal Cultural Helper Education Program Spiritual and Pastoral Care Services Royal Alexandra Hospital*.

Community Education Unit – *Aboriginal Elders and Community Workers in Schools: A Guide for School Divisions and their Partners, 2001* (for a copy visit www.sasklearning.gov.sk.ca)

Government of Alberta. *Walking Together First Nations, Métis and Inuit Perspectives in Curriculum, 2012. Elders and FNMI Worldviews* (On-line resource <http://www.learnalberta.ca/content/aswt/>, retrieved January 17, 2012)

Office of the Treaty Commission- *Making the Connection – Cree First Nations kēhtē-ayak thoughts on Education*. 2009 (to purchase a copy visit www.otc.ca)

Office of the Treaty Commissioner, 2002. *Teaching Treaties in the Classroom: Participants Manual. Elders in the Classroom*. Saskatoon, SK.

Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre. *Cultural Teachings: First Nations Protocols and Methodologies*, 2009.

Saskatchewan Learning 2004. *Policy and Protocol on Procurement of Tobacco and/or Cloth for Elders and/or Elder's Helpers*. Revised November 17, 2004

Saskatchewan Learning 2004. *Policy and Protocols on Payment of Honorariums and Mileage for Elders and/or Elder's Helpers*. Revised November 17, 2004.