

River East Transcona School Division (RETSD) is committed to advancing the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Calls to Action. RETSD actively promotes Indigenous education and cultural practices across all divisional sites and schools, including Smudging.

Understanding Smudging

Smudging is a purification ceremony rooted in Indigenous culture and has been passed down through generations. While methods and practices vary among Indigenous communities, its core purpose remains the same: to purify, promote balance, and help participants center themselves with a positive mindset.

According to oral tradition, when the Great Spirit placed the four kingdoms—mineral, plant, animal, and human—on Mother Earth, four sacred plants formed an agreement with humans. These plants, known as the sacred medicines, include:

1. **Sage:** Sage symbolizes the West and is considered women's medicine in Indigenous traditions. It is valued for its ability to provide strength, wisdom, and clarity of purpose. When burned, Sage releases a distinct aroma, but the smoke is minimal and dissipates quickly. Within RETSD schools, Sage is primarily used for Smudging.
2. **Sweetgrass:** Sweetgrass represents the North and is often referred to as the hair of Mother Earth. It is known for its purifying properties and its ability to bring clarity of mind. Sweetgrass has a very mild aroma and produces less smoke than Sage when burned.
3. **Cedar:** Cedar represents the South and is traditionally used for purification and attracting positive energy. When burned, Cedar releases a warm, earthy aroma, and its smoke lingers slightly longer than sage but dissipates quickly. It is commonly used in ceremonies for cleansing and spiritual protection.
4. **Tobacco:** Tobacco represents the East and holds deep spiritual significance in Indigenous traditions. It is offered before harvesting from Mother Earth as a sign of respect and gratitude. Tobacco is also gifted to Elders and Knowledge Keepers when seeking their guidance and teachings. Unlike the other sacred medicines, Tobacco is not typically burned for purification but is used in ceremonial offerings. Tobacco is not currently incorporated into Smudging practices within RETSD.

As part of this sacred agreement, these four sacred medicines offer their purifying smoke to help cleanse individuals and spaces, fostering balance within ourselves and our communities. In return, humans are expected to treat these sacred medicines with respect and gratitude.

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