



*Aboriginal Advisory Council*

# Elder Protocols and Guidelines

Elder Protocols and Guidelines  
for  
School District No. 58 (Nicola-Similkameen)



***Success for ALL Learners ~ Today and Tomorrow***

## **Elder Protocols and Guidelines for School District No. 58 (Nicola-Similkameen)**

### **Background**

Aboriginal Education is a priority for School District No. 58 (Nicola-Similkameen). School District No. 58 (Nicola-Similkameen) is working diligently to help First Nation, Métis and Inuit students succeed in all areas, and to ensure that all students have an opportunity to learn about the important role First Nation, Métis and Inuit peoples have in the past, present and future of Canada.

School District No. 58 (Nicola-Similkameen) are taking steps to ensure their schools are inclusive and culturally responsive by integrating First Nation, Métis and Inuit perspectives into school planning and programming in partnership with the Local First Nation Bands and Métis as per the Enhancement Agreement. This includes welcoming all students to learn about First Nation, Métis and Inuit traditions.

It is understood and acknowledged that First Nation, Métis and Inuit people are diverse in their languages and cultures. However, within this diversity, there are common characteristics that can be referred to as:

The “**Aboriginal worldview**” - guiding principles and traditional values of Aboriginal societies. This suggests the way Aboriginal peoples see themselves in relation to the world. It is a holistic process where learning takes place across different spheres of human experience including spiritual, physical, emotional and mental dimensions. Worldviews may also consider relationships and experiences of the past, present and future as interconnected.

WNCP: The Common Curriculum Framework for Aboriginal Language and Culture Programs, Kindergarten to Grade 12 (2000)

The “**Aboriginal perspective**” - based on the distinct worldview of the Aboriginal cultures. This worldview has humans living in a universe made by the Creator and needing to live in harmony with nature, one another, and with oneself. Each Aboriginal culture expressed this worldview in a different way and with different practices, stories, and cultural products.

WNCP: The Common Curriculum Framework for Aboriginal Language and Culture Programs, Kindergarten to Grade 12 (2000)

Many First Nations share the concept or teachings of the medicine wheel which provides a tool/teaching by taking care of all aspects of one’s self. Implicit in this is the understanding that all of life is a ceremony; that the sacred and the secular are parts of the whole; that people are whole beings (body, mind, spirit, emotion). School District No. 58 (Nicola-Similkameen) are working to share this perspective with their staff, students and community to foster an

atmosphere of respect, understanding and inclusivity. One of the most commonly shared experiences are the various roles held by our Elders and the ways in which we honour them.

British Columbia has long had the goal of improving school success for all Aboriginal students. Achieving this goal will require that the voice of Aboriginal people be heard in all aspects of the education system; the presence of Aboriginal languages, cultures, and histories be increased in provincial curricula; and leadership and informed practice be provided.

### **Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement**

School District No. 58 is committed to the Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement four goals of Health and Wellness, Language and Culture, Self-Worth and Identity, and Academic Success. School District No. 58 works hand in hand with our local First Nations Communities to create and foster cross cultural awareness for all learners.

### **Protocols:**

The following protocols are to be observed whenever members of the S.D. #58 Nicola-Similkameen learning community seek to engage Elders for purposes such as to speak to a class, participate in an initiative, program or project, or assist and advise on cultural events and other activities including but not limited to opening and closing prayers, Powwows, ceremonies, and workshops.

### **Elders**

Within Indigenous cultures, Elders are particularly entitled to be treated with respect. The term “Elder” refers to someone who has acquired significant knowledge over a number of years of First Nation, Metis or Inuit traditional teachings, ceremonies, and/or healing practices, models living in a Good Way, and has gained the wisdom that enables them to share their insight with others. The purpose of this protocol is to assure Elders are treated with respect by members of the S.D. #58 Nicola-Similkameen learning community where they are invited to be part of S.D. #58 activities or ceremonies.

### **Role of Elders**

School District #58 Nicola-Similkameen recognizes that Elders are important members of our First Nations, Metis and Inuit communities and have valuable knowledge to share with Indigenous and non-Indigenous students and communities. Some of this knowledge includes but it not limited to:

- Enhancing cultural perspectives and sharing wisdom and teachings
- Promoting awareness of culture and traditions
- Building and enhancing relationships between the school and Aboriginal parents/guardians/community by making them feel more comfortable in our schools
- Acting as a mediator and promote harmony
- Acting as a mentor and role model for students

- Teaching an example of Puberty Rights (which are individual for each family) \*A letter of parental notification is needed for younger grades.
- Promoting Aboriginal based languages
- Enhancing and enriching classroom lessons and school cultural events with the integration of Aboriginal worldviews and perspectives
- Examples of an elder programs can be a blessing, field trips, storytelling, arts and crafts, cultural teachings and so on.

### **Opening Prayer and /or Blessing for Elder-led Ceremonies**

Usually lead by an Elder, an opening prayer or blessing is intended to acknowledge the gratitude for life and ask for assistance with the work or intention of a gathering.

Traditional worship practices are a part of Native American tribal gatherings with dance, rhythm, songs and trance. Sacred narratives and beliefs are deeply based in Nature and are rich with the symbolism of seasons, weather, plants, animals, earth, water, sky and fire. The principle of an all embracing, universal and omniscient Great Spirit, a connection to the Earth, diverse creation narratives and collective memories of ancient ancestors are common among tribes. <http://www.worldhealingprayers.com/2.html>

[First Nation](#), [Métis](#) and [Inuit](#) religions in Canada vary widely and consist of complex social and cultural customs for addressing the sacred and the supernatural. The influence of Christianity — through settlers, missionaries and government policy — significantly altered life for [Aboriginal peoples](#). In some communities, this resulted in hybridized religious practices; while in others, European religion replaced traditional spiritual practices entirely. Though historically suppressed by colonial administrators and missionaries, especially from the late 19th to mid-20th centuries, many contemporary Aboriginal communities have revived, or continue to practice, traditional spirituality. <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/religion-of-aboriginal-people/>

### **Role of Audience**

During an Elder-led ceremony, everyone stands, hats removed, heads' bowed, hands by side or clasped in front. Don't sit down until you are sure the Elder has finished speaking. Do not talk, text or take phone calls during the ceremony. Be in the moment and ask the group or audience to also be in the moment. Be gentle and understanding of those with challenges.

### **Elder Acknowledgement**

If Elders are present at a presentation, meeting or event, it is a sign of respect to acknowledge their presence. Although you may be on a first name basis with an Elder you should use caution as people may not know that you are on a first name basis and may be offended with your use of their first name. At a formal event or meeting be formal and use both the first and last name. Name is stated ahead of title. **Please confirm how the Elder would like to be introduced.**

## **Contacting an Elder**

In S.D. #58, when contacting an Elder, a phone call is better than something in writing. Elders often rely more on the spoken word than written invites or emails. Do not contact them months in advance and then leave it at that. Contact them again a few weeks in advance and then again a few days in advance. Keep the communication going until the event is complete. Make it really clear the start and end time and the amount of time the Elder has to speak. Be sure to get the first and last name of the Elder, the spelling of their name, how they would like to be addressed and their preferred contact information. Be prepared the Elder may have to cancel due to community events or health issues. If that is the case, contact the District Principal of Aboriginal Education, a First Nation Support Worker, or member of the community and ask for their advice on inviting another Elder.

## **Elder Host**

Where Elders are invited to a S.D. #58 Nicola-Similkameen learning event, the person or organization responsible shall host the Elder and their Helper, if any. The Elder host is responsible for transportation, greeting the Elder and Helper, and following the protocols outlined, as well as arranging for the gift of appreciation after the presentation, meeting or event.

## **Greeting an Elder**

Have an Administrator, teacher, or student at the front door of the building to greet the Elder and their travelling companion, if there is one. Do not assume that they will shake your hand. As you are introducing yourself wait to see if they offer their hand. If they do, do not squeeze their hands - do not apply any pressure greater than what they provide; expect it to be a soft hand that you shake and you will be fine. **Be sure the person who will be introducing and thanking the Elder knows about hand shaking considerations.** Let the rest of your staff know an Elder will be in the building.

At larger events consider having a quiet room where the Elder can prepare for the smudge or blessing, rest after travelling or before returning to their home. It would be polite to have a snack and a drink available upon their arrival or if it is midday or in the evening, plan to have a meal available.

## **Food & beverages**

Be sure to find out in advance if the Elder has allergies, or any specific dietary requirements if they are invited to stay for breakfast, lunch or dinner. Ask how and when the Elder would like to be served. If the Elder has mobility challenges and can't carry a plate of food or they use a walking stick, offer to serve them. In local teachings, often children are served first (in order of age).

## **Elder Helpers**

Elders may bring their own Helper who assists the Elder in preparation of a ceremony. If the Elder has their own Helper, it is important that they are fairly compensated (see Gifts of Appreciation).

## **After the ceremony or event**

When the Elder has completed the ceremony, thank them and their companion. Ensure they are guided to a quiet area and offer the honoraria privately at that time, not in front of the audience/group. Once they are ready to make their way home, assist them to their transportation.

## **Honorariums/Gifts of Appreciation**

Elders never ask to be paid for their work, as it would be culturally inappropriate to sell cultural knowledge. Traditional Indigenous cultural knowledge is not and cannot be owned by an individual or institution.

In the past, Elders were given food, clothing and other necessities in exchange for their help, and now monetary gifts are acceptable if presented as a gift and not as payment. Other acceptable gifts include sage, tea, or dried salmon (cs'wen). It is considered inappropriate to fail to have the gift ready to be delivered at the conclusion of the ceremony or occasion or to request the Elder to attend at a later date to pick up their Gift.

If a monetary gift is being offered, for security and control purposes, it is recommended that a cheque be requisitioned and acquired prior to the time that the gift is required to be provided. In the event that circumstances do not permit a cheque, a cash gift is also acceptable. Elders should never be asked to sign a receipt as acknowledgement of their gift even if it is financial. For Canada Revenue Agency purposes, Social Insurance Numbers do need to be provided.

When offering a gift, Elders should not be requested to their date of birth, or to sign in acknowledgment of receipt. Where the gift is in cash, an S.D. #58 employee should be present as a witness to the delivery of the gift. Elders who are employees of the S.D. #58 Nicola-Similkameen will be remunerated according to their formal contract with the school district.

## **Acknowledgements:**

We gratefully acknowledge the assistance of...

Doreen Sterling – Lower Nicola Band

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Jim Toodlican – Shackan Band

Marty Aspinall – Coldwater Band

And members of the EA working group- Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement and the ACI working group - Aboriginal Curriculum Integration

**Resources used:**

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<http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/religion-of-aboriginal-people/> (Accessed August 10, 2016).

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Lakehead Public Schools. 2009. *Elder/Senator Protocol for Schools*. Available at

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**The Board of Education of  
School District No. 58 (Nicola-Similkameen)**

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**HONORARIUM FOR SERVICES**

Please submit COMPLETED FORM to the School Board Office for payment.

<b>NAME:</b>	
<b>ADDRESS:</b>	
<b>CITY/PROV:</b>	
<b>POSTAL CODE:</b>	
<b>PHONE #:</b>	
<b>SIN#:</b>	

<b>DATE OF SERVICE:</b>	
<b>SCHOOL:</b>	
<b>EVENT:</b>	
<b>SERVICE PROVIDED:</b>	

<b>HOURS:</b> _____ @ \$25.00/HR	
<b>TRAVEL FROM</b> _____	
<b>SUPPLIES/MATERIALS – receipts <u>must</u> be attached</b>	
<b>TOTAL:</b>	

\_\_\_\_\_  
**PRESENTER'S SIGNATURE**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**SCHOOL AUTHORIZATION**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**PRINCIPAL OF FIRST NATIONS EDUCATION**

Please Note: All honorariums are to be paid by the School Board Office.  
Reimbursements are made on or about the 15<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> of each month.  
You are responsible for maintaining your own records for Canada Revenue Agency.