

# Elder/Senator/Knowledge Keeper Protocol for Schools

Lakehead Public Schools Committed to the success of every student www.lakeheadschoos.ca

## Elder/Senator/Knowledge Keeper Protocol for Schools



**Connecting for Success**  
Anishinaabe Pimaatisiwin  
Kikinoomaakewikamikong  
Michif à notre école  
Aboriginal Presence in Our Schools

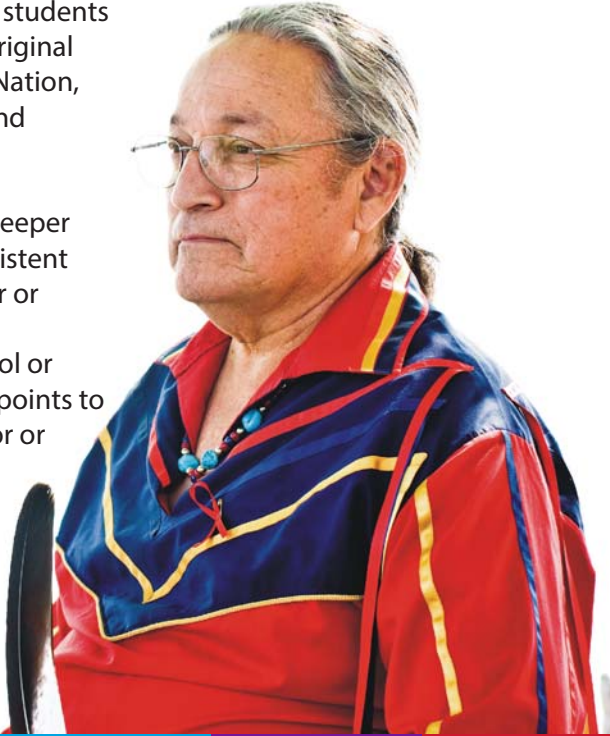
### Rationale

Lakehead District School Board is committed to the success of every student. Inviting Aboriginal role models, like Elders/Senators/Knowledge Keepers, into our schools is an opportunity for the sharing of cultural beliefs and traditional practices with students and staff in our schools. The inclusion of Aboriginal perspective and presence would foster First Nation, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) student self-esteem and confidence.

The rationale for Elder/Senator/Knowledge Keeper Protocol is to serve as guide and ensure consistent practice when working with an Elder, Senator or Knowledge Keeper (also known as a Cultural/Traditional Teacher) in a board, school or classroom capacity. This guide provides key points to consider when working with an Elder, Senator or Knowledge Keeper from the community.



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### Honorariums/Gifts

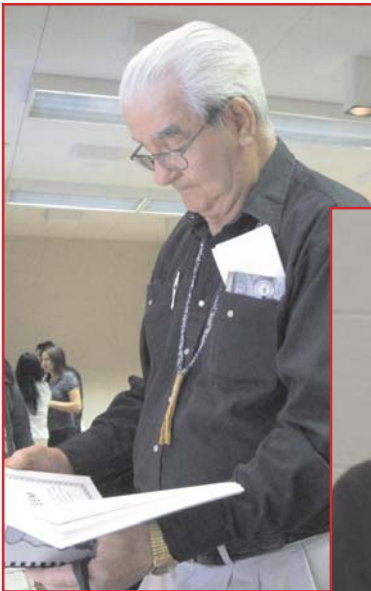
#### Purpose

The purpose of honorariums and gifts, is to acknowledge and show appreciation for the sharing of knowledge and respect for personal time given. Traditionally, food, clothing, medicines, etc., would have been used to gift the Elder/Senator/Knowledge Keeper. Today, these items and/or monetary honorarium may be given as a demonstration of respect and appreciation. The practice of giving is culturally appropriate and is implemented through many agencies in Thunder Bay. An Elder/Senator/Knowledge Keeper does not have the expectation to receive the honorarium, but appreciates the gesture of what is given. Giving from the heart is what counts. Not all Elders/Senators/Knowledge Keepers will accept the gift, and may voluntarily give their time at no cost as well.

The practice of giving honorariums and gifts is outlined in our Board Policy on Fees Procedures. *“It is the policy of the Lakehead District School Board to provide remuneration or an honorarium for professional services rendered.”* The current board rate is available on the website.

- Gift (blanket, gift certificate, broad cloth, craft supplies, practical items etc.);
- Appropriate honorarium amount (current board rate);
- Please let the Elder/Senator/Knowledge Keeper know if a gift or honorarium will be given, or if you are not able to meet these honorarium guidelines. Some Elders/Senators/Knowledge Keepers may prefer a gift over an honorarium; therefore ask the Elder/Senator/Knowledge Keeper on his/her preference.
- The honorarium should be ready and presented with a thank you card or in an envelope right after the presentation.
- Tobacco may also be given but it is good to inquire with the Elder/Senator/Knowledge Keeper first to find out if this is appropriate protocol. It is okay to ask the person if he/she accepts tobacco or not (See Section: Cultural Practice: Offering Medicines (Tobacco)).

Sources: Information has been compiled from numerous local and regional sources.



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**How Do I Make A Tobacco Tie?**

A tobacco tie is made by cutting a small square of broad cloth (can use any of the four colors or nice pattern) and placing loose leaf tobacco (can be store bought, traditionally grown or pipe tobacco) in the square, thereafter tying it with ribbon (can use any of the four colors).

- **If you are giving a pouch of tobacco it can be wrapped in broad cloth tied with ribbon.**
- **When you are making the tobacco tie or wrapping the pouch of tobacco ensure you are in good spirits.**
- **You may contact the FNMI Liaison Officer for assistance.**

**Other Considerations**

Here are some other points to consider when working with an Elder/Senator/Knowledge Keeper:

- Find out if the Elder/Senator/Knowledge Keeper will be bringing a helper. If so, it would be appropriate to give a thank you gift (or card) to the helper as well.
- As a reminder, a phone call to the Elder/Senator/Knowledge Keeper should be made a week and/or a few days ahead of time along with the day before his/her visit.
- It's important to ensure your staff is aware of community visitors coming to your school. It is recommended to arrange a student or staff member to greet the Elder/Senator/Knowledge keeper at the front door or other prearranged location (e.g. office) and escort him/her to the appropriate destination.

### Cultural Practice: Offering Medicines (Tobacco)

When making requests to an Elder/Senator/Knowledge Keeper and if he/she accepts your request, ensure you have tobacco ties/pouches at hand. It's important that tobacco is given first at the initial meeting after the request is accepted or prior to the session/event and not after, unless you have a relationship already established and this practice is okay with the Elder/Senator/Knowledge Keeper.

Offer the tobacco tie from your left hand which signifies giving from the heart, respect and commitment. The Elder/Senator/Knowledge Keeper accepting your request will offer the tobacco tie in prayer on his/her own time for good positive outcomes and guidance.

**It's important to note that not all Elders/Senators/Knowledge Keepers practice traditional ceremonies, and it is okay to ask this question. e.g. "Are you a traditional Elder/Senator/Knowledge Keeper? Will you accept this tobacco tie as a sign of commitment to my request?"**



When making requests to Elders/Senators/Knowledge Keepers and/or Cultural Resource people, practicing cultural protocol will be acknowledged and appreciated. If you are making a request for a drum group, a pouch of tobacco would be offered versus a tobacco tie. As well, if you find out the Elder is a sacred pipe carrier, offer pipe tobacco instead of commercial tobacco. You can ask the Elder first. Pipe tobacco can be purchased at Rollies on May Street.

If your request isn't accepted and don't offer a tobacco tie but give thanks for their referral and time.

### Why Involve Elders, Senators and/or Knowledge Keepers?

First Nations Elders, Métis Senators and FNMI Knowledge Keepers in particular are integral to the revival, maintenance, and preservation of Aboriginal cultures. Elder/Senator/Knowledge Keeper participation in support of curricular objectives develops the positive identity of First Nations and Métis students and enhances self-esteem. All students may acquire a heightened awareness and sensitivity that inevitably promotes anti-racist education. It is important to note that the title Elder/Senator/Knowledge Keeper does not necessarily indicate age. In Aboriginal and Métis societies, one is designated an after acquiring significant wisdom and understanding of native/Métis history, traditional teachings, ceremonies, healing practices and experience. Elders/Senators/Knowledge Keeper have earned the respect from their community to pass on this knowledge to others and give advice and guidance on personal issues, as well as issues affecting their communities and nations.

### Role of an Elder/Senator

An Elder/Senator/Knowledge Keeper appreciates the opportunity to share their teachings, and will respond positively when approached with respect and humility. When requesting guidance or assistance, there is a protocol for approaching Elders/Senators/Knowledge Keepers, which, varies from community to community. Please do not feel intimidated when approaching an Elder, Senator or Knowledge Keeper. Their role is to:

- **Enhance cultural perspectives and share wisdom and teachings;**
- **Promote awareness of culture and traditions;**
- **Build and enhance relationships between school and Aboriginal parents/guardians/community by making them feel more comfortable in the school;**
- **Act as a mediator and promote harmony;**
- **Act as a mentor and role model for students;**
- **Promote Aboriginal based languages;**
- **Enhance and enrich classroom lessons and school cultural events with the incorporation of Aboriginal content/perspectives;**
- **Examples of an Elder/Senator/Knowledge Keeper program can be drumming and singing; field trips; storytelling, arts and crafts, cultural teachings, etc.**

## How to Access an Elder/Senator/Knowledge Keeper

An Elder/Senator/Knowledge Keeper can be accessed by contacting:

- Local Aboriginal community agencies such as Thunder Bay Indian Friendship Centre, Anishnawbe Mushkiki, Ontario Native Women's Association, Lakehead University, Negahneewin College, Métis Nation of Ontario, Northern School of Medicine etc.
- Lakehead Public Schools' FNMI Liaison Officer or Aboriginal Education Resource Teacher.

## When Approaching an Elder/Senator

Once you have acquired the Elder's/Senator's/Knowledge Keeper's contact information, and what special gifts he/she has to share, please provide the following information when speaking to them

- **introduce yourself;**
- **where you obtained the referral from (i.e. Indigenous Friendship Centre, FNMI Liaison Officer);**
- **the reason for your call;**
- **your interest in meeting them further discuss your request at their convenience, gifts/talents, your request and availability.**

Some Elders/Senators/Knowledge Keepers prefer personal visits versus phone calls. To establish a relationship and clarity of the purpose of the visit, meet with them before they are scheduled to visit your school. Some Elders/Senators/Knowledge Keepers may be okay with discussing your request over the phone but usually this practice occurs only when the relationship has already been established, and when there is an understanding between both parties. Be patient when making a request, as you may not always get an answer immediately. An Elder/Senator/Knowledge Keeper may wish to think about the request before committing to it. If they are unable to accommodate your request, he/she may provide a name of another Elder/Senator/Knowledge Keeper for your request.

Ask the Elder/Senator/Knowledge Keeper if transportation arrangements are required. In most occurrences, transportation arrangements may not be necessary but in some instances you may have to arrange their travel to/from the school (i.e. cab fare, driver).

## During Your Meeting with an Elder/Senator/Knowledge Keeper

When you meet with the Elder/Senator/Knowledge Keeper:

- Introduce yourself and be welcoming by offering tea/water/coffee
- Give thanks for the meeting and their time
- Make your request  
*e.g. "I received your name from our Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer and in speaking with this person, he/she recommended you as a valuable resource to.....At our school or in our classroom (whichever is appropriate) we want to build cultural awareness and make connections to the community to create an inclusive environment in the school....Are you available to accommodate his request? We would require a commitment of ....."*
- After you have made your request, the Elder/Senator/Knowledge Keeper will ask further questions for more information and let you know if he/she is able to accommodate your request.
- Ask if a gift or honorarium would be appropriate (as some may wish to volunteer their time).

