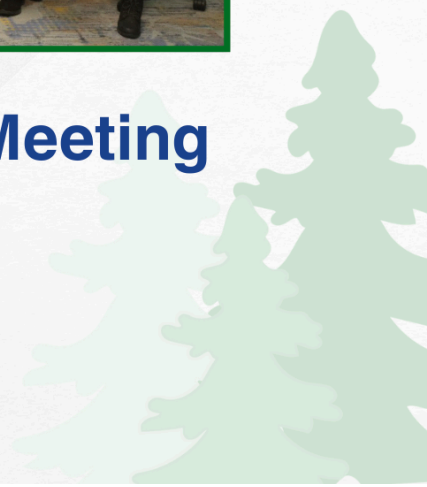




# What We Heard Report Superintendent's Elder and Knowledge Keeper Advisory Council



**December 4, 2024 Meeting**



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## Overview



Northland School Division's priority on reconciliation education is to acknowledge relationships to First Nations and Métis cultural heritage in connections to the land, Indigenous languages, school communities and collaborative partnerships. The Superintendent's Elder and Knowledge Keeper Advisory Council held its first meeting on Wednesday, December 4, 2024 in Treaty 6 territory, Edmonton, Alberta. Through the sacredness of traditional ways of knowing, doing and being, the meeting began with Elder Dr. Francis Whiskeyjack offering an opening prayer, ceremony and song. Deputy Superintendent

Scott Meunier followed with a land acknowledgement. Starting the meeting this way honoured traditions and showed Northland School Division's (NSD) commitment to Truth and Reconciliation, which is the number one priority in our [Education Plan](#): Connections Supporting Reconciliation.

The council will help connect Northland schools with the communities we serve by bringing First Nations and Métis culture, language, and traditions into the classroom. Elders and Knowledge Keepers will guide NSD as we work to support students, staff, and communities in their journey toward truth, reconciliation, and success in education.

At the meeting, Elders and Knowledge Keepers talked about the importance of teaching students about the land through activities like water and medicine walks. They also shared how important it is to keep traditional languages alive, as they help students connect with their culture. Elders spoke about the value of sharing stories, practising traditions, and helping students feel proud of who they are.

Elders and Knowledge Keepers also talked about removing barriers to learning, such as historical challenges and a lack of cultural representation in schools. They encouraged working with schools to include Indigenous knowledge and perspectives in teaching. They also shared ideas about creating safe spaces for students and involving youth and communities in future work.

## Elder and Knowledge Keeper Council Feedback



This section of the report summarizes the key themes NSD heard from members of the Elder and Knowledge Keeper Advisory Council.

**What principles of learning do you hope to help us “lift up” in our schools?**

- Learning involves me...
- Learning to me ultimately supports...
- Learning to me recognizes...
- Learning to me requires...
- **Connection to the land:**
  - Emphasizing the importance of taking students to the land for learning experiences, including water and medicine walks.
  - Teaching that knowledge is all around, accessible to all ages, and tied to the land.
  - Encouraging stewardship of the land, integrating health, safety, and wellness teachings through interactions with nature.
- **Cultural identity and language preservation:**
  - Acknowledging the harm caused by cultural assimilation and the need to reconnect with traditional languages as a gateway to culture.
  - Maintaining Indigenous languages and ensuring their preservation as a crucial element for student success and cultural identity.
- **Addressing barriers:**
  - Highlighting "language theft" as a significant barrier and exploring ways to dismantle it through leadership, values, and storytelling.
  - Investing in projects that engage students creatively and meaningfully while making Calls to Action visible in schools.
- **Collaboration with Elders and Knowledge Keepers:**
  - Integrating their voices and wisdom into curricula to reflect cultural understandings and local perspectives.
  - Promoting listening to Elders as a foundation for designing immersive and effective learning experiences.

- **Curricular and funding changes:**
  - Advocating for curriculum changes that incorporate cultural knowledge and global perspectives.
  - Securing funding for new work and projects that engage students in innovative ways.
- **Action-oriented plans:**
  - Developing an action plan for responsible resourcing to support educational initiatives.
  - Creating Cree/Dene literacy plans with clear timelines.
  - Designing community-rooted practices that reflect local values and traditions.
  - Collaborating with governments and partners to enhance learning environments.

**Vision for educational success:**

The council's feedback emphasizes creating schools that:

- Reflect students' identities and cultures.
- Encourage connections to the land and traditional knowledge.
- Celebrate linguistic diversity as a doorway to cultural strength.
- Foster (or "support") engagement and creativity through community-driven solutions.

**Principle of Learning for Wahkohtowin EveryDay - How to help our schools connect traditional ways of knowing in every classroom?**

- on spiritual (\*creativity) needs...
- on intellectual (\*love of learning) needs...
- on emotional (\*self, others, Mother Earth) needs...
- on physical (\*body and health) needs...
- on social (\*footprint that a being leaves in this world) needs



**Spiritual**

- **Connection and Value:** Emphasizing cultural and land-based relationships, living in the moment, smudging, pipeholder practices, and spiritual teachings (fire, water, trees, plants, and reciprocity).
- **Cree Language and Arts:** Incorporating cultural teachings, stories, and language practice.

- Interconnectedness: Teaching the spiritual relationship between humans, land, and all living things.
- Foundations of Identity: Understanding who we are, where we come from, and connecting through language and culture.

### **Intellectual**

- Truth and Reconciliation: Learning about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and the Calls to Action.
- Education and Knowledge Transfer: Educating about residential schools, opening doors to health-related fields, and learning through hands-on community-based practices.
- Learning Through Action: Demonstrating accountability, asking tough questions, taking students on the land to build skills and knowledge, and incorporating traditional dances and practices like the Sundance.
- Empowerment Through Voice: Instilling pride and confidence in youth by connecting them to their cultural roots.

### **Emotional**

- Support and Balance: Fostering emotional well-being through nutrition education, teaching food preparation, Cree language immersion, and creating safe spaces for listening and support.
- Basic Needs and Guidance: Addressing challenges like lack of sleep, gaming, and meditation, while setting clear expectations and supporting a balanced mindset.
- Pride and Recognition: Building connection to the land and culture, fostering pride and respect for self and others.

### **Physical**

- Land-Based Learning: Reconnecting with the land through hunting, trapping, fishing, and learning on and from the land.
- Practical Skills: Teaching livestock skills, chores, and hands-on activities like producers of the land.
- Body and Health: Emphasizing physical well-being through cultural and community engagement, such as traditional practices and physical health education.

### **Social**

- Community and Connection: Strengthening ties through activities like Christmas concerts, awards nights, and extracurricular events.



- Elder and Youth Collaboration: Bringing elders and youth together through advisory committees, adopting Kokum/Moosum, and establishing shared spaces like “Elders’ Space.”
- Conflict Resolution and Communication: Promoting body language awareness, community connection, and resolving issues through dialogue.
- Preservation of Language and Culture: Highlighting Cree language immersion, bilingual education, and cultural storytelling.

### Other Feedback Shared

- Empowerment Through Understanding: Encouraging children to find their "why" and ask questions to feel empowered and confident.
- Foundations of Identity: Understanding cultural and historical roots to guide learning.
- Historical Awareness: Sticking with Canadian history while incorporating Indigenous perspectives and traditions.
- Intergenerational Learning: U of A students and others learning from local peoples to bridge gaps in understanding and cultural appreciation.

### Parting Thoughts

- **Youth and community engagement:**
  - Involve youth in future meetings.
  - Ensure community events are accessible and inclusive for community members.
- **Safe spaces:**
  - Create safe spaces for students dealing with challenges such as home complications and addictions.
  - Provide spaces in schools for Elders to support spirituality, including practices like talking circles and outdoor land-based gatherings.
  - Explore agreements for shared school-community use of land.
- **Support for teaching staff:**
  - Establish living spaces for teaching staff within the communities they serve.
- **Cultural priorities:**
  - Emphasize "Kids first" and live by the principle of Wahkohtowin (connectedness and relationships) daily.
  - Highlight the role of language as a gateway to preserving culture.
  - Foster connections to real people and traditional laws.



- **Student pride and identity:**
  - Encourage Nehiyaw Pride (Cree pride) and a sense of pride among students.
  - Promote the importance of knowing one's heritage, identity, and where one comes from as a source of self-esteem and pride.
- **Land, language, and culture as foundations:**
  - Highlight the interconnectedness of land, language, and culture as pathways to the future.
  - Help students understand the purpose ("WHY") of learning about language, land, and culture and what value it adds to their lives.

## Next Steps

The Superintendent's Elder and Knowledge Keeper Advisory Council will meet virtually on Thursday, February 20, 2025. The council will also gather for an in-person meeting on Tuesday, May 6, 2025 and Wednesday, May 7, 2025. During the December 4th meeting, there was discussion about weaving in more Métis history, with support from local Métis settlements, Métis Settlements General Council and the Métis Nation of Alberta. The feedback from the December 4th meeting will be shared with council members, staff, students, parents/guardians, community members and education partners.