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IN THE FACE OF CHANGE

☀️ *An Aboriginal Perspective* ☀️

After years of struggle about the politics, practice of inclusion and multicultural education, it is time we understand that inclusive, diverse classrooms are here to stay. But inclusion is not about disability and it's not about schools. Inclusion is creating a society in which all children and their families feel welcomed and valued.¹



The *Grandfathers (rocks)* gave the Anishinawbek people seven virtues to live by known as the **Seven Grandfather Teachings**.

WISDOM – Nbwaakaawin

To cherish knowledge is to know WISDOM.

Possibly the most valuable resource in today's society are the Elders of our communities. Elders radiate and demonstrate respect in everything they do, inclusive of their dealings with individuals, families and school communities. Our schools' Visiting Elder Program supports elementary and secondary school access to local community Elders. They share their traditional wisdom and dedication to the goodness in all aspects of life: spiritual, physical, emotional and intellectual. Elders pass down their heritage, cultural wisdom and teachings both in the classroom and outside on the land. This approach to education promotes an alternative pedagogy and recognizes the importance of such learning. Through offering an Elder's program to both Native and non-Native students, all can experience this rich cultural knowledge, which can only strengthen the wisdom of the community.

LOVE - Zaagidwin

To know LOVE is to know peace.

You must love yourself in order to love another.

The secondary curriculum in our schools offers a range of courses in Catholic spiritual development. SCDSB currently is developing a secondary Native Studies course with a high spiritual content that, at a principal's discretion may be counted as a compulsory religion course in the secondary course calendar. This course will focus on Anishinawbek history, language, culture and identity, but more specifically, spirituality. The course will be based on traditional teachings that show respect for the environment and this in turn teaches students love for the Creator and everything around them.

RESPECT - Mnaandendmowin

To honour all creation is to have RESPECT.

The drum is a sign of respect. Drumming nights offered at four elementary schools support school communities that build bridges between cultures. The drum is the sound of Mother Earth's heartbeat. This is a wondrous extracurricular activity fostering community identity and supporting families in transition.

BRAVERY - Aakidehewin

BRAVERY is to face the foe with integrity.

In order to create a welcoming school atmosphere that recognizes and values aboriginal cultures, aboriginal students and families must see themselves as an equal contributing part of the school culture. Aboriginal students need to see teachers that look like them. They must see aboriginal peoples in books, magazines, posters and on the internet standing side by side with all other cultures.

The Sudbury Catholic District School Board (SCDSB) proudly offers aboriginal education within its schools, as a response to the needs and interests of the students. It is the SCDSB's hope that both Native and non-Native children enrolled in aboriginal programming gain an understanding and appreciation of today's aboriginal society. Recognizing the strengths of the whole, SCDSB has established a wide variety of programming and creative partnerships, providing students with an increasingly culturally relevant education.

In the program's preliminary year, a *Voluntary Aboriginal Self Identification Initiative* was implemented. This program was realized in consultation with the local community and an aboriginal advisory committee was created. The committee continues to meet on a monthly basis and partners on everything from secondary course development to planning the Northeastern Ontario Aboriginal Education Conference in May 2010. The school board partners with local aboriginal agencies, parents and grandparents to recognize people's gifts in the community. This re-establishes a society in which all children and their families feel welcomed and valued.

Aboriginal education programs begin from a child's perspective: "Children need not sacrifice their culture and teachings to succeed in school" (Dr. Cecil King, 2009). Believing in the individual child, SCDSB has purchased culturally diverse aboriginal focused primary and junior classroom libraries. These resources promote an increased awareness, understanding and appreciation for the diverse histories, cultures and perspectives of First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples among educators and students. Cultural integration throughout the curriculum has been carefully presented and supported in a respectful and authentic manner. Integrated into mainstream curriculum, aboriginal education programs seek to honour diversity and recognize the value of the aboriginal ways of learning.

SCDSB based their theoretical approach to aboriginal learning on the Medicine Wheel. The Medicine Wheel's blessed, timeless teachings assist individuals along their paths of learning. Within the Medicine Wheel, the relationships among the teachings form the basis of what it is to be human. Timelessly, the teachings take people from their individualism to celebrated societies. The circle is representative of a continuous, harmonious relationship with nature and all living things both social and biological.

In order to better promote welcoming school atmospheres that value and respect culture in the schools, SCDSB has produced a series of school-based learning posters outlining the *Seven Grandfather Teachings*. Each virtue is celebrated with a poster. The poster campaign invited seven families within the board to participate as role models. The posters honour community by highlighting aboriginal students, mothers and grandmothers. By inviting generational families to model, the board showed support and understanding of the respect for women and how children are raised by the whole community, including mothers, aunts and grandmothers. The posters are produced in Ojibwe and English. Again, the board showed respect for the culture by recognizing that it cannot be separated from language. SCDSB continues to place a high value on the Ojibwe language, expanding classes into the secondary panel and hiring Ojibwe language instructors in both panels.

HONESTY - Gwekwaadziwin

HONESTY in facing a situation is to be brave.

SCDSB continues to work with community partners and their co-terminus boards to produce an Aboriginal Secondary Student Awards Banquet each year. This recognition provides structure for students to aspire to succeed. The individual achievements of aboriginal students are recognized and celebrated publicly with community, family and friends. "Together we can ensure that our youth will have an opportunity to enrich Canada by realizing their potential," said Roberta Jamieson.² The core of someone's person is the basis for any recognition; this begins with hard work and honesty.

HUMILITY - Dbaadendziwin

HUMILITY is to know yourself as a sacred part of creation.

As a whole, the Sudbury Catholic District School Board's aboriginal education initiative prefers to lead by example. With more than 15 new initiatives, SCDSB embraces the spirituality component as it relates to the goodness of Catholicism. This common thread within these programs instils the uniqueness of our aboriginal education.

TRUTH - Debwewin

TRUTH is fact or belief accepted as knowledge.

"A picture paints a thousand words." The Killarney-Shebanoning Outdoor Environmental Education Center is hosted at a fully operational, underutilized one-room schoolhouse in the Georgian Bay municipality of Killarney. With its rare combination of undeveloped Great Lakes shoreline and expansive wilderness, the powerful programming opportunities are endless. The SCDSB in partnership with the municipality of Killarney, offers all students curriculum-based programming with a holistic approach to learning, drawing upon the rich culture and heritage of the local area.



The vision of this program is to provide our children with a natural place for learning. The traditional ways of the Anishinawbek people have given the program a base for learning in a truthful way.

After one season of operation, the SCDSB delivered programming to over 1000 students who attended the Killarney-Shebanoning Outdoor Environmental Education Center. The possibilities of this unique program are endless.

Students, teachers and staff have been exposed to the following culture-based land teachings through the Shebanoning program:

- tipi teachings (based on virtues and values);
- medicine wheel teachings;
- pipe ceremonies;
- drumming workshops;
- smudging ceremonies;
- First Nations' foods;
- eagle ceremony;
- craft programs (leather work, dream catchers, etc);
- sweat lodge ceremonies;
- traditional hikes; and
- sunrise ceremonies.

With this program in place, students gain an understanding and appreciation of the cultural experience of the past and current practices of aboriginal people. There is nothing mystical about the aboriginal people of this nation. Through our programs, myths are explained and truths are explored. In the future, aboriginal education initiatives at the Sudbury Catholic DSB will continue to grow and develop, using aboriginal educators, traditional learning techniques, increasing student engagement and by responding to the learning and cultural needs of the aboriginal student body.

¹ The Positive Classroom, *Educational Leadership*, September 2008, Volume 66, Number 1.

² Roberta Jamieson, CEO of National Aboriginal Achievement Award. The National Aboriginal Achievement Award (NAAA) was established to encourage and celebrate excellence in the aboriginal community. NAAA created the awards in 1993, in conjunction with the United Nation's International Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples. The awards recognize the outstanding career achievements of First Nations, Inuit and Métis people, in diverse occupations.

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