

Impact Statements

Today was a fantastic start. I was especially grateful to meet the rest of the cohort and already learned so much about so many different schools in the US. Can't wait to learn about Finnish schools and brainstorm with my colleagues on how we can bring back some beneficial pieces to our schools and communities we serve.

- Jessica Waters, FLGS 2024

My take away is that we all have different educational perspectives...not just US vs Finland but throughout the US as well. This makes me readjust my lens towards Finnish education to be not only from MY perspective but from others US perspectives as well.

- Amy Anderton, FLGS 2024

My away from today: What an amazing first full day. From our first meeting this morning, I became so excited to absorb as much as I could about the Finnish Education system. Everyone was so hospitable and patiently answered all of our many questions. Also, finally meeting the whole cohort was amazing after just seeing their names on WhatsApp for so long.

- Sarah Cummins, FLGS 2024

Citizen diplomacy at its essence is each of us doing our part to impact the issues that really matter in our world. To really create global positive change, citizen diplomacy then becomes not just a commitment, but a way of being. It underscores that even the smallest act of joy, justice, or care for others and our world is a courageous act toward diplomacy. Citizen diplomacy is moreover the belief, that even the smallest act of good, can and will have huge impacts on our world; in turn, small acts of citizen diplomacy cultivate large scale global diplomacy.

- Donald Rucker, FLGS 2024

My takeaway comes from the lecture from Terri Mölsä, CEO of Fulbright Finland...she said Together we SHAPE the future. I started thinking about what that SHAPE would look like, and then wondered how I (or any ONE of us) could do this. And then I realized, it's not a question of "What can I do to SHAPE the future? I only have a small CIRCLE of influence". However, MY circle overlaps YOUR circle, and YOUR circle overlaps HIS or HER circle, etc. THAT, my friends, is how WE can SHAPE the future....one CIRCLE at a time!

- Amy Anderton, FLGS 2024

There is a deliberate approach starting with the minister of education to support excellence in the field of teaching. This is nurtured through a free programs that challenge educators to achieve at a high level which in turn creates a sense of trust and respect.

- Moses Williams, FLGS 2024

I have been struck by how many of the challenges we face as an educational system in America, seem to be universal and connected to the challenges that Finland faces. We share many of the same hopes and dreams for our students, and work to improve outcomes in many of the same areas.

Despite being separated my thousand of miles, oceans, and language we have so much in common. It's been an honor to be here.

Also sauna and ice swimming are outstanding.

- Emilie Knisley, FLGS 2024

The message keeps resonating that each of us has responsibilities to work for the greater good!

I am so grateful for the multiple and meaningful experiences that we were given today!!

- Kelly Thompson, FLGS 2024

I appreciate the emphasis on trust, teacher and school sovereignty, and collective responsibility. It is refreshing to know that many of the issues we face in the United States are also present here (newcomer support, students and cell phones, parent engagement, post-pandemic attendance, etc). Very thankful for the informative and enriching day of learning and growing.

- Matthew Baker, FLGS 2024

In reflecting on Tehri Mosla's framing, a call to action resonated with the Diplomacy conversation. What are the acts within my purview that can contribute to meaningful change? Also, the 2 alumni principals were inspiring as they share their realities in leading their schools. There was a clear connection between what was identified by the university of Helsinki and coherence with what the work looked like in action- nähdään aamulla

- Jose Rodriguez, FLGS 2024

One of my takeaways comes from the teacher training presentation. During the teacher training process part of the practice is to become aware of his/her own educational theory which includes their values and how it is reflected in course planning and interaction with students. We often assume a teacher's educational theory, based upon our own. However, As I return home I would like for our teachers to truly

ponder this question and articulate in written form their response. I think it will be a great reflection piece that will produce meaningful conversations to support whether our theory is really put into practice or if we need to make adjustments. Today overall was amazing!

- Tanya Smith, FLGS 2024

Buenas Dias! Happy Wednesday ❤️ Here is my contribution for day #2: We heard, "Every challenge is an opportunity and every opportunity is a challenge." This resonates with me ... oftentimes, we are uncomfortable with challenges, change, and discomfort. These challenges and opportunities help us to grow, just as we ask our students to do ... every day. Also, I noticed that the highlights of a strong and "effective teacher" included the following: a person who is strong with relationships, a problem-solver, engaging, shows care for people, and empowers others to do their very best. These are values and character traits that are not often taught in a teacher education program. And, these values are so important for a human's growth and development. Social-emotional learning.

- Khaliyah Williams-Rodriguez, FLGS 2024

The qualities of a good teacher also resonated with me. The focus on mental wellness and being a kind person were highlighted more than subject and content knowledge.

- Sarah Cummings, FLGS 2024

I had two big take aways today. The first was that Finland has a great plan to support the unemployed through retraining and up-training through the vocational school programming. The second was the misconception most Americans have about early childhood education in Finland. Kindergarten (pre-primary) is compulsory in Finland, but most are embedded in the day care model. The Finnish are also doing studies on the benefits of a 2-year pre-primary.

- Rebecca Bacon, FLGS 2024

I really have enjoyed the day. I especially liked the discussion from the school, municipal, and the National levels. I would love to see vocational education grow in the US. I also see many of the same struggles in the US and Finland. I would love to further discuss what basic education looks like for newcomers to Finland, facing and working against systematic racism, as well as to understand more about what special schools and level 3 support looks like in special education. These two days have given me a lot to think about.

- Susan Outlaw, FLGS 2024, FLGS 2024

Two big takeaways from today:

1. Our hosts at the Helsinki Vocational College told us that what is a core value of the city becomes part of the pedagogy of the school. I love how strong the sense of community is both in the school and when looking at the city and how it values schools. It also reminds me of a place-based learning model, which I appreciate.

2. I heard several times today that all schools and daycare centers are good and that all citizens of Finland can expect a similar educational experience no matter where they are. It's a really nice feeling not to have competition between schools and instead having the ability to simply focus on doing the right thing, which is educating all children. But it was also clear that they can do this because of the governmental support for education. When schools don't have to worry about funding or support from the government (or have that constant feeling of having to fight for it) they can foster a sense of collaboration rather than competition.

- Sarah Cummings, FLGS 2024

Here is my contribution for day #3: Most vocational schools are well-supported, with an emphasis on increasing skills, decreasing homelessness and minimizing unemployment. Similarly, compulsory education exists in Finland and challenges with literacy (by gender) is prompting an action at the school and national level to increase instructional minutes. These practices mirror some of the challenges in schools in the US. I am still fascinated by the concept, "a Masters degree is equivalent to trust" and autonomy of instructional practices exists in the classroom.

- Khaliyah Willimas-Rodrigues, FLGS 2024

I was struck by how inclusive the vocational centers are of the whole community. For my district, adult Ed and high school Voc Ed are very different tracks within the centers. The Finnish system feels much more integrated and accessible to all. If we could remove that barrier in the US, I think that the vocational centers could offer so much to local folks struggling with underemployment and low wage work.

- Emilie Knisley, FLGS 2024

My thoughts are pretty simple... All means all in Finland. Every child has an opportunity to contribute to society. Personalized plans for all students and the ability to "reskill"

- Moses Williams, FLGS 2024

My take away is the statement "There are no dead ends in the education system". All students have a pathway of success and success may look different for each child. I am also intrigued with all the student support available at the vocational center.

One more takeaway is the acknowledgement of women in society.

- Tanya Smith, FLGS 2024

Student voice- engaging with students and understanding the school system through their own experiences painted a more complete picture on the educational system- from their aspirations, what they are interested in , how the school serves and guides their needs, was impactful.

- Jose Rodrigues, FLGS 2024

We got to speak with several students today which was really the highlight. One of them actually did an exchange in the US. The biggest take away from my day was when she said that the difference is the number of choices students have in both systems. In Finland, yes, it leads to hope, like Moses said, but also motivation to be at the school they are in.

- Christopher King, FLGS 2024

Monday- I can't express enough how grateful I am to share this experience with such an amazing and inspirational group of educators. Our students across the US are in amazing hands and I feel very blessed to learn from each of you. Within 5 seconds of engaging in the first conversation with someone from the group, I realized he was an expert in an area my district is desperately seeking to improve in. I'm excited to keep these relationships going for years to come.

Tuesday- Did we really swim in ice water? My takeaway is related to teacher observations/evaluations. I used to take great pride in my ability to help teachers grow through the observation process. However, five years ago my district adopted a process that feels robotic and limiting in my ability to offer teachers meaningful feedback. I plan on engaging our top decision makers in my district in a conversation about how to best support teachers in a way that is rooted in trust similar to the Finnish values.

Wednesday- Ami's energy sure was palpable and contagious. My takeaway was the consistent messaging that the educators here share. "There are no dead ends." "We make decisions based on input from our youth." There seems to be consistency and a common direction that all educators in Finland are moving towards. It was evident listening to the panel at the University that all 3 levels are on the same page and working together toward common goals.

Today- The discussion with students was incredible. My takeaway is the genuine gratitude that they exhibit for the opportunities that they have. They communicated appreciation for access to higher education and for the Upper Secondary experience that they were enjoying. I'm not sure what to do with this awareness but it was certainly eye-opening.

- Brian McCarthy, FLGS 2024

My takeaway from Wednesday at the vocational school I was incredibly impressed with how Finland didn't allow a dead end for learning, with the emphasis on the student's success in life, compared to the US that doesn't plan for dead ends but invariably have them, especially for our most vulnerable individuals: students with disabilities, immigrants, and student who fall through the cracks. The importance is on the student's ultimate success in life, rather than the school's or district's bragging rights or statistics. I also want to acknowledge the efforts of so many people at the reception to make this whole invaluable experience come to fruition for all of us.

My take away from today was the similarities between the US and Finland: (1) foreign language teachers on both sides struggle with the time it takes to assess oral proficiency as well as the challenges of recruiting enough students for the less common language classes to constitute full time work, (2) the challenges of rural teachers in the US compared to those in Lapland: pay differences, and finding enough students to constitute a full schedule, and (3) students on both sides, even just before graduation still don't know what they want to do with their lives. I had the impression originally that most Finnish students pursued a goal after graduation, but not true for most! They are just like our kids!

I thoroughly enjoyed meeting Anna from then city government, and the connections she and I made to enhance both sides!! Thank you!!

- Amy Anderton, FLGS 2024

My takeaway from today is that you're an amazing and dynamic group of humans!

- Emily Dudley, IREX

My take away from today was that Finland is seeing many of the struggles that we are in the US. It is a struggle to support the learning of immigrant students and that technology is steering students away from the joy of reading world wide.

- Rebecca Bacon, FLGS 2024

Student welfare is clearly important and a priority. It is normalized for students to ask for help and to receive help, and there are structures in place to support this (e.g., a student wellness café). Repeatedly, we heard "education in Finland has no dead-ends," which is a direct result of the values emphasized in the National Core Curriculum. This serves as the basis for which other practices in schools and classrooms will follow. "The core curriculum explains what to teach vs. how to teach."

Another highlight shared by a high school student today was related to stress: "Stress, what stress? If I cannot do anything about it, why worry? If there is something to worry about, then do something about it rather than worry about it."

- Khaliyah Williams-Rodriguez, FLGS 2024

Everyone is proud of their school and their role in it. This really shows. Students seem very driven and independent. I'm curious to see the broader context in the primary schools today, rather than just the top tier secondary schools. I'm really interested in how that will compare. Again, many of our struggles seem universal and human rather than Finnish vs USA problems. Literacy, digitalization, etc.

- Emilie Knisley, FLGS 2024

Yesterday's trip to the upper secondary school really deepened my understanding of the history of education in this country. The fact Finnish women had equal access to participate in gov and school so early and young people could not get married until they were literate helped contribute to today's collective commitment to education. My biggest takeaways from Principal Ismo were to have an unwavering commitment to remaining student centered and the power of using physical space to promote community. The Nordic welfare system or strong social safety net is possible because of the lack of corruption and the reciprocal trust between government, citizens, and schools. It will be interesting to see what innovative approaches the Fins take to addressing emerging challenges like influx of newcomers, how special ed students will be serviced in higher ed, and how we balance teacher autonomy while still ensuring strong results on national assessments.

- Matthew Baker, FLGS 2024

My takeaway: Transformative leadership takes courage. You must be willing to endure resistance from those in your building in order to make progress. Staff will make the choice to leave or support the expectations.

2nd: Leaders must always be purposeful (your "why") and intentional (making things happen)

3rd: Kids are kids wherever you go!

- Tanya Smith, FLGS 2024

I was really excited to talk to a woman from the Autism Society of Finland. I asked about how her society advocates and supports people with Autism. I also asked about the voice of adults with autism. She explained they have over 100% adults who share their thoughts and experiences as adults with autism. She said in Finland there is more of a culture or seeing autism as a trait like they would blue eyes or being left handed and not as something that needs to be fixed or modified. It was such a refreshing view and one that American adults with autism are pushing for in the US.

- Susan Outlaw, FLGS 2024

Yesterday's takeaway: I was struck by the warm, inclusive feeling of the primary school. The scale of the building was designed with children in mind and it conveyed a cozy, neighborhood atmosphere. It was excellent to be able to see a special education experience in the Finnish schools. You could feel the love and care in the building.

- Emilie Knisley, FLGS 2024

Yesterday's takeaway: joy! Joy is such an important part of learning. I loved observing the students especially during their outdoor play. I loved observing two girls changing in to ice skates for recess. I also enjoyed seeing how a uniquely designed school took advantage of every nook and cranny of space.

- Rebecca Bacon, FLGS 2024

Today's take aways (technically yesterday's):

1. 95% of students are concerned about global climate change, yet only 23% of teachers feel prepared to teach about it.
2. I am grateful to be part of such an impressive cohort! Khaiyah, Susan, and Jose were so remarkable today!

- Rebecca Bacon, FLGS 2024

As I reflect on the amazing time that we had at the nature center. I can see how the environment fosters camaraderie and a unique opportunity to teach life skills and independence. I definitely think that there can be some standards attached to this type of "school of nature".

- Moses Williams, FLGS 2024

I am also impressed at how they have researched the biological changes to the brain and the body when spending time in nature and applying this knowledge to healthcare as well. I love what the facilitators said about not teaching directly and letting go of the control. I think this could be applied in many educational situations.

- Susan Outlaw, FLGS 2024

My takeaway today is that intentionally NOT teaching is as important as intentionally TEACHING. Sometimes we as teachers need to get out of the way and let kids learn by exploring.

- Amy Anderton, FLGS 2024

Another one it is the lessons they taught the kids about resilience. I think resilience, perseverance, and growth mindset are incredibly important skills for kids to develop and I loved the examples they gave of how they were addressing that.

- Sarah Cummings, FLGS 2024

I was struck by how valued the natural world is and how essential it is to Finnish life. Also, I want to recreate that yurt/hut at my school.

- Emilie Knitley, FLGS 2024

Today's takeaway: the importance of spending time in nature and allowing children unstructured time to explore and interact with nature. It's important for adults, too. I also learned that I should not get in a snowball fight with Matt or Brian. 😊

- Rebecca Bacon, FLGS 2024

I appreciated the quiet drive this morning and the beauty of the Finnish countryside. Today's discussions and tour again reflect the importance of education in all aspects of Finnish society. Thank you for a day full of Finnish cultural exposure! I am so very grateful.

- Kelly Thompson, FLGS 2024

I am so happy we are seeing Finnish education from different municipalities. Today was a wonderful introduction to Turku and I am excited to shadow an administrator tomorrow.

- Susan Outlaw, FLGS 2024

Today's takeaway: my goal was to learn about the Finnish emphasis on outdoor education and unstructured outdoor time and I believe I am 90% there. I look forward to seeing more tomorrow.

I was grateful to learn more about early childhood education today and wish we had time to visit a pre-primary program.

- Rebecca Bacon, FLGS 2024