

## **Winston Churchill High School Finland/Alberta International Research Partnership**

### *What makes a great school for all?*

**Background Information:** The information below describes the Finland/Alberta Partnership we were recently accepted to participate in alongside 4 other Alberta high schools. This is a research partnership, not an exchange program, focused on the working question of “*What makes a great school for all?*”. Through collaborative exchange of pedagogy, practice and visions, schools in both countries will have the opportunity to create and implement initiatives that seek to respond to the question. This is a 3-year project with year one being focused on discovering what makes a great school for all, year two extending into an implementation stage centred on what we will do to affect change in our schools, and year three looking to evaluation, sustainability and further growth. Student voice and engagement will be a key element of the ongoing research project.

From the background information for Alberta high schools to submit an Expression of Interest:

#### **Transforming Our Alberta Schools through Action Research**

The Alberta Teachers' Association has initiated a new international research partnership with Finland that will engage Alberta high school principals, teachers and students with opportunities to expand their knowledge and leadership skills and share exemplary practices in areas of common interest with one another and with other stakeholders within and outside their school, jurisdictions, province and country.

#### **Goal**

To establish a network of public high schools in Alberta and across Finland, over a three year period, committed to improving student learning through innovative practices in the area of curriculum and assessment. Included in this focus will be the role played by students, teachers and the school leaders in promoting inclusive positive school change (creating a great school for all) based on the principle of equity.

#### **Focus**

The project involves principals, teachers and students working side by side in an action research project to engage in activities focused on what they believe makes a great school for all. Generally, the first year is spent collaboratively involving student and teacher voice (among others) to identify "What" makes a great school for all and requires action research. In October 2018 the Alberta schools will be travelling to Finland for schools visits, with the Finnish schools visiting Alberta in May 2019. The second year of the project involves ongoing reflection(s) and action research on "So What" difference it is making to the life of the school and school community, and the third year involves a discussion of "Now What" should take place to sustain or transition from the international research partnership work.

### **International Visits**

In the first year the Alberta schools will send a small team of representatives to Helsinki Finland for school visits between October 8-12, 2018. This team has traditionally been the principal, one/two teachers, two/four students. The first day in Helsinki is a base camp summit to orient all of the participating schools, followed by three days of school visits across Finland, and a debrief summit back in Helsinki on the last day to debrief what has been learned. The Finnish partner schools will then visit Alberta in May 2019 for a similar experience, but this time visiting the Alberta partner high schools. Visits to Finland in fall 2019 and fall 2020 will have student representation.

### **Budget/Financing**

The annual financial commitment from the Alberta Teachers' Association will be \$5000 per partner high school each year to support teacher engagement. The schools will contribute through local PD funding and possibly school generated funds. Student travel may be subsidised to some degree, but cannot come from the ATA funds. The general cost of each excursion to Finland will be flights only.

The first connection for the partnership involves the Alberta school teams travelling to Finland October 8-12, 2018 to begin the conversations and work to identify potential practices that can be incorporated to advantage individual schools. Due to the very short timeline leading to the first connections, students will not be travelling to Finland. Following the Finland visit, a student cohort will be developed to lend voice to the initiatives and have the opportunity to travel in year two and three. For the first visit, Tracy Wong, Craig Findlay, Omar Kadir and Carey Rowntree will represent Churchill. Successive years will provide the opportunity for additional staff members and students to enrich their leadership and growth in the areas of positive school change. The Finnish teams will visit Alberta for a similar period of time in May, coinciding with the uLead Summit where teams will present their initial work and initiatives under consideration.

The Churchill application for consideration focuses on improving and enhancing current approaches and practices. We are looking for ways to enhance and improve our current beliefs and practices with fresh ideas and considerations, building on our Moving Forward with High School Redesign opportunities as one example of foundational knowledge. Over the next three years, members of our school community (students, staff, parents, District) will have opportunities to share their visions on "What makes a school great for all?" and contribute to the development and implementation of the initiative(s).

Winston Churchill High School is partnered with **Joensuu Yhteiskoulun Lukio (Joensuu, Eastern Finland)**