

Engagement of students: establishing a student sustainability action group

UPPER SECONDARY



Resources

HUMAN



TIME



COSTS



What was the intervention about?

Aims

To foster visibility of sustainability and climate action at school and establishing a culture and structures for students' participation. Thus, to foster collective awareness and positive attitudes about sustainability and climate action, therefore, it also aims to foster individual competences. Establish a student sustainability team for Samke high school through participatory approach. Raise students' awareness about the possibilities to participate and act in a sustainable way. Organising different activities with students like improving schools' practices towards more sustainable, awareness raising campaigns, visits and excursions. Creating a structure of time, place and resources for the team. Improving the whole school

practices to become more sustainable. Short meetings organised almost every week. During the year 2022-2023 the focus was on mapping the issues the students regarded as important. Improving the quality of school food and recycling were considered as the main issue. During the year 2023-2024 new recycling and collecting bottles systems were established and also campaign days related to decreasing the bio waste at the school restaurant. Also critical consumerism days were organised. Both years 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 students visited primary schools to tell about problems of fast fashion. 2025 spring a panel discussion of green careers organised. Evaluation day in May 2025 results:

- yearly calendar for sustainability activities,
- establishing the schedule and credits for students to participate,
- teachers and students will have meetings together as students' perspectives and ideas are very important to consider.

Facebook post by ECF4CLIM Finland:

Sustainability experts are needed in many fields!

What do you have to offer the world? This is one of the questions asked, for example, in job interviews at Colliers Finland Oy, as shared by Jussi From from Colliers Finland Oy yesterday during the Green Career Path panel discussion organized by students and teachers of Sammon keskuslukio.

Representatives from six different companies and also the city were present. They shared how their work contributes significantly to reducing climate emissions.

For example, VR (the Finnish railway company) has managed to reduce emissions by 10% simply by improving train drivers' driving habits—when there is the will, there is a way.

Attitude makes all the difference!

Challenges

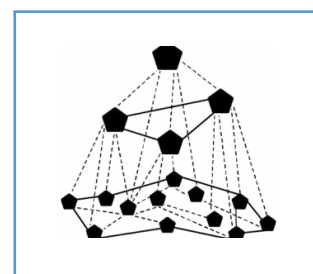
- » During the three years of ECF4CLIM, searching for time for the meetings has been discussed; thus, lack of time is the key difficulty, very tight schedules, and no breaks during the day for extra activities (structural challenges).
- » Different solutions and timings were tried out, and finally, solutions were found. Sports-oriented students are not generally interested in sustainability.
- » Lack of time to activate students during lessons, students used to having a passive role, mainly following instructions/ doing things teachers tell them to do in lessons at school.
- » The solution was to consider students' interests carefully, students' gaining credits and diploma (might be beneficial for searching jobs) according to their participation and collaborating among students and teachers in common regular meetings.

Sustainability competences in place in the intervention



Engagement

- » Main focus: how to engage students in a sustainability team and generally, raising interest and motivation to act.
- » Creating a sustainable culture of practices in the whole school to engage students.
- » Enablers: Inviting the friends of those mapped as interested in environmental issues with them to the meetings, listening to and considering students' wishes and perspectives.
- » The students also get easy study credits out of participating in the team, organising interesting events and excursions related to the students' interests and wishes.
- » Telling about the option to influence positively also through the possibility to participate in the ECF4CLIM research project.
- » Students and teachers started to plan and work together.
- » Engaging all the students through surveys, with a video on the sustainability efforts of the school.
- » Designing a yearly calendar to engage students in sustainability throughout the school year.
- » See also connections (how to engage students through awareness of connections to sustainability)



Connections

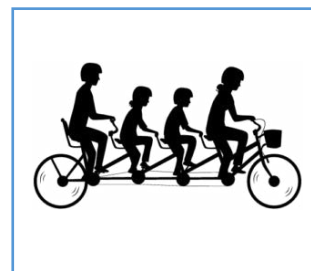
- » Connecting sustainability to students' life worlds: consumerism, clothing, future careers, sports and the sustainability issues raised by them: recycling and food.
- » Collaboration among teachers (also students are interested) between Tampere municipality and the high school of the area- participants of the meetings were collective/centralised timings of the schedules (to enable cross-studying between schools) have been decided.
- » Challenges: General attitudes and social identities questioning the importance and relevance of sustainability among especially boys.
- » Collaboration with the centralised food and maintenance company is challenging and complicated due to the structure.

Sustainability competences in place in the intervention



Change

- » Aimed change: to promote teachers' skills to engage and motivate students, or organise student-centred activities.
- » Moreover, it is a collective change of the structure of the students' schedule - find a good time for student team activities.
- » Reflecting these issues together with teachers and headmaster, and students, by finding out and sharing experiences on how these issues have been organised in other high schools or trying to lobby the curriculum work on how this kind of student-centred and participatory activities could be part of the curricula.
- » Learning about and reflection on different motivation profiles and focusing on and considering students' interests.



Action

- » Students' team's responsible teacher conducted evaluative discussions with each participating students, this has best fostered his understanding.
- » Continuous reflective discussions with ECF4CLIM researchers with headmaster and teachers during evaluation days.

Analytical framework

Individual Competences

- » Engaging students in sustainability, raising interest and activating collaboration, courage of acting differently than mainstream students, making initiatives, dialogue, listening, understanding different motivation profiles/ways of thinking, understanding of sustainability issues and possible solutions.
- » Teachers: participatory skills, collaboration and openness to work with students as equal participants, being interested in and widening perspectives to students' lifeworlds, cultivating a positive atmosphere, acting as a positive role model, analysis and use of e.g. bio-waste data.
- » Making surveys to gain an understanding of students' attitudes.

Collective Competences

- » Managing time: Scheduling meetings, creating a team, communication, and planning together.
- » Resources for monetary compensation for leading teachers.
- » Participatory approach.
- » Yearly calendar with a strategic plan on how to recruit students, including campaign days and excursions.
- » A credit system for students participating.
- » Effective and positive communication.
- » Supportive and effective leadership and allocation of resources for sustainability.
- » Developing a school culture that aims to consider sustainability in all its activities.

Technical-material Competences

- » Big screen in the school restaurant for communication, new recycling bins, bio waste scale

