

Modern Greek Education Initiative

Report on the Workshop held on Saturday, 17 March 2012, 2:30-5:30

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Overview

Purpose

To identify ways in which the broader Greek community can support Greek Schools in the Greater Washington Area.

Participants

Leaders of Greek Schools, Representatives from the area Churches, Parents, Embassy staff, Prometheas Board members, and invited guests with interest and involvement in the topic.

Summary of Meeting

A group of 39 stakeholders (Appendix I) of six Greek Schools gathered in the Founders Hall of the St. George Parish for this important discussion. The meeting began with a welcome by Mr. Karmiris (Appendix II), a prayer led by Mr. Adamantiades, and participants' introductions. After a brief review of the assessment summary on participating Greek Schools, participants

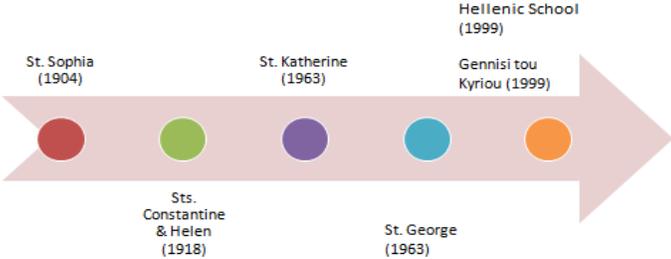
identified priority issues in which the Greek community of the Greater Washington area could help. In the final hour of the meeting, participants discussed the identified priority issues in small breakout groups and presented them to the entire gathering. Participants agreed to establish a permanent forum for continuing this important collaboration.

Introductions and Expectations

Participants brought a range of gifts and talents to this discussion including knowledge, years of teaching experience, educational skills, passion for Greek language education, and a high spirit of voluntarism and collaboration. Participants expected the meeting to be a forum for an open exchange of ideas and to result in a lasting and fruitful collaboration between the Washington Area’s Greek Schools and the Greek community.

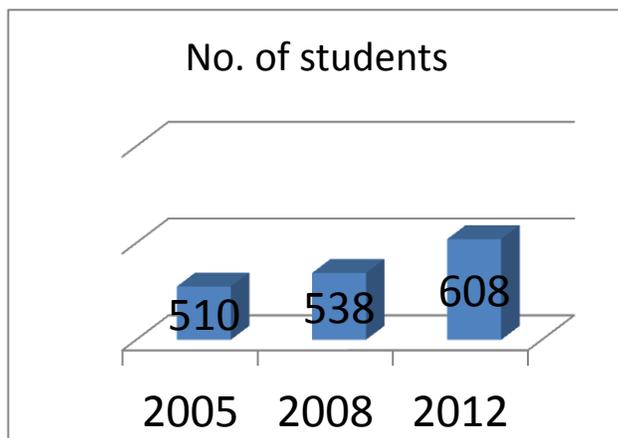
Summary of Assessment of Area Greek Schools

Prometheas invited area Greek Schools to share information about their students, staff, and issues. The schools contacted are presented in the timeline graph below, based on the year of their establishment.



These schools vary greatly in size, serving as few as 7 students and as many as 261. Based on the information provided by area Greek Schools, the total number of students enrolled in our

Greek Schools, cumulatively, has seen a modest growth, presented below.



Approximately 25% of all current students are enrolled in kindergarten. Furthermore, our schools employ mostly paid teachers (each school from 1 to 13), with two schools supplementing their teaching staff with volunteer teachers and one school with paid assistants. There was also significant variation in the structure of Greek education in our schools. Differences include the number of teaching hours, corresponding tuition, and whether schools offered different curricula for students with fluent Greek parents and/or grandparents vs. students with no Greek language support at home.

The main issues raised by Greek Schools in their written responses and follow-up interviews are presented below.

- 1. Insufficient number of trained teachers:** This issue was echoed by most schools. There is currently no place that trains teachers who can teach Greek as a foreign language to our children. This involves a combination of skills: Greek proficiency and teaching, teaching as a foreign language, developing engaging activities for children to motivate their participation and love for Greek School.
- 2. Further legitimizing the “Ellinomathea” Certificate by US Universities:** For several schools, the Ellinomathea examinations keep students attending Greek School for several more years—from 1 to 4. Success in Ellinomathea affords students some opportunities in Greece—applying for government work, attending Greek University, etc.—but few U.S. Universities recognize it or give credit for it. If the Ellinomathea Certificate were recognized by U.S. Universities (as in the case of a New York, specific Greek language certificate), this would provide a further incentive and recognition for our children to attend Greek School and to excel in Greek language education.
- 3. Uncertain demand for Greek language education:** In a time when parents are busy and working hard to balance many priorities, we sometimes see parents giving up on Greek

School and not bringing to it their children. We are not sure of the cause: is it a resource constraint, a time constraint, less pride in being Greek or Greek Orthodox, or less recognition of the value of speaking Greek for Greek Orthodox people. We need to understand the cause of weaker demand, and to support greater demand creation for Greek language education.

4. **Financial-resource constraints:** Some schools have a problem with financial resources for identifying convenient space, paying teachers, etc.
5. **Standard, unified curriculum:** A final shared issue raised by some participants involves the absence of a common, unified curriculum across schools, and even within a school in some cases. This leaves teachers on their own (with the only assistance coming from the school director) to determine what they will teach in the classroom and how they will teach it. This creates a wide variation in what students are taught and how this is done. There are two further complications: varied experience in teaching Greek as a second language, and significant diversity in language proficiency levels and educational goals of Greek-School students and families.

Additional Issues Identified and discussed during the Workshop:

6. **Greek language program as an elective in American Schools** as a strategy to increase demand and supply of Greek language education.
7. **Development of updated materials for Greek language education** to use in classrooms.
8. **Establishment of a Charter school with a Greek Curriculum.**
9. **Need for Coordination of efforts with the establishment of a Coordination Committee on Education to identify and resolve issues facing the schools.**

Highlights of Discussions on Priority Topics

This section is based on reports submitted by break out small groups discussing several of the above topics in greater depth.

Topic: Ellinomathea

Participants: Sophia Tsangali, Kalliopi Tsikourika-Samara

Discussion Highlights: Effort to have Ellinomathea recognized in US highschools and universities.

Key Recommendations:

1. Easier topics
2. Dates of test that are convenient and do not clash with American-school tests
3. Issues that are age-appropriate and adapted for the American context
4. More sample tests and topics, free to all schools

5. Parent seminars to help them understand the right age to have students take each level of Ellinomathea
6. Not to pressure students to take levels of Ellinomathea when they are not ready

Topic: Need for financial resources

Participants: George Philippopoulos, Ismini Lamb, Barbara Kakaes

Discussion Highlights: How the community can help financially the Greek Schools that are not supported by any other organization (church).

Unresolved Issues: How to promote our schools in the community? How to finance these schools?

Topic: Greek language program as an elective in American Schools

Participants: Katerina Drosou, Katerina Papaioannou, Christina Loukou, Pandelis Psoras

Discussion Highlights: Today, we see many other languages offered in American Schools: French, Spanish, Italian, Chinese, Arabic, Russian, Japanese, Turkish, and Latin, to name a few. To add a language, you need signatures from 20 parents. If we do this, we will strengthen the teaching of Greek in area schools.

Unresolved Issues: How do we implement this? What steps should we take? Who should work together: community, parents, Greek Embassy, Greek Government?

Recommendations: Assess the number of students who are interested in taking Greek as a foreign language.

Topic: Need for post event coordination: Education Committee of the Greek Schools in the Greater Washington area

Participants: Aigly Zafeirakou, Nikoletta Argiridou, Kostantinos Loukos, Tony Alexis, and Nikos Kastanos

Discussion Highlights:

- Our Greek American communities are in danger of losing our cultural identity and language.

- Our Greek language Schools are facing issues such as; teacher training, teacher procurement (and Visas for Greek Gvt Teachers), streamlined curriculum and books/modern technologies and methods, Best Practices, State accreditation, (elinomathia diploma) student foreign language credit for Greek in high schools and colleges, coordination of School events and fundraising, etc., - all of which would benefit from the united and sustained efforts of all of the Schools as a group.
- It is a fact that there is a lack of any kind of coordination in the efforts of the different groups and schools which are working with Greek education in the area.
- The interchange of experience and sharing of efforts can benefit all the existing schools.
- The civil community will have to take the initiative of the creation and coordination of the Greek Education project. The support from the Greek state will be very welcomed.
- The creation of an Education Committee, which will deposit effort, out of the box thinking, coordination and continuity of the efforts to solve the existing problems and bust further expansion, is a “must”.
- This committee will be composed by people from each school community; Our priests, school directors and educators, parents and community members all willing to offer their expertise, time and effort.
- The Education committee will need authority. It will be successful, only if a board, which will be composed by all the decision makers of each school and the other players, supports it.
- There must be a meeting to create the vision, and mission statements and the constitution of the above committee, where the composition of the two groups (the Prometheas Education Committee and Board of decision makers from each school) will have to be defined and proposed.

Key Recommendations:

We recommend a constitutional meeting for the purpose of creating the Washington Area Greek Education Board, before summer.

- The participants of this table will ask to meet with the Prometheas Educational Project Group and request its support and to set the date and place for the celebration of the Constitutional Meeting.
- The Prometheas Educational Committee will send a letter to all the participants in the Workshop, inviting them to the Constitutional meeting.

Topic: Insufficient number of trained teachers

Participants: Elina Karmokolias, Elena Lagos, Basil Assimakopoulos, Lefteris Karmiris, Polyvia Parara, Lena Petropoulos, Stratos Tavoulareas

Discussion Highlights: Teachers need training on an ongoing basis. The key areas where teachers need training need to be identified in consultation with School Directors and teachers. Consider the role of multimedia in the class. Share experiences and benefit from what different schools are doing. Finally, enhance the learning experience to attract students.

Unresolved Issues: Check what they are doing in other geographical areas, e.g., New York.

Recommendations: Establishment of a committee to review the need and consider training opportunities. Plan and support training programs. Appoint a chairperson (the group proposed Polyvia Parara), and invite representatives from each school.

Topic: Establishment of a school with a Greek Curriculum (Ελληνικό Πρόγραμμα Ενταγμένο)

Participants: Katerina Drosou; Pantelis Psoras, Katerina Papaioannou

Discussion Highlights:

- Method of establishment
- Support from US and Greek Governments
- Detailed curriculum and instruction books

Unresolved Issues: Use the Greek language as a vehicle to help our children to accomplish important achievements, and to promote the Greek civilization.

Topic: Enhancing the Demand for Greek Language Education

Participants: Sophia Adamantiades, Elisavet Vrahopoulou, Ioanna Houssiada, Irine Makariou, Athanasia Dacey, Giorgos Goudouvas, Myrofora Frantzi, Tina Maragoussis-Conley, Alexandros Alexandrou, Christos Christou, and Achilleas Adamantiades.

Discussion Highlights: The group addressed three questions: (i) is there diminished demand? (ii) what are the reasons for such diminished demand? and (iii) what ways can we think of in order to enhance the demand?

The consensus of the group was that there is indeed reduced demand (in the higher grades) and most of the problems stem from this reality. When strong demand exists, normally, there will be adequate supply for the demanded service. The following reasons for this diminished demand were offered:

- (a) A low priority that the parents attach to the instruction of Greek language. Some call it “an inferiority complex” regarding the Greek language and culture and pressure on the parents to identify with the prevalent culture that surrounds them.
- (b) Conflicting demands, such as those for athletic activities, on the time the children have during the Saturdays when Greek language education is offered.
- (c) Inadequate qualifications of the teachers and the consequent low level of accomplishment in promoting the knowledge of the language. When the parents see that not much is accomplished at Greek school, they pull the children out. Poor accomplishment is also due to the fact that once-a-week instruction is inadequate to make a dent – a twice-a-week instruction may be a better method, as is being used in the pre-school classes at St. George, with good results.
- (d) Mixing children (and parents) who only wish a rudimentary knowledge of the language with those who have higher aspirations may be responsible for low results. Such mixing slows down those children who, for a number of reasons, are prepared and motivated to do more, by those who have lower motivation. Separating these two groups should be considered.

Recommendations:

The following ideas were discussed and agreed in order of importance:

- (a) Children should start their education in the Greek language as early as possible. The experience and success of the Pre-school Group at St. George and the St. Katherine full day Paideia Preschool is eloquent in this respect. The enrollment for both of these programs has grown significantly over the past three years. The St. George Pre-school class has risen to a degree that it cannot be satisfied by existing staff. The record, methodology, staffing, and general approach of the St. George Pre-school Group should be studied and, possibly, emulated.
- (b) As well, the establishment of the St. Katherine Paideia full-day Preschool with immersion style Greek language instruction points to a substantial demand from our Church Communities for daycare and Greek language instruction. Both of these programs clearly show that starting Greek education at an early age, with day-care and Preschool Education, may offer a way for our Greek Schools to greatly increase their enrollment rather quickly and to experience even greater growth if the Schools are able to keep the students enrolled as they grow older and graduate onto the higher grades.
- (c) The involvement of parents is of paramount importance. This can be enhanced by organizing seminars for parents, in which the importance of the language, ideas, values, history, and culture of the Greek civilization, past and present, can be attractively presented in order to enhance the consciousness and motivation of parents.

- (d) The concept of “Ellinomathea” and the certificates and credits that it provides, could play an important role in enhancing the motivation of parents. One of the members (Ms. Vrahopoulou) gave the group an account of her efforts on behalf of the St. George Greek School Board in 2004-2007 to capitalize on this concept, which, in her view, proved unsuccessful. The recognition of the Ellinomathea tests for credit at the K-12 level is a county-by-county (not even a State) school district decision. Fairfax County for example requires a significant number of resident signatures (% of total student enrollment, which is about 150,000) to introduce a new foreign language. It is also a University-by-University decision, as each college has its own standards (for example very different criteria for accepting AP exams). Although other members expressed opposite views, the consensus of the group was that the issue must be investigated further and persons in charge of such matters (for example, the education staff of the Greek Embassy in Washington) should look into this matter and report back to the Prometheas committee as to feasibility, efficacy, methods of approach and the like.
- (e) Organizing a summer camp with the use and instruction of the Greek language could offer a strong incentive. This should be further studied as to its practicality and organization.
- (f) The idea was offered that parent groups that have a need for day-care services can organize neighborhood-centered groups of children in which the care provider would speak to the children in Greek. This would be a natural part of daily service and could fit well in the life schedule of many children.
- (g) The members also agreed that instruction in Greek civilization should be part of this effort, rather than just language instruction. This would (i) impart the history, accomplishments and values of our culture; (ii) make a difference even in the case that the language is not picked up; and (iii) make the instruction more attractive to both children and parents.
- (h) Finally, the use of modern technical means, such as computers, video shows, and other class instruments that are increasingly available these days, introduction of song and dance, and the like could enhance the attractiveness of Greek language instruction and should be introduced at a greater scale in the classrooms.
- (i) Engaging the priests of Greek Orthodox parishes could be beneficial in enhancing the demand owing to the (normally) high respect that they carry among parish members. However, it must be recognized that their priorities are different and their language skills not always commensurate with our expectations and purpose; therefore, we cannot rely on them to do the job that we, as the primary parties, must perform.

Acknowledgement:

We are grateful to Father Dimitrios for assisting the sessions and to the St George Church for making the Founders hall available.

Appendix I

List of Workshop Participants

<u>Name</u>	<u>Identification</u>
Prometheas Education Committee	
Lefteris Karmiris	Prometheas, President
Barbara Kakaes	Prometheas, VP
Stratos Tavoulareas	Prometheas, VP
Tony Alexis	Prometheas, Board member
Elina Karmokolias	Prometheas, Secretary
Nikos Kastanos	Prometheas, Board member
Tessie Catsambas	Facilitator
Stacy Tselekis	Facilitator
Prometheas Members	
Achilles Adamantiades	Prometheas member
Elisavet Vrahopoulou	Prometheas member
Polyvia Parara	Prometheas member
Aigly Zafeirakou	Prometheas member
Ismini Lamb	Prometheas member
Greek Embassy Education Office	
Antonios Marmarinos	Greek Embassy Education Office, Director
Katerina Drosou	Greek Embassy Education Office
Mahy Kosmidou	Greek Embassy Education Office
St. Sophia School	
George Goudouvas	St. Sophia School, Director

Fotini Economides	St. Sophia School, Liaison
Alexandros Alexandrou	St. Sophia Adults School, Director
St. George School	
Fr. Dimitrios Antokas	St. George, Priest
Lena Petropoulos	St. George School, Director
Katerina Papaioannou	St. George School, SB Chairperson
Basil Assimakopoulos	St. George School, Parish Council
Sophia Adamantiadou-Patronas	St. George School, Preschoolers Board President
Ioanna Housiada	St. George School, Parent
Nicoletta Argiridou	St. George, Preschoolers
Christina Loukou	St. George School, Graduate
Konstantinos Loukos	St. George School Graduate
St. Katherine School	
Sophia Tsangali	St. Katherine School, Principal
Elena Lagos	St. Katherine School, PTO President
Chris Christou	St. Katherine School, Paideia Preschool
Sts. Constantine and Helen School	
Kalliopi Tsikourika-Samara	St. C and Helen School, Director,
Hellenic School	
Myrofora Anastasi-Frantzis	Hellenic School, Director,
George Philipopoulos	Hellenic School, President
Irene Makariou	Hellenic School, SB representative
Anastasia Loizou	Hellenic School, Teachers representative

Gennisi Tou Kyriou School	
Athanasia Dacey	Gennisi Tou Kyriou School, Director
Other	
Tina Maragoussis-Conley	
Pandelis Psoras	

Appendix II

WELCOME TO THE GREEK EDUCATION INITIATIVE

By Lefteris Karmiris, President of the Hellenic Society Prometheas

March 17, 2012

Ladies and Gentlemen, participants to the Greek Education Initiative Workshop, welcome.

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to this important workshop. We appreciate that you are taking time out of your very busy schedule to participate. I hope that the time we all are going to spend for this meeting today will prove to be well-spent. I am well aware that I am speaking to you who are deeply devoted to the cause of Greek Education and you hold high the important goal of preserving the Greek culture and Greek language in our community.

First of all, I want to share a few thoughts about our motivation and our goal. We (as part of the Greek American Community of the Greater Washington area) are parents or grand-parents of young people who are participating in some Greek Education program. We see them striving to learn, even though they have to compromise on their free time and other activities which are also valuable at this age. Some parents have an easy time convincing their kids to participate in Greek Education, but others have difficulties. All of us have gone through the stage of questioning the value of Greek Education but, at the end, we came out convinced of its importance to us and to our children. Luckily, we have so many young adults who are so thankful for the opportunity to participate and can serve as examples to motivate our youth that is entering the Greek Education programs. We have seen the Greek programs of the area doing an amazing job, in spite the difficulties and challenges they face.

Personally (but also on behalf of members of the Prometheas Greek Education Committee), I have been following the work that is being done over the years in our Greek schools. One of Prometheas main goals is the preservation of the Hellenic culture in our area. Without question, the Greek language is the indispensable part of the Hellenic culture.

The time came and the circumstances evolved for us to realize that we were providing lip service to the goal of preservation of the Greek language and culture. And we asked ourselves some questions, such as:

- Is there any need for a more practical support we can offer our community schools to do better?
- What substantive and concrete support can we offer to our schools?

- What if we try to apply our diverse experiences and coordinate our efforts with the professional educators to achieve better results?

These and a few more similar questions and thoughts summarize the rationale for our engagement in this unique experiment which we named ***Greek Education Initiative***. We are doing this partly because we feel that Greek education and Greek language are very important elements for our cultural survival in this country. Our motivation as Greeks of the Washington area was the simple observation that we cannot remain observers. Also, we feel that it is our civil duty to be helpful, especially for such an important goal. As of now, most of us involved are members of Prometheas. However, if necessary and desirable, we are prepared to get more people involved (even outside our organization) driven by the needs and the willingness of the schools. When we decided to proceed, we reasserted our commitment to be seriously involved and invest all necessary time to give this initiative a fair chance to succeed.

If we want to really address some of the challenges facing the Greek schools of the area, we need to do our best to be helpful. Let me emphasize that we understand and respect that there is an administrative structure and most of the needs of the schools are addressed through this established structure whether this is called church, parish council, archdiocese, Greek Government, private initiative, and the like. Our intention is to volunteer ourselves if and when this is welcome by each school, and to work closely with you and under your guidance to address issues your school is facing.

Having decided to proceed, we sent out a simple questionnaire and collected your feedback. The main conclusions are as follows:

- We found out that not all school programs are the same. We know that all of you face some difficulties; some do not have enough teachers; others do not have adequate facilities; some have low registration of students; others are facing financial difficulties; the ellinomatheia certification is a good thing, but improvements as to how the exams are scheduled and administered may be needed.
- One thing is clear and common: the Greek churches, the parents and especially the directors and teachers of the Greek programs are making an outstanding effort to support the students and give them a rich and fulfilling experience.
- So, the first thing we feel that we need to do from this podium is to congratulate all of you for the hard work and dedication. You are doing an amazing job and we are all grateful of your contribution.

The objective of today's meeting is to listen to all of you, to identify any issues you are facing and start discussing ways in which we may be helpful. We may conclude that you are not facing any issues and you do not need any help. This will be a pleasant surprise. However, if you are indeed facing problems which we, as the Greek community of the area, can help eliminate or mitigate, we want you to know that we are ready to work with you now and, if necessary, in the future. We see this workshop as the beginning of the effort, not the end of the initiative.

Mrs. **Tessie Catsambas** has volunteered to be the professional facilitator of this discussion. Tessie is a mother of two girls who recently went through the Greek Program at St. George. She was Chairperson of the School Board Committee and under this capacity she worked closely with the teachers to support the school. So, she brings very useful and relevant experience on this topic. Tessie is also a professional facilitator and she will help us go through this workshop in an efficient and timely manner.

Assisting Tessie is Mrs. **Stacy Tselekis** who is also a professional facilitator. We are very thankful to both Tessie and Stacy for their willingness to help.

Before I turn this podium over to Tessie I would like to present to you the members of the Education Committee of Prometheas. These are:

Lefteris Karmiris	Prometheas, President
Barbara Kakaes	Prometheas, VP
Stratos Tavoulareas	Prometheas, VP
Elina Karmokolias	Prometheas, Secretary
Tony Alexis	Prometheas, Board member
Nikos Kastanos	Prometheas, Board member
Spyro Pangalos	Prometheas, Board member (absent)
Tessie Catsambas	Facilitator
Stacy Tselekis	Facilitator