GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AMERICA

DEPARTMENT OF GREEK EDUCATION

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# TWO-YEAR PROGRESS REPORT 2006-2008

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## Introduction

Over the past two years 2006-2008 the Department of Greek Education of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese continues, through its numerous programs, activities and dedicated work efforts, to strengthen the teaching, learning and preservation of the Greek language in the United States. In achieving these objectives, our vision and work remain focused on these four pillars:

a) Constantly enhanced communications with our Greek Schools and their constituencies (clergy, school board, parish council, teachers and parents)
b) Writing and production of new text books for all our Schools,
c) Providing ongoing training and support to our teachers, and
d) Acquiring and utilizing current innovative and effective teaching methods for today's Greek-American students.

A further aspect of our work has keenly focused on taking the pulse of our teachers and school administrators, observing the teaching and operational environments, being aware of the challenges they may present, and maintaining an open dialogue through which solutions can be found.

What follows is an extensive account of the four pillars aforementioned that together comprise the sum total of our vision, efforts and work.

## Communication

The Director of Education had the opportunity to visit the Metropolitans and cooperate with their Eminences on issues concerning school operations in their Metropolises. Furthermore, the Director visited a representative sample of Greek Schools in the United States, observed class instruction and exchanged ideas with teachers, parents and administration. He also met with clergy, community presidents and School Boards.

In addition the Department of Education assisted teachers overcome challenges in their application to receive pension from the Greek State.

**New Books**

Taking into account the results of a survey conducted during 2006 by the Department of Greek Education we have moved to implement consistent themes and recommendations.

A large number of educators, 683 out of 974 (69.82%), from 204 out of 330 parochial schools (70.12%), completed and returned the evaluation questionnaire sent to all schools. Their strong participation in the pedagogical process was exceptionally satisfactory given the large, representative sample. The analyzed data showed that 19,216 questions out of a total of 21,856 (87.92%) were collected, a fact, which renders the survey statistically valid, credible and reliable in both academic and pedagogic terms.

The results of the survey showed that the books currently in use do not fulfill the basic requirements for effective learning and do not adequately address the needs of today's Greek-American students.

Therefore, our actions have focused on the writing and publication of new books and the implementation of a pilot program to assess the appropriateness of the new thematic units.
This endeavor was initiated by his Eminence Archbishop Demetrios who sought the collaboration of the distinguished Professor of Linguistics from the University of Athens,
Dr. G. Babiniotis. After extensive discussions with Dr. Babiniotis on various aspects of Greek Education in the United States, the pressing need for new textbooks and respective teacher training to increase effectiveness became apparent.

With the spiritual guidance of Archbishop Demetrios and the academic leadership of Professor Babiniotis, the Department of Greek Education planned, coordinated, and launched a first-ever effort to publish new textbooks. These books directly respond to the academic needs outlined in the survey for today's Greek-American students.

We anticipate that during the new school year, we will offer our schools a series of books for primary levels of Greek Language instruction: a) student's book, b) student's supplementary book, and c) the teacher's manual.

It is worth mentioning that the student's supplementary book will include explanations of Greek grammatical concepts in English to facilitate students' and parents' understanding.

The teacher's manual will guide the educators in adopting new guidelines to plan and deliver a methodical and enriched curriculum.

A team of experienced teachers and professionals in the field of linguistics from the Arsakia Schools of Athens, with the academic guidance of Prof. Babiniotis and in collaboration with the Department of Greek Education of the Archdiocese has begun the writing of the above-mentioned books. An integral part of the process is to provide thematic units to a number of parochial schools of the Greek Archdiocese in a pilot program to assess curriculum appropriateness and method effectiveness.

We should also note that Prof. Babiniotis is offering his services without accepting any form of payment, reflecting his deep respect and appreciation for the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America.

"I owe it to the church," quoting professor Babiniotis.

**Pilot Implementation of new books**

An evaluation questionnaire was sent to Greek parochial and other types of Schools, of all Metropolises of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese.

We aimed to confirm the appropriateness of the new thematic units and assess whether students understand the material and whether curriculum adjustments need to be made.

The questionnaires along with teachers' suggestions continue to be evaluated and incorporated into the book writing process by an Archdiocese's Committee, consisting of experienced teachers appointed by his Eminence Archbishop Demetrios.

Thanks to a close collaboration between the Archdiocese's Committee and the writing team in Athens, we anticipate that the new book series for the 1st level of instruction will be offered to schools during the next school year.

**Training Seminars**

A two-day seminar under the auspices and with the blessings of His Eminence took place at St. Demetrios Church in Astoria, NY, on September 19-20, 2007.

Furthermore, other one-day seminars under the auspices of His Eminence Archbishop Demetrios and with the blessings of Metropolitans Maximos, Alexios, Methodios, Evangelos and Iakovos of their Metropolises Pittsburgh, Atlanta, Boston, New Jersey and Chicago were organized in collaboration with the Department of Education of the Archdiocese and the education offices of the Holy Metropolises. In those seminars, Professor Babiniotis presented new ways and methods of teaching Greek as a second language. His Eminence Archbishop Demetrios said about these seminars by Dr. Babiniotis for our teachers: "This is a milestone in the Archdiocese's efforts to elevate Greek education in America."

It should be noted that the above-mentioned seminars were incorporated in the program "Visiting Professors" of the "Alexander S. Onasis" Public Benefit Foundation in New York.

**The first educational seminar of Cyprus**

An important historical seminar took place in Cyprus in July 2007 hosted by the University of Cyprus. Under the auspices and blessing of his Eminence Archbishop Demetrios, this seminar was planned and organized by the University of Cyprus and the Department of Greek Education specifically for the continuing education of our Greek teachers in the United States.

For the first time, our teachers were instructed not only in teaching Greek as a second language, but also on acquiring additional skills, and addressing contemporary challenges in teaching Greek history, religion and culture.

The hospitality offered by the University of Cyprus was exemplary. The Ministry of Education and Culture and the University of Cyprus sponsored all participating teachers during the nearly three-week seminar.

Furthermore, representation in the seminar by the Department of Greek Education during the time of the seminar facilitated learning and application by all participating teachers.

The visiting group had the opportunity and privilege to attend a concert by the Archdiocese Youth Choir of New York, at the Presidential Gardens in Lefkosia followed by a reception.

Also, his Beatitude Archbishop Chrysostom welcomed the teachers to the Archdiocese in Lefkosia. The group's cultural activities a visit to the Monastery of Kykkou, receiving the blessings of the Abbot of the Monastery.

The former Minister of Education and Culture, Mr. Kleanthous, welcomed the teachers, had a discussion with them regarding Greek Education in the United States and received their appreciation for the Cyprus Seminar.

It was at this meeting that the Minister officially announced that the Cyprus Seminar was to become an established tradition, which Cyprus committed to continue into the future.

It was a historic and first-ever seminar, of a different nature than other seminars participating teachers previously attended. This was due to the fact that the seminar commenced with the presence of His Eminence Archbishop Demetrios of America, with representation from the Archdiocese, the Minister of Education of Cyprus, the Rector of the University, professors, Mr. Philip Christofer, Mr. Papanikolaou of PSEKA and other dignitaries.

At this point, I would like to convey to Your Eminence and to all Metropolitans the deepest gratitude and appreciation of our teachers for your holiness, affording them this unique opportunity in their teaching careers.

Our warmest appreciation and gratitude have also been extended to the former Minister of Education of Cyprus, the Rector of the University, the President of the Cyprus Federation of America and all those who enabled this historical educational event.

This year the training seminar in Cyprus will commence on July 19 and end on August 4.
Its program involves the presentation of contemporary educational methods for the teaching of Greek language, History, Culture and Religion. Additionally, the participants will be informed on the modern history of the island of Cyprus by a Cypriot diplomat from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The program is further enriched with visits to archaeological sites, historical monuments and cultural treasures of Cyprus.

**Other activities**

The Director of Greek Education, under the spiritual guidance of His Eminence Archbishop Demetrios, had meetings with officials of the Ministry of Education in Athens addressing specific concerns of Greek teachers in America.

Primary issues discussed were:

1) The participation of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America in Ministry Councils according to the Greek law 2413/96
2) The retirement plan of Greek teachers living in America.
3) The hiring of Greek-American teachers (omogeneis) in the schools of the Archdiocese.

We are pursuing these discussions until we have mutually satisfactory resolutions of the issues.

In addition, the Director of Greek Education has represented Archbishop Demetrios at an International Conference that took place at the University of Crete in Rethymno in June 2007. **Dr. Efthymiopoulos presented the topic, "The Greek Orthodox Church of America as an institution for the preservation of the Christian Spirit, Education and Culture of the Greek Omogeneia in America and her ecumenical character towards the idea of globalization."** An active participant in all workshops the Director of Greek Education emphasized the role of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America in preserving Hellenism and Orthodoxy in America.

We are confident that with this spirit of collaboration, with all of us working together and diligently in the present, and by creatively planning the future, we will achieve the optimum for our children and our Heritage.

Your Eminence, a number of your visionary initiatives for the development of Greek Education, is making good progress. Your spirituality and vision were the catalyst for the Department of Greek Education to team up and collaborate with the distinguished Professor Dr. Babiniotis to produce a series of new books for primary levels of Greek language instruction. The entire cost of

the production and publication of the new books is underwritten by FAITH: AN ENDOWMENT FOR ORTHODOXY AND HELLENISM.

**Your Holiness characterized this effort, to produce new books for our Greek Schools as a "sacred task."**

**And indeed, we believe it is.**

All of us work together to make this noble endeavor a reality and we bring our utmost commitment, dedication and passion as well as time, effort and hard work to this project.

It is the intention and will of the Greek Education Department to innovate, contribute to and assists any effort to improve the instruction of Greek as a second language. We always listen to and discuss all recommendations. We welcome your feedback and recognize the value of your input. You and we are guided by the unconditional truth that the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America is and will be the indisputable leader and vehicle of Greek education.

**Goals**

**Teacher training**

Training is of paramount importance to our teachers and the Department of Education. Teacher training will be held during this fall to acquaint them with the curriculum methodology and the teaching approach of the new thematic units.

This training will provide teachers with the necessary instructional skills to become more effective in the use of the new books.

At the beginning of the new school year 2008-09 training seminars will be launched in N.Y. and other Metropolises with the guidance of Prof. Babiniotis.

**Acknowledgements**

It brings me particular honor and joy to take this opportunity to extend special thanks and gratitude to:

a) The Leadership100, which enthusiastically supported all our efforts.

b) The Faith: An Endowment for Orthodoxy and Hellenism, for sponsoring the writing and publication of the new books.

c) The Faith: An Endowment for Orthodoxy and Hellenism, that recognized the Valedictorians and Salutatorians of the 23 Greek American Day Schools of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America for their academic excellence.
These Awards are not only recognition of their academic excellence, but also a financial support for their further educational advancement.

d) Mr. Dimitriou for his interest, continued support in our work and his cooperation.

e) And also kindly convey special thanks to Prof. Babiniotis for his cooperation and academic guidance and support, offering his services without compensation.

Your Eminence Archbishop Demetrios of America, the Department of Greek Education is thus, once again, deeply indebted to your Holiness for your continuous guidance, both spiritual and academic, for your creative vision and for your firm commitment to Greek Education, as we move forward into the future and face the challenges in order to achieve the optimum for our children.

**It is our sincere hope, and prayer, that our children will grow and learn within the beautiful world of Orthodoxy and HELLENISM.**