



GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AMERICA

DIRECT ARCHDIOCESAN DISTRICT OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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ARCHDIOCESAN COUNCIL MEETING

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REPORT OF THE DIRECT ARCHDIOCESAN OFFICE OF EDUCATION

SCHOOL CHOICE: The Greek Orthodox Parochial Day Schools

“*School Choice*” is the foundation for the “*No Child Left Behind Act*” that was signed into Law by **President George W. Bush** in 2002 and has, since then, changed significantly the nation’s education policy. The Law provides benefits to private school students, teachers, and other education personnel, including those in religiously affiliated schools. These services are considered assistance to students and teachers rather than private schools themselves.

“*School Choice*” is what drives millions of parents in the United States to send their children to private schools, either religiously affiliated or independent. According to the U.S. Department of Education / National Center for Education Statistics, in 2003-2004, 5.12 million students were enrolled in private schools – approximately 10 percent of all U.S. elementary and secondary school students. About 82 percent of private school students attended religious schools.

The Greek Orthodox parochial day schools have always been “**schools of choice.**” Thousands of parents – nowadays not necessarily of Greek descent – choose to send their children to the Greek Orthodox parochial day schools. They prefer schools that are affiliated with a church, offer a sense of community, are accountable to them, teach moral values, religion, and the universal Hellenic ideals, customs, and traditions.

These church-supported schools have graduated thousands of students of the finest *ethos* who as adults have distinguished themselves in all professions, are members of the local parishes serving under various capacities, and worthy members of the American society at large. It is for this reason that parishes continue to endorse and support the parochial day schools, despite the financial hardships they encounter in late years.

For the same reason and because the number of small parish-supported early childhood programs has been increasing around the country, our Church shall realize the potential that these **faith-based schools** hold for its future membership.

THE DISTRICT SCHOOLS

For the current school year (2007-2008), **2,020** students are enrolled in the Greek Orthodox parochial day schools of the metropolitan New York area. In addition, **3,300** students are

enrolled in the afternoon Greek schools of the District. Day and afternoon schools employ about 430 teachers.

Parochial day schools in New York City account for one less school this year. The “*Soterios Ellenas*” School of the “Koimissis Tis Theotokou” Church, Brooklyn, was converted to a “*charter school*,” namely the “Hellenic Classical Charter School.” The conversion was done gradually during the last years, and “*S. Ellenas*” operates today as a nursery school.

Charter schools are financed by public funds and are forbidden to teach religion. The “Hellenic Classical Charter School” – formerly “*S. Ellenas*” – reported an enrollment of 220 students for the current year. Less than 40 percent of its students are of Greek descent.

THE ARCHDIOCESAN DISTRICT OFFICE OF EDUCATION: A shift in Focus

The *Direct Archdiocesan District Office of Education* serves the District’s parochial day schools and the afternoon Greek language schools by providing professional training for all teachers (Greek and English curricula), appropriate materials for teaching Greek as a second language, and *The Comprehensive Examination in Modern Greek* for the evaluation of student learning.

Recognizing the invaluable contribution of the New York City parochial day schools to the Church and the Greek-American community, the *Office of Education* of the *Direct Archdiocesan District* has intensified its efforts, in recent years, by assisting the day schools in taking advantage of the provisions of the “*No Child Left Behind Act*” for the equitable participation of their students and teachers in some of its major programs.

Acting in unison with the principals, the *District Office* has become an advocate for the Greek Orthodox parochial day schools at the **federal**, **state**, and **local** education authorities. This is accomplished by participation at conferences and serving on various committees with other religious school officials, such as:

1. The *Annual Private School Leadership Conference*, sponsored annually by the **U.S. Department of Education**, Washington, DC.
2. The *Annual Conference for Administrators of Religious and Independent Schools*, sponsored by the *New York State Coalition of Religious and Independent Schools*, Albany, NY.
3. *The Standing Committee of Religious Schools Officials*, New York City. The *Committee* meets regularly under the chairmanship of Dr. Catherine Hickey, Secretary for Education of the Archdiocese of New York.

Activities of the District Director

Since the beginning of the current school year (2007-2008), the director of the *District Office of Education* has partaken in, or will be attending, the following:

August 21 **A White House Compassion in Action Roundtable:** “*Real Choices For Educational Improvement: How Faith-Based and Community Organizations Help Bridge the Achievement Gap.*” The Eisenhower Executive Office, Washington, DC.

- August 30 Principals Meeting – Greek Orthodox Parochial Day Schools.
St. Demetrios High School, Astoria, NY
- September 25 **The Third Annual Private School Leadership Conference** sponsored
By the U.S. Department of Education/Office of Innovation and
Improvement /Non-Public Education, Washington, DC.
- October 15-16 **The 23rd Annual Conference for Administrators of Independent and
Religious Schools:** Leading Schools, Developing Minds, and Educating
the Future, Albany, NY. Governor Spitzer was the keynote speaker of this
year’s Conference that was also attended by a delegation of eight
administrators from the New York City parochial day schools.
- October 16 Meeting with **Ms. Mary Holmes**, Associate for Foreign Language
Instruction, the New York State Education Department, Albany, NY.
- October 18 **Meeting of the Standing Committee of Religious Schools Officials** with
The director of the NYC Department of Education / Bureau of Nonpublic
Schools Reimbursable Services, Karen Zayde Moncher.
- October 23 Principals Meeting – Greek Orthodox Parochial Day Schools.
St. Demetrios High School, Astoria, NY
- November 8 **Meeting of the Standing Committee of Religious Schools Officials** with
(*scheduled*) **Joel I. Klein**, the Chancellor of Education of the City of New York, to
address issues of importance to the NYC nonpublic schools.

PROFESSIONAL TRAINING

The *Direct Archdiocesan District Office of Education* organizes annually a *Staff-Development Seminar* with the purpose of offering in-service training to the teachers of the parochial day and afternoon schools of the District and the surrounding areas.

Held under the auspices of His Eminence Archbishop Demetrios of America, this year’s Seminar will be held on **Tuesday, November 6, 2007** (Election Day), at St. Demetrios High School, Astoria

With His Eminence’s guidance and support, the *Office of Education of the Direct Archdiocesan District* collaborated with the faculty of **St. John’s University/School of Education** and succeeded in designing an array of *morning workshops* and *afternoon presentations* that will assist the teachers of the parochial day schools in enhancing the knowledge and skills needed to help young students achieve high learning standards. In addition to *St. John’s University*, distinguished educators from other institutions, such as **Queens College** and **Manhattanville College**, will also conduct workshops.

The workshops cover all areas of study and all grades (Pre-K to high school). One workshop, in particular, **“How to Incorporate Culture into the Foreign Language Classroom.”** will be devoted to the teaching of Greek culture. Dr. Jacqueline Davis, *Queens College/Department of Secondary Education*, an expert in foreign language teaching, will be conducting this workshop.

Dr. Davis will speak on “*The Assessments that follow National Standards in Foreign Language Teaching*” in the afternoon.

Principals of the parochial day schools in New York City have officially designated “*Election Day*” as a “*Staff-Development Day*” for their teaching staff, and day schools are closed on that day. Also worth noting is that the Archdiocesan District Office of Education, as a result of its intensified efforts, has secured full funding for the *District’s Seminar* by the **NYC Department of Education/ Bureau of Nonpublic Schools Reimbursable Services**.

THE KINDERGARTEN CURRICULUM

In response to the need for a uniform course study for the kindergarten classes of the parochial day schools, the *Direct Archdiocesan District Office of Education* developed a *Curriculum for the Kindergarten* to assist the teachers who teach Greek as second language to children of this age group. The publication of the *Kindergarten Curriculum* was made possible due to the generous support of the “*Stavros S. Niarchos*” Foundation and will be distributed “gratis” to the schools.

THE COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION IN MODERN GREEK

A major project of the *Direct Archdiocesan District Office of Education* is the development and administration of *The Comprehensive Examination in Modern Greek*, a foreign language test that assesses student proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing Modern Greek. The proficiency level of the Examination is equivalent to a third year of a foreign language high school course.

With the approval of with His Eminence Archbishop Demetrios, the *District Office* secured the collaboration of the **Institute of Modern Greek Studies** (Manolis Triandaphyllidis Foundation), a center of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece for the development and evaluation of the *Comprehensive Examination in Modern Greek*. Mrs. Maria Makedon, the director of the *District Office* will travel to Thessaloniki in December to meet with the professors of the University.

The Comprehensive Examination in Modern Greek is given to public and parochial school students (in grades 8 and above) in New York State as well as in other parts of the country. Based on a Certificate issued by the Archdiocese, students who successfully pass the Examination receive foreign language credits in public high schools, colleges, and universities.

RESOURCE MATERIALS

The *Direct Archdiocesan District Office of Education* has composed a list of recommended books, suitable to the needs of today’s young learners of the Greek language. These books and other resources – certificates and diplomas – are available through the *Office’s Catalog* and online at www.OrthodoxMarketplace.com.



Submitted by:
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