



**ACS Athens**  
American Community Schools

# PRESIDENT'S NEWSLETTER

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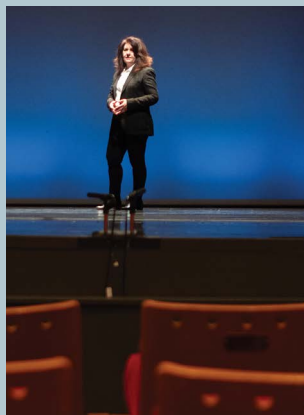


**Peggy Pelonis Ed.D**  
ACS Athens President

## FROM THE PRESIDENT DR. PEGGY PELONIS

Dear ACS Athens Community,

Over the past two years the world came to a sudden stop with COVID-19 and with it came a myriad of challenges: online learning, social media frenzy, longing to connect face to face, to play or to just be together. The greatest longing however was and is a need to be carefree. Though the pandemic seems under control, challenges across the globe continue to find their way into our homes; war, displaced peoples, environmental dilemmas, illness and so many concerns around us that are, no doubt, taxing our physical as well as our psychological immune system.



Borrowing a phrase from the Greek philosopher, Heraclitus, “No man/woman ever steps in the same river twice, for it’s not the same river and he/she is not the same man/woman”. Once change happens we are never the same again. We may long for what was, miss what we had, appreciate what was lost, but we really can’t fully go back. So now what? The question is, will we recover or will we discover? Will we do our best to go back to the way things were before, or will we co-design our future? Will we learn to savor precious moments, cherish relationships, be present in the here and now or long for the way things once were?

Amidst these challenges young people were called on to be resilient, to pivot, to move in different directions, as we all were, and often these directions held no guarantee of positive outcomes, no definite timeline for when things would get better. We, the adults in their lives, were unable to guide them as to a final resolution and ‘back to normal life’. While young people’s journey has been disrupted and has evolved in a new way, they seem to have more resources and more technology tools than any other generation but now they also have the option to discover new skills, new ways of carving their path in life. They know what it means to lose their freedom because of something unpredictable and unmanageable, as they gather their knowledge and skills, as they turn what they know into action, as they strive to be active conscious responsible citizens of the world, we must help them remember that real change – redesign – is in their hands. This kind of redesign comes with a strong, holistic education and the powerful belief that change is likely when they have the tools.

It may not be possible to save the world, but deciding today to make their own life better, to make someone else’s life better, to make life on the planet better can only contribute to a better world. In this sense the greatest risk for young people today is inventing and continuously re-designing their life and that is what creates “architects of their own learning”- positioned to transform the world. It is also what guides adult educators to provide an optimal and continuously evolving platform for such positioning to take place. I would like to share with you some of the ways that our holistic educational platform is being enriched.

## FROM THE BOARD CHAIRPERSON, SUHEIL SABBAGH

In this edition of the President’s Newsletter, I want to take the opportunity to announce that we will be holding elections for the three parent representatives on the Board of Trustees (BoT) in the Spring of 2022. The BoT has 18 members, 6 of whom are US-based Trustees. An Executive Committee consisting of seven Trustees authorized by the full Board is fully operational.

The role of the Board of Trustees is to execute fiduciary responsibilities on behalf of ACS Athens. Our role is to advance the mission of ACS Athens, set policy and direction and work with the ACS Athens President. Further to this, the BoT works to ensure the financial viability of this institution, including fundraising in order to continue providing educational excellence for our student population. The management of the school lies with the president and her leadership team. The BoT does not represent any particular body or voice; rather we are responsible for strategic planning that will ensure the future of the school.

A call to all parents went out asking for candidates to submit interest in running for a Board position. Being on the ACS Athens Board of Trustees requires a strong commitment to maintaining excellence in all aspects of the school’s interests. Board members are expected to:

- Be an ambassador for the school at all times;
- To advance the mission and vision of ACS Athens and set policy and direction, working closely with the President of the institution;
- Demonstrate the ability to listen, analyze, think clearly and creatively, work well with individuals and groups
- To prepare for and attend BoT meetings, take responsibility and follow through on a given charge;
- Contribute personal and financial resources in a generous way according to needs;
- Have a friendly, responsive and patient approach;
- Support the President in her responsibilities of school operation.





# THE IMPORTANCE OF PLAY & THE NEW ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PLAYGROUND



It's no secret that play is a very important part of a child's early development. As children's brains develop, play assists in the advancement of communication skills as well as language skills. Through play children can be creative; using their imagination to problem solve, generate different courses of action, and strengthen their emotional, cognitive and physical abilities.

Though complex, elaborate toys can seem attractive, in reality simple homemade toys can be more useful. These provide children with the opportunity to use their imagination optimally rather than have everything perfectly designed. Give kids a bunch of pots and pans, some string and tape and let their imagination run wild. Ultimately this contributes to creation and manifestation of new objects that can be used to address their needs and to entertain them while providing a feeling of internal satisfaction for what they have created. Isn't this how many of the inventors/engineers/architects began?

Play also allows children to gradually master their world and this builds confidence as well as resilience; both necessary skills as they grow into bigger challenges. Ultimately allowing children to master their world naturally, both individually and with other social groups, is the greatest form of encouragement. When children succeed step by step, but also learn to get up when they fall, they develop the most important ingredient for future success; belief in themselves.

With this in mind and because setting the foundation in the early childhood years for success and satisfaction is very important, our new Early Childhood playground is ready and includes an outdoor theater, vegetable gardens to be planted by students and a running track!

Recently, as a symbolic gesture of moving towards a stronger emphasis on Early Childhood (PJ-2) we had a yellow ribbon cutting ceremony where our new EC mascot: Conscious Cub was introduced, where the ACS Athens- Bright Start partnership was announced and where our very on Dogs in Learning (DiL) program brought Brenda the dog back on campus. Members of the Board of Trustees, the PTO, faculty, administrators, staff and of course students joined myself and Dr. Bea Cameron, Regional Educational Officer for the Office of Overseas Schools, State Department, who cut the ribbon commencing children's play. The best part was the look on children's faces as they ran to the playground.





## MIDDLE STATES ASSOCIATION COMMISSIONS ON ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS APPOINTMENT

It is an honor to have been invited to join the Middle States Association Commission; the governing body that oversees the work of MSA-CESS (see invitation letter here: <https://bit.ly/3w1xPXC>). The Commission is made up of educational leaders from across the region who work to improve the quality of education in the United States and across the world.

"The Middle States Association is a worldwide leader in accreditation and school improvement. For over 125 years, Middle States has been helping school leaders establish and reach their goals, develop strategic plans, promote staff development and advance student achievement". My work with MSA over the years includes leading accreditation for international schools in Turkmenistan, Kuwait, Rome, Moldova and Athens. Leading accreditation for other international schools provides optimal professional development opportunities that allow one to objectively assess the overall operations of a school and compare best practice. At ACS Athens, a number of our administrators and faculty are asked to join MSA teams across the world helping schools achieve accreditation or re-accreditation.

MSA has several protocols designed to fit a variety of schools, for example new schools may use the "Design our Future" protocol, to carve a course towards goals of success. More seasoned schools may proceed with the "Excellence by Design" protocol. ACS Athens was one of seven schools and the only international school to proceed with the "Sustaining Excellence" protocol, the highest and most rigorous level of accreditation. This accreditation protocol has two phases; the twelve standards review as with all other protocols, and additionally it has a phase two component requiring faculty, administrators and staff to engage in Action Research. As you know we have successfully completed the standards review and have now officially moved into the second phase; the school wide research phase. Faculty and non-instructional staff engage in Action Research exploring and investigating best practice and seeing how these can translate into the classroom, to continuously improve teaching and learning. In this year's Commission meeting in Philadelphia, PA in April, among many new endeavors I was proud to be asked by other schools to assist them in adopting the Sustaining Excellence protocol, as ACS Athens is considered a pioneer.

## GIVING ENCOURAGES EXCELLENCE AND WELLBEING



Part of our philosophy of excellence is encouraging a culture of giving. A widely held misconception is the idea that giving generally benefits the receiver. In fact, the greatest reward of giving is to the giver. We know that human beings have two basic needs; the need to belong and the need to be loved. From a place of belonging within a group, a community, a family, humans develop a sense of purpose which gives our lives meaning. What gives us meaning is unique to each of us but a strong connection with another and with society encourages people to contribute, collaborate and generally work for the good of the whole. This does not mean that individual success is neglected; in fact, a strong sense of belonging creates sturdy foundations for success.

When we struggle with problems, are unable to cope, find life overwhelm-

ing, we tend to feel isolated and alone. Convinced that others don't understand and embarrassed to share our weaknesses, we may become distant and withdrawn. Social interest; the ability to think of others, connects us to others and to society in general, helping us better cope with challenges as we take comfort in the sense that we are not alone. This connection happens to a large extent when we are able to 'see' with the eyes of another, 'hear' with the ears of another and put ourselves in the shoes of another. Ultimately this ability to move outside of the self to help someone who suffers more or to contribute to a social challenge, adds to internal satisfaction and mental wellbeing. It also bridges gaps of communication and makes collaboration possible among different peoples.

Empowering students to take charge of their wellbeing is part of our philosophy of holistic education and naturally students could not remain idle in the midst of the humanitarian crisis rising due to the Russian/Ukraine war. Boxes of giving hold great meaning for the giver and the receiver. While the giving of clothes, blankets and food are most obvious, most important are the hidden gifts that come from the heart of those who shift outside of themselves to 'see', 'hear' and 'move' in the place of another in order to ensure bidirectional wellbeing.

“no man/woman ever steps in the same river twice, for it's not the same river and he/she is not the same man/woman”.



# THE EDUCATIONAL COLLABORATIVE FOR INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS-PARTNERSHIP



Providing professional development opportunities for faculty and administrators across the globe is significant in order to stay abreast of educational change and best practice. The Educational Collaborative for International Schools (ECIS) has been doing so since 1965. Located in London, with strong connections in 82 countries and 40K educators as members, ECIS "supports schools in the areas of professional development, leadership development, recruitment, human resources, governance, and risk, complemented by grants and awards.

The ECIS and ACS Athens partnership goes back several years. I am honored however to have been recently elected to serve on the ECIS Board of Trustees. In 2023 ACS Athens will be hosting the ECIS student support conference Leading Inclusion by Example. It promises to be a most rewarding educational experience for educators, parents and students.

Recently, I was delighted to invite ACS Athens students to be part of a new ECIS initiative; the creation of a student-led & service-oriented global conference. ACS Athens students took the floor dynamically with fresh ideas and well-informed suggestions, continuing to lead the way to a new era where young people's voices are amplified globally.

# THE ACS ATHENS BASKETBALL COACHES' CLINIC; A UNIQUE NETWORKING EXPERIENCE



With two years pause due to the pandemic lockdown, the coaches' clinic took place May 14-15 at ACS Athens. This year's talented and well accomplished coaches included:

- Tara VanDerveer, Head Coach at Stanford University and Naismith Hall of Famer
- Mitch Henderson, Head Coach at Princeton University
- Nyree Dardarian, Performance Nutritionist at Drexel University
- Marshall Cho, USA Basketball Youth programs

This outstanding professional development opportunity not only attracts professional participating coaches from Greece, Europe and the USA, but also allows university students and amateur coaches to attend. Over the years, speakers joining the clinic have come from the University of Maine, DePaul University, Washington State University, Virginia Commonwealth University, St. Louis University, American University, New Jersey Institute of Technology, Liberty University, University of North Carolina @ Charlotte, Florida State University, University of Southern New Hampshire, Maryland University, Grinnell College, Cal Poly Pomona and more. Most noteworthy is that these coaches have the opportunity to watch our talented athletes in action and learn more about our institution.

# THE POWER OF APPRECIATION AND THE PTO



Recently, the PTO president and members of the ACS Athens PTO organized a Teacher/Staff Appreciation luncheon and gift day. As they naturally, methodically and very cheerfully, served the faculty and staff a variety of dishes representing at least some of the nationalities in the school, I'm not sure they realized the significance of such a gesture. Smiles got bigger and stayed on people's faces longer, there was a spring in people's step, conversations were lively and cheerful and expressions of gratitude abounded. Such a simple gesture has incredible power towards wellbeing. Appreciation means that someone acknowledges that they benefited from one's help or guidance and is one of the key components of Positive Psychology known to have positive outcomes. Being receptors of appreciation can lower anxiety, reduce stress, improve one's mood, and can motivate people to do better/be better.

Experiencing appreciation can contribute to stronger social bonds and encourages people to come closer together; to collaborate, socialize and be less worried about showing vulnerability. Overall, experiencing appreciation contributes to well-being. No wonder the energy at ACS Athens during Teacher/Staff Appreciation Day was festive. In turn, thank you to our PTO for taking the time to acknowledge and celebrate teaching and learning. Your gesture was much appreciated!

Holistic education encompasses education on all levels; intellectual, physical and emotional. In fact, learning is largely an emotional experience. Most people in their adult life may not remember the details learned in social studies or math, but will

remember a particular teacher and how they made them feel. Athletics are a significant part of the ACS Athens culture. Led by Annie Constantinides (Ms. C.), former national basketball star and current elected member of the Board of Hellenic Basketball Federation, there is no doubt that empowering student athletes to achieve optimal success, while developing well rounded personalities, is a goal everyone at ACS Athens is encouraged to strive towards.

In order to provide opportunities for student athletes, the international basketball coaches clinic was developed aiming to network and expand partnerships with universities in the United States. This well thought out strategic plan was a natural outcome as the Sabbagh academic/athletic scholarships attracted to ACS Athens top sports talent, of diverse background from the local community, enhancing an already strong athletic program and empowering further the very talented student athletic teams. To this date, sixteen ACS Athens student athletes have received full university athletic scholarships, eleven of which are recipients, while at ACS, of the Sabbagh ACS scholarships.