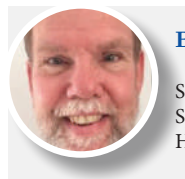


ACS Athens School in Greece has international flavor, American roots



By David Bjorkgren

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There's a place in the suburbs of Athens, Greece, where children are taught to be world citizens.

ACS Athens is a private K-12 international school that embraces the American educational philosophy but also has a multi-national flavor.

The school's president, Dr. Peggy Pelonis, appreciates the mix. The psychologist grew up in a Greek family in Los Angeles, studying in the U.S., but has also run an international training center for psychologists in Greece. She's been the school's president since 2019.

"We are a top rank school in Greece with a strong emphasis on American curriculum and philosophy, and a leading school with over 65 nationalities. The combination of those two things is important," Dr. Pelonis says.

The ultimate goal? Giving students a sense of purpose and wonder so they will go out into the world and make it a better place.

The school dares to ask the questions: Are our children happy, and how do they achieve contentment?

"They achieve many awards. They get degrees. They become very successful but what about internal satisfaction?" Dr. Pelonis asks.

ACS Athens was founded in 1945 as a school for children living on American and English military bases in Greece.

Over time, the military left, but the school remained, opening its doors first to worldwide students, then to students in Greece.

English is the exclusive language at ACS Athens and students graduate with an American high school diploma. They can also earn the International Baccalaureate diploma, as well as a Greek equivalency diploma.



Dr. Peggy Pelonis, President of ACS

Dr. Peggy Pelonis. Photo courtesy of ACS

"The American Philosophy allows students to have choices," Dr. Pelonis says. It's more about seeing the individual differences in students and guiding them to find where they excel.

The result is independent learners who will think about knowledge critically, synthesize it and use it to solve problems.

ACS Athens is an innovator.

It's already introduced the concepts of artificial intelligence to its Elementary School.

When COVID-19 shut down schools world-wide, ACS Athens was up and running online overnight. It had been investigating online learning when the pandemic struck.

"It caught everyone else by surprise but we were prepared because we were looking ahead," Dr. Pelonis says.

ACS Athens faculty are motivated

to examine and improve their own teaching practices, making the school one of seven in the world to be accredited for a Sustaining Excellence protocol from the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools.

"They recognized that we have

these practices in place for continuous improvement and life-long learning, which is what we expect from our students," Dr. Pelonis says.

Faculty and staff teach ethical decision-making, so students understand their decisions and actions have consequences.



The (famous) Academy blue doors. Source: ACS Facebook page

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“The idea is to develop in these students emotional intelligence and resilience beyond academic success,” Dr. Pelonis says.

The 1,088 students currently enrolled come from 65 nationalities. A third is from the U.S. A third is local. The remaining third are from all over the world.

Individual attention from teachers is optimized with small classes of 20 or so.

Campus life is busy at the commuter school. Being in Athens means Greek influences abound.

The Greek language is taught and there is a popular Humanities course combining philosophy, history, English and Social Studies with opportunities to visit sites throughout Greece.

Students can join one of the five Greek-themed houses for friendly competitions: Athenians, Corinthians, Macedonians, Spartans and Trojans.

They may take lunch with the faculty or administrators, or participate in an annual mock trial featuring former U.S. President Harry Truman.

They might want to start their own clothing line, build a robot, work on a podcast in the media

studio or participate in one of the many international sports programs.

In the summer there’s a popular camp on campus.

ACS Athens also partners with U.S. universities, sharing faculty, research and student interns.

A major campus program “Youth to Youth” brings refugee minors from downtown Athens to campus Saturdays to experience the school and to learn English and Greek.

The school’s successes are many. Students have made achievements in medicine, communications, performing arts and technology.

One of their alums, Scott Parazynski, accompanied John Glenn as his physician when he returned to space aboard the international space station.

Looking ahead, the school hopes to expand the campus and classroom space as it continues to innovate.

The students, meanwhile, will explore, thrive and create life-long friendships.

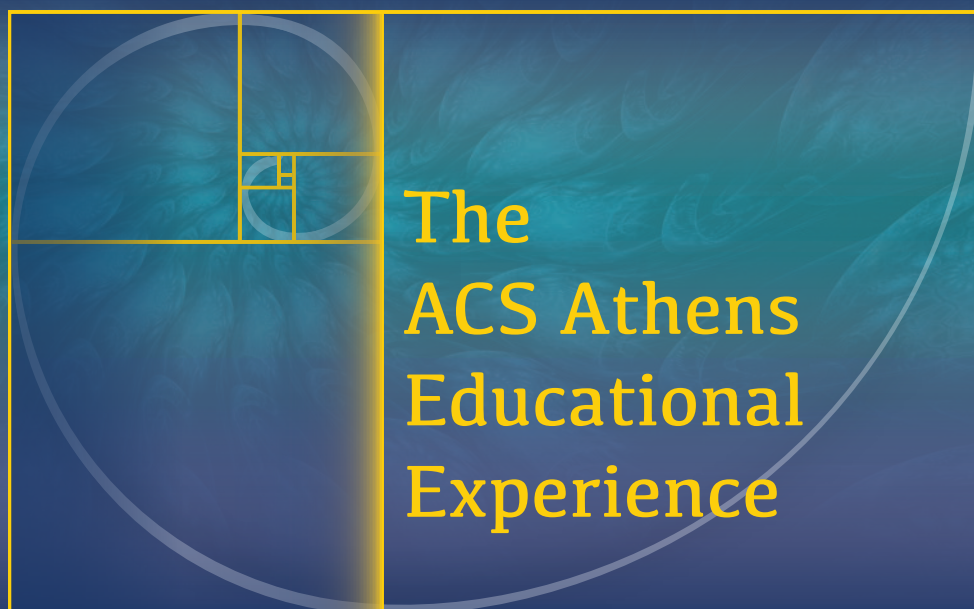
To find out more about ACS Athens, visit www.acs.gr.



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ACS Campus. Source: ACS Facebook page