

INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION IN GREECE

VIEWS FROM THE INSTITUTIONS



The American Community Schools of Athens

When Students Collaborate to Make a Whale of a Difference...

Dina Pappas

Elementary School
Principal, ACS Athens

Collaboration is the key to success. It is a partnership that is modeled for students by our teachers in ACS Athens elementary school in order to achieve the best possible results in learning. This teamwork is cultivated at a very young age and slowly becomes a lifestyle as our students mature into adulthood.

There are many ways one can witness collaboration in our elementary school. It is not only taught, but can also be seen throughout the school. Through group effort, teachers educate students to be responsible for themselves, for each other, and for their environment. As early as junior kindergarten, students learn about the various animals and their habitats in the ocean and on land. This foundation is created and built upon each year as the students grow and develop. Recycling starts in our school as early as kindergarten. Recycling bins are available in every class and students are trained to separate paper from garbage. Through their unit on recycling, kindergarten teachers educate students as to how to reuse materials. One project is the process of recycling paper. Teachers believe that pupils actually making their own recycled paper is the best way to learn, so using newspaper, a blender, water, a big square pan, a piece of window screen, and a



flat piece of wood, students learn the recycling process hands-on. When they discover how easy it is to make recycled paper, students realize they all can help save trees and reuse paper instead of throwing it away. Little by little, every piece of paper makes a difference.

"Jobs" are taught from the 1st grade to a couple of students at a time by the teacher and then those students are responsible for

teaching the next couple of students when their "job" is complete after a few weeks and they move on to another "job." Students are also introduced to animal rescue. Students learn about various animals and even have turtles in their classroom. By keeping turtles, students learn to care for them and feed them properly, which heightens their awareness of other animals. Caring for animals helps foster empathy toward others.

In the 2nd grade, students learn to become even more responsible for themselves and each other on a daily basis. Good manners are practiced and students are rewarded by a table based on the premise of teams. "United we stand, divided we fall." Teachers teach the ocean habitat in depth and create awareness through lectures, discussions and research on endangered animals. Studying the continent of Africa, students study various animals and their habitats and even go to the zoo on a field trip to see the animals live and discuss the idea of caged animals. This hands-on experience touches the hearts of all our students and teachers.

In their "Pigeon Creek" unit, the 2nd grade students build a community through collaborating together. As two classes, the students cooperate with each other and confer on how to best build a community and what various aspects of community are involved. From building homes to building schools to planting trees and obtaining water, students work hard to create their community all the while working together as a team. As the second grade teachers, Ms Mantarakis and Ms Sianis, put it: "Together we can make a whale of a difference, but it takes every fish in the sea."

The 3rd grade is introducing a new concept this year: Adopt an Animal through WWF (World Wildlife Federation). Students will elect as a class to adopt an animal. First, they will research the various animals available for adoption and then choose one that best represents our school. In order to raise money for the adoption, the 3rd grade will have bake sales and use the money earned from them toward this cause. Students will have to collaborate with each other to decide what to sell, how much items should be sold for, and what goal they want to reach. Our math specialist, Irene Soteres, is excited about this project and plans to have students graph their profits. Teachers in the 3rd grade, Ms Polideras and Mr Pilleris, came up with the idea of adopting an animal because they felt that students needed more opportunities to give. Giving is something we should do throughout our lives no matter what our age. In the grand scheme of things, giving is the ultimate level of humanity as it shows our love and care for our world and ourselves.

The 4th grade is a treat in terms of civic responsibility. Teachers introduce a fascinating unit on the carbon footprint or reducing energy. Students are shown various ways of saving and caring for the environment, even such simple acts

as turning off the water when brushing teeth or shutting off the lights when leaving a room. Students also partake in a simple machines unit in which they learn about hybrid cars and other innovations that will change the world. Students then become the creators and invent their own machines that could have a positive effect on the world. As the 4th grade teachers put it, the underlying thread throughout the 4th grade experience is: "Anything positive you do in life comes back to you. Our aim is to make children aware that they are responsible for their world."

Knowledge and know-how start at home, are reinforced in school, and are carried out into the community which affects and shapes our global community. Everyone can make a difference. The 4th grade teachers, Ms Donas and Ms Pap, encourage students to take on leadership roles: "Kids become leaders in everything they do because they are supported to act upon their knowledge." Last year, Ms Donas and Ms Pap committed their efforts to the marine environment and support of the Project AWARE Foundation. Project AWARE (Aquatic World Awareness Responsibility Education) is a diving industry's leading no-profit environmental organization dedicated to taking care of the underwater world through education, contacting people and action. Through the expertise of diver David White, students studied coral reefs, sharks and dolphins, kelp, sea turtles, and ecological problems in the sea. Students were made aware of what pollution does to our underwater friends and how each one of them could help the ocean. Since "70 percent of the world's oxygen comes from the oceans," protecting our underwater forest is protecting ourselves. Our students have the know-how to clean up their beaches in Greece and around the world and they act on it.

By the time a student graduates to the 5th grade, he/she is involved in another unique experience. Students in both 5th grade classes jointly write a play. With the help of their expert teachers, Ms Sexson and Ms Kynigou, they are guided to string together paragraphs into a masterpiece of a play. After the written work is complete and edited, students choose what other area they want to shine in, whether it be making costumes, working on the lighting, composing lyrics or creating dance moves. The entire process is one of development. Students learn to get along with one another even if they don't necessarily agree with each other. They learn to respect their peers, handle day-to-day problems, and manage to see the bigger picture. By show time, students have discovered what it takes to be a success and have understood they all need to work with each other. No matter how big or small the role, everybody makes a difference. Nobody says it better than our students. The most recent play the 5th graders created was titled "The Navigating Nincompoops." This is what some students had to say about the process:

- "When you live something, you learn something from it. I will remember the play till the day I die." Irinna

- "I learned that if you don't cooperate, you will never get anything done. It was fun but tough. I would like to do this again." George

- "I learned to share things with others and that if you want to make the best play you have to spend a lot of time on it!" Anran

- "In the play, the thing I had a problem with and I had to manage to stop was talking in the wings. The most important thing I learned is how to work with other people in a team." Vangelis