

AFGLC Conference Presentation Paper

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“Aligning Greek Language Teaching with US National Standards”¹ [As of 2/14/10]

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In order to prepare America for the 21st century, the US Department of Education along with other subject specific professional associations has developed National Standards for subjects taught in public educational institutions. National Standards are voluntarily being employed for each major subject being taught in the USA. These content and curriculum standards are guidelines or goals of what is expected to be taught and learned in their respective field. State and local subject standards generally align with the National Standards for each subject. Standards are a prerequisite for establishing criteria needed for teacher training and certification and for the development of assessments.

“... the US Department of Education and the National Endowment for the Humanities, [established] an eleven-member task force, representing a variety of languages, levels of instruction, program models, and geographic regions, undertook the task of defining *content standards* -- **what students should know and be able to do** -- in foreign language education. ... (1996) *Standards for Foreign Language Learning: Preparing for the 21st Century*, represents an unprecedented consensus among educators, business leaders, government, and the community on the definition and role of foreign language instruction in American education. This visionary document has been used by teachers, administrators, and curriculum developers at both state and local levels to begin to improve foreign language education in our nation's schools.”

<http://www.actfl.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=3392>

In 2009, the NEW revised 3rd Edition Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century, targeted standards for Arabic, Chinese, Classical Languages, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish. My question today is, **“Should there be national standards for the Greek Language? In addition, should there be standards for Greek**

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Language teacher training and certification?” “If so, what implications do these questions bring to light?”

Along with the many other notable subjects, NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION have been developed by the US Department of Education as a Collaborative Project of ACTFL (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages), AATF (American Association of Teachers of French), AATG (American Association of Teachers of German), AATI (American Association of Teachers of Italian), AATSP (American Association of Teachers of Spanish & Portuguese), ACL (American Classical League), ACTR, CLASS and NCJLT-ATJ. [See <http://www.actfl.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=3392> for actual standards].

The **Philosophy Statement** of this document sums up its **purpose**, stating:

Language and communication are at the heart of the human experience. The United States must educate students who are linguistically and culturally equipped to communicate successfully in a pluralistic American society and abroad. This imperative envisions a future in which ALL students will develop and maintain proficiency in English and at least one other language, modern or classical. Children who come to school from non-English backgrounds should also have opportunities to develop further proficiencies in their first language.

I wish the last sentence of this Philosophy Statement was in place when I entered public school only knowing Greek from my immigrant parents. Could you imagine the effect of my school giving me the opportunity to further develop my Greek language proficiencies? What a difference that would have made on me as well as on my English speaking classmates.

As is stated in the above Philosophy Statement, Classical and Modern languages are to be developed and taught. Their usefulness is clear. Greek and Latin languages help students improve their understanding of scientific, medical, legal and mathematical terms and their etymology. Knowledge of these Classical languages will help them do better on Standardized

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tests because they can figure out words and their meanings. Moreover, the more structured and complex a language is, just like music, more synaptic activity occurs in the brain.

Advantages of developing such standards for Hellenic Education effort in North America include the enlargement of the possibility of having the Greek language offered in more public and private schools. When I googled “Why Learn Greek”, I found 13,400,000 results entries, a large majority of these web sites like the one that follows make mention of the importance of understanding the New Testament and other classical works in their original language. In <http://www.gsbaptistchurch.com/greek/> under **The Greek Language** it states:

From 13th Century BC "Linear B" Greek, through the "Classical Greek" of Homer, 8th century, and Plato, 4th century, to the Greek of the Bible, called "Koine Greek" or the common man's Greek, the language is a marvelous form of language, capable of exact expression and subtle nuances. Christ came when the fullness of time was here (Gal 4:4), and the universal language used to capture and record and preach his arrival and the New Testament he came to offer, was Koine Greek. Every Christian can benefit from the study of this language.

The American Classical League, American Philological Association, and Regional Classical Associations have developed National Standards for Classical Languages (Greek and Latin).

[See <http://www.aclclassics.org/pdf/standards.pdf>] This brings an especially profound set of questions for the Greek community to address. Should we too as a united Greek community join in recognizing these National Standards for Classical Languages? Should we also develop National Standards for the Greek Language? [Modern Greek officially came to be in the 1970's] And the biggest question of all, who is “we” in the Greek community?

The national standards for foreign language education center around five goals:

Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities (the 5 C's of foreign language education). In establishing national standards for the Greek Language, these five Cs need to be answered with research, detail explanations and agreement.

STANDARDS FOR FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING COMMUNICATION

Communicate in Languages Other Than English

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- **Standard 1.1:** Students engage in conversations, provide and obtain information, express feelings and emotions, and exchange opinions [**in the Greek language**]
- **Standard 1.2:** Students understand and interpret written and spoken language on a variety of topics
- **Standard 1.3:** Students present information, concepts, and ideas to an audience of listeners or readers on a variety of topics.

CULTURES

Gain Knowledge and Understanding of Other Cultures

- **Standard 2.1:** Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the practices and perspectives of the culture studied
- **Standard 2.2:** Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the products and perspectives of the culture studied

CONNECTIONS

Connect with Other Disciplines and Acquire Information

- **Standard 3.1:** Students reinforce and further their knowledge of other disciplines through the foreign language [**Key for Greek language; i.e., vocabulary, medicine, math, science, theater, music...**]
- **Standard 3.2:** Students acquire information and recognize the distinctive viewpoints that are only available through the foreign language and its cultures

COMPARISONS

Develop Insight into the Nature of Language and Culture

- **Standard 4.1:** Students demonstrate understanding of the nature of language through comparisons of the language studied and their own [**Identify etymological roots of many English words from the Greek Language, and understand how the English language is entering the Greek ...**]
- **Standard 4.2:** Students demonstrate understanding of the concept of culture through comparisons of the cultures studied and their own. [**Culture in terms of arts, theatre, dance, music, religion, food, dress ... has many parallel and distinct conceptual frames**]

COMMUNITIES

Participate in Multilingual Communities at Home & Around the World

- **Standard 5.1:** Students use the language both within and beyond the school setting
- **Standard 5.2:** Students show evidence of becoming life-long learners by using the language for personal enjoyment and enrichment. [**Annual celebration of Greek and American Democracy on March 25.**]

In teaching Greek, we are not starting from scratch; the American Classical League has developed a set of syllabi for “Attic Greek” which is used as an outline for the National Exam for “Attic” Greek <http://nge.aclassics.org/>. Currently, the State of New York offers a

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Regents Exam in Modern Greek, and New Jersey accepts this exam as well. The Greek Orthodox Archdiocese Department of Greek Education also offers a Comprehensive exam in Modern Greek, found on their web site

<http://goarch.org/archdiocese/departments/education/exam>. Their list of standards and check points of the Greek examination (in Greek) is found at:

<http://goarch.org/archdiocese/departments/education/exam/STANDARDS%20-%20CHECKPOINTS%20OF%20GREEK%20EXAMINATION%20-IN%20GREEK.pdf> . We need to see if anything else exists as well. We need to compile a list of all existing exams, coordinate and consolidate any duplicated effort and determine any mutual and missing links. **All parties that offer Greek exams should be involved with establishing national standards for the Greek language.**

In addition to National Standards for learning any language, the proper preparation and **training of teachers to teach a language** should also be defined. In the US, there has rightfully so been a trend to have all teachers in public schools to have the appropriate certifications and education to teach. Dr. Adam D. Blistein, Executive Director, American Philological Association has sent me a link to a set of standards for Latin teacher training and certification. The current draft of these standards is found at:

<http://www.apaclassics.org/education/Standards.pdf>. We need to review these and tailor them for Greek Language teacher training and certification. In addition, we need to work with both Departments of Education **and** Hellenic or Modern Greek Studies Programs in more colleges and universities in order to guarantee that the appropriate courses needed for state and national certifications of teachers of the Greek Language are offered.

There will be two major drawbacks for the Hellenic Education effort in North America if we continue to ignore the creation and implementation of National Standards for the Greek Language and for those who will teach the language. One is the sporadic, inconsistent and

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politically and culturally subjective, and outdated approach to language teaching and learning of the language that largely exists today. And the other drawback is the extinction or the undermining of the “truth that sets us free”. What I mean is this, many classic great thinkers thought and wrote their work in Greek. Greek is the primary source of their archetypal work. If our command and understanding of the Greek language is poor, then the deeper meanings of these great works will be lost or worse yet, left for others to interpret in their own subjective way. The Greek language is ever changing, but always the same. The language vocabulary and structure has changed throughout the years, but its semantic quality has remained substantially unaltered.

As of now there is no “American Association of Teachers of Greek”, however, the Federation of Hellenic Educators and Cultural Associations is an umbrella organization for a number of associations of Teachers of Greek, i.e., Greek Teachers Association “Prometheus” of New York Metro area, Greek Teachers Association "Athena" of Illinois, Greek Teachers Association “Iliada” in Philadelphia area, Hellenic Society PROMETHEAS of Washington, DC, Saint Basil’s Academy Teachers College Alumnae Association (S.B.A.T.C.A.A.), Greek Teachers Association of Florida, St. Irene Chrysovalantou-Sacred Patriarchal and Stavropegial Monastery-Department of Education in New York, Greek Teachers Association “Odyssey” in Delaware, Archimedean Academy Charter School- Miami, Florida, Charter schools in North Carolina and other locations, Hellenic American Educators Association (HAEA) of New York, Hellenic-American Educators Association of New Jersey (HEANJ), and others. **We** need to have a united Greek Language Teachers group be members of and actively participate in ACTFL (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages) that allows and encourages all its members to participate in ACTFL and regional such Conferences.

Each of the American Associations of Teachers of [German, Italian, Spanish, etc.] have their vision and mission statements, by-laws, **research on who and from where their language teachers get certified, and how much education their members have, on their websites** (which are also linked on the ACTFL web site). It might be worth our while to see and study what others have done and reflect how some of these ideas could help us with the Greek Language. Again I stress, that we need to have Greek Language representatives on the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages and other such organizations that promote the teaching of foreign languages. In addition, Hellenic, Ancient, Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies programs at the various universities can play a major role in assisting and promoting the future training and certifications of Teachers of Greek.

An important suggestion that Hellenic Link, Inc. has been a proponent of is the possible linking of Hellenic Studies programs at some universities with their Departments of Education. For example, if we look at the website of the Modern Greek Studies Program at Rutgers, we see that this program is linked to several other university Departments (Classics, Religion and others), but **not** to that of Education. This link is critical if we are true to our language and its further development. We need people who **know BOTH** the Greek Language well and also know how to most effectively teach it to others. Currently, it is encouraging to note that at least one university, the Concordia University of Montreal, is considering actively the development of such interdisciplinary link for its Hellenic Studies Program.

The Plan. In general, what we need to do is further study what exists and what is lacking in terms of National Standards for the 1) Greek language and 2) for the teacher training and certification. As a Hellenic Education community, we need to discuss and study the ramifications of teaching Classical **and/or** Modern Greek and their implications for the future generations. In addition, the ratification of existing Standards for Classical Greek need to be embraced by the Hellenic Education Community in North America; and the creation of

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Standards for the Greek language and teacher training and certification need to be developed and ratified. After this foundation has been laid, then we need to promote and publicize the value of the Greek language as the key to multiple dimensions of thinking, feeling and being, which ultimately the professional as well the Hellenic community at large should be energized to introduce in the educational system for the 21st century.

Today this first draft of the National Standards for Greek Language learning is being developed to discuss these critical questions. Today we are initiating and circulating a double sided sheet in hopes that each of you could begin collaborating by filling in and substantiating the 5 C's for Greek Language learning at this conference that align with the National Standards for Foreign Languages. A Task-Force could be created to further identify the practical implications and the scaffolding processes necessary for the Greek language to be cultivated in America. I hope the participants of this conference will approve and adopt a recommendation to establish a Task-Force, under the auspices of AFGLC (American Foundation of Greek Language and Culture) and HL (Hellenic Link, Inc.), to study and promulgate a draft of relevant National Standards, and to collaborate with all Greek language institutions for their ratification.

National Standards have been created to begin to **improve** foreign language education in our nation's schools. "Do we want to improve Greek Language learning in America as well?"

¹ A contribution from the Advisory Council on Hellenic Education of the Hellenic Link, Inc.