

High Academic Standards Tuition-Free Public Charter Schools Teaching the Greek Language & Culture



It's early in the morning, and the weather in sunny Florida is already indicating this is going to be another hot day. Dozens of students gather in an organized fashion at the entrance of the beautiful building with its vast windows and palm



trees in the background, where the school principal and teachers greet them every morning with a smile and often music. «Kalimera, Maria», «Kalimera, Mr. Kostas». Even if they are not of Greek descent, parents who send their children to school often greet staff in Greek.

The entrance is adorned with the inscription «Plato Academy» between the American and Greek flags. Smiles and hugs with classmates who are excited and eager to see one another. Like a buzzing beehive that comes to life every morning, students and teachers start their day feeling like this is their second home. The school day officially begins with the students singing the USA and Greek National Anthems and continues with the enrichment of the state standards. Each grade level is taught Greek daily and often integrated into other content areas. Our seventh and eighth graders are taught a lev-



el of Greek providing them the opportunity to qualify for high school language credit, which they proudly earn!

Plato Academy Schools are laying the foundations for a bright future to students of kindergarten through 8th grade, providing a solid foundation in Greek heritage. It is the largest educational institution of its kind in the United States that practices the teaching of Greek language, history, and culture while supporting Greek language education through a commitment to academic excellence. The nine tuition-free schools provide a consistently high-quality education that is evident, among other areas, in students' performance on the annual Florida State Tests.

History

Plato Academy Schools, serving today almost 4,000 students in all, have been at the forefront of Greek-language education in the US since the establishment in 2004 with the Panhellenic Federation founding the first school in Clearwater, Florida. The following year, Steve Christopoulos, became the leader of the sole campus with only 32 students at the time. Through his tireless efforts and cooperation of a team of exceptional staff, and the school's board of directors, the progress has only been steadily upward and thriving.

Greek Language Education

What makes Plato Academy schools stand out is not only the high academic and behavior

expectations but also the embedded teaching of Greek to all students daily. In addition, the Plato Academy in Clearwater, since 2013, is one of only two approved examination centers for the Greek language in Florida, certified by the Greek Language Center based in Thessaloniki, granting A1 and A2 level degrees in writing and speaking Greek.

Plato Academy focuses not only on Greek language instruction for elementary and middle school learners but also offers Greek language lessons to adults. The success and mission is so well beloved that many families often request expansion to a high school so they can keep their kids in such a nurturing environment, a plan that has been taken into consideration for the future.

Educational Technology

Investment in educational technology is intertwined with the growth of schools, with Plato Academy Clearwater being among the first to implement interactive whiteboards in each classroom, thereby setting the standard for student engagement. Today, all Plato schools are equipped with interactive boards while also providing every student a school laptop. Early primary students are provided with iPads, ensuring that all aged students have access to interactive content while developing their skills in using modern technologies. The staff has been selected and hired because they have a strong enthusiasm for helping

kids learn and a drive to continuously grow. This is evident through their participation in conferences and professional learning communities where they come together to share and learn new knowledge, ensuring continuous improvement that they model for their students firsthand.

Academic Success

Plato Academy Schools close the gap between public and private education by providing students with an education that is both free and of superior quality, all while being immersed in an atmosphere that is infused with Greek fundamentals. The school's commitment to academic excellence alongside deepening in Greek ideals is the basis of the schools' success. Through the cultivation of critical thinking and the enrichment of linguistic expression using the Greek language, students discover and unleash their latent abilities, unlocking their full potential. These invaluable skills act as transformative tools, equipping them with the means to thrive in all aspects of their future professional and personal endeavors.

Cultural events

The vibrant community of Plato Academy schools embraces a multitude of enriching events throughout the year, fostering a strong connection to Greek heritage and enhancing school life for all stakeholders. From the heartwarming Christmas caroling performed by the choir at prominent venues like Tampa Airport and Consulate Gener-

al, to the spirited participation in the Tarpon Springs "Greek Independence Day" Parade on March 25th each year.

A standout occasion is the captivating opening ceremony of the Olympic Games, observed during the International Day with a prominent focus on Greek traditions. In nearly all events, students showcase their talents by singing Greek songs and performing traditional Greek dances, even while wearing the beautiful and colorful traditional costumes. The response from parents has been overwhelmingly positive, with



such enthusiasm that even the idea to teach traditional dances to adults is being explored.

What distinguishes these activities is their inclusive nature,



which allows parents of non-Greek background to watch and appreciate their children's involvement in the schools' cultural festivities. It is interesting and significant that students not only enthusiastically embrace Greek music and songs, but also expertly execute them, with harmonizing melodies and impeccable articulation.

Visit to Greece

Since 2007, the tradition of organizing trips to Greece has thrived within the Plato Academy schools. The most recent excursion in June 2023 was a memorable experience for both students and parents, as they had the opportunity to explore



renowned historical sites such as the Acropolis, Epidaurus, ancient Olympia, Nafplion, and Delphi. Additionally, they visited the beautiful island of Zakynthos, where they celebrated and connected with students from the local Primary School through a joyous event filled with Greek songs and food.

At Plato Academy schools, the curriculum goes beyond the standard subjects, to include Greek history, philosophy, and mythology playing integral roles. By actively participating in events commemorating national anniversaries and embracing Greek customs, students are immersed in an educational environment deeply enriched with Hellenism. It is noteworthy that even the school premises themselves often bear Greek names, further reinforcing



ing the commitment to fostering a sense of Greek heritage and identity.

Family environment

At Plato Academy, attention is given to maintaining small class sizes compared to public schools, despite the number of students enrolled. This deliberate approach ensures that every student is known by name by each staff member, fostering

a familial atmosphere. This close-knit community is further strengthened by a foundation of trust, forming a strong bond between parents, students, teachers, and the greater community.

The Leadership team consists of three exceptional members: Chief of Schools, Amy Hayes a returning Plato Academy family member, with a 16-year public education career, including teaching 2nd grade, ESE Compliance, and serving as Principal. She holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts from The Ohio State University and a Master of Education in Educational Leadership from the University of West Florida. She served as the Director of Charter Schools and Home School Education for Pinellas County Schools and as Board Secretary of the Florida Association of Charter School Authorizers.

Chief of Academics Danielle Cicetti, a longstanding member of the Plato Academy family since 2007, initially as the first 5th grade teacher at Plato Clearwater, later opening Plato Seminole in 2011 and Plato Tarpon in 2012, has held various roles including Chief Academic Officer and most recently, Interim Senior Director for Plato Academy Schools, accumulating over 20 years of experience in education with a Master of Special Education, candidacy in PhD program for Curriculum and Instruction from the University of South Florida, and a Master of Educational Leadership from the University of West Florida.

Chief of Staff Development, Dawn Parker, a dedicated educator with 34 years of experience and a strong commitment to empowering learners, holds a Bachelor of Psychology with a minor in Sociology from the University of Maryland, a Master of Education with an Emphasis in Counseling from the University of La Verne California, and a Master of Educational Leadership from the University of West Florida; she has also held various roles including English Language Examiner, Dean of Students, Counselor, elementary teacher, Assistant Principal, and Principal within Plato Academy Schools since 2007.

Chairman

As the Chairman of the Board of Directors of Plato Academy Schools, Louis Kokkinakos, a distinguished businessman, brings remarkable leadership to the table. With a proven track record of active participation in philanthropic events and organizations, and as the owner of Foodservice Restaurant Partners Group, his leadership skills and business acumen are invaluable. Mr. Kokkinakos' unwavering dedication to the success of Plato Academy Schools stems from his strong belief in



the profound impact of their immersive Greek language and cultural education. He firmly believes that these schools not only benefit the students but also make a positive contribution to the local community. With his extensive experience and passionate commitment, Mr. Kokkinakos plays a pivotal role in driving the vision and

achievements of Plato Academy.

Vice Chairman

Ioannis Petalas, a successful businessman with extensive experience in various business sectors, maintains a special relationship with Plato Academy Schools as vice-chairman of the Board of Directors. As the owner of Seminole Subs restaurants, Mr. Petalas has acquired expertise in catering and restaurant management. His commitment to the schools' educational community extends beyond his business endeavors, as his son attended Plato Academy. Motivated by the desire to provide a first class education for future generations, Mr. Petalas is dedicated to the support and advancement of the Academy schools.

Treasurer

As the founder and owner of Walker Wealth Management, Yale Walker brings his exceptional leadership skills to the Board of Directors of Plato Academy Schools, serving as the Treasurer. His commitment to the growth and progress of the St. Petersburg area in Florida is evident through his active participation in the Leadership St. Pete program in 2021. With a background in International Business from Eckerd College, Mr. Walker seamlessly blends his professional expertise with a genuine passion for making meaningful contributions to the local community. As a devoted father to two students attending Plato Academy, he has a personal stake in ensuring the highest quality of education for all students. Through his invaluable role on the Board of Directors, Mr. Walker's expertise, dedication, and personal investment further strengthen the educational mission and vision of Plato Academy Schools, fostering an environment that nurtures student growth and success.

Secretary

George Antonaklas brings immense value to the Plato Academy Schools Board of Trustees with his diverse background. As a former police officer, accomplished hotelier, and licensed real estate agent in Florida, he offers extensive knowledge and expertise. Being the owner of George Antonaklas LLC, a brokerage and commercial real estate firm, he brings a deep understanding of the business world. This practical experience complements his role on the board, allowing him to contribute valuable insights. As a parent of a Plato Academy student, Mr. Antonaklas is personally invested in the mission and vision of the schools, which prioritize quality education intertwined with Greek cultural heritage. His dedication ensures an enriching educational experience for all students. Through his

multifaceted background, professional acumen, and parental devotion, Mr. Antonaklas plays a pivotal role in shaping the strategic direction and success of Plato Academy Schools.

For more information about Plato Academy Schools, visit

platoacademy.net