

# A Whole School Approach to Fostering a Rights-Based Culture and Preventing Childhood Obesity

Maria DIMOPOULOU<sup>a</sup>, Georgia GYFTOULA<sup>b</sup>, Niki KOKKINOPLITI<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Directorate of Primary Education, A' Athens, Greece,

[maria.dimopoulou62@gmail.com](mailto:maria.dimopoulou62@gmail.com)

<sup>b</sup> 3rd Primary School of Zografou, Greece, [georgyftoula@enl.uoa.gr](mailto:georgyftoula@enl.uoa.gr)

<sup>c</sup> 21st Kindergarten of Athens, Greece, [nkokkinopliti@gmail.com](mailto:nkokkinopliti@gmail.com)

## Abstract

This presentation focuses on the implementation of a holistic, rights-based intervention in schools, grounded in the Whole School Approach model and inspired by the toolkits of the “Food for Action” program (Ministry of Health & UNICEF, 2025). The aim is to promote a school culture that respects and upholds children’s rights, while also addressing the pressing issue of childhood obesity (WHO, 2016). The presentation showcases the application of this model in two school settings: the 21st Kindergarten of Athens and the 3rd Primary School of Zografou.

The intervention extends beyond the traditional curriculum to include the school’s physical and social environment, as well as its collaboration with the local community and health promotion services (World Health Organization, 1997; SHE Network, n.d.). Key components of the model include comprehensive school policies, participatory practices that empower children (Lundy, 2007), and activities that encourage healthy lifestyles within a framework of children’s rights (Covell & Howe, 2008; UNICEF, 2009; UNICEF UK, 2015).

The presentation highlights the positive outcomes of these integrated actions, both in terms of enhancing awareness and advocacy for children’s rights and supporting behavior change related to health and nutrition. Attention is also given to the challenges of ensuring sustained commitment from all stakeholders and the long-term viability of the approach within the school context. The session concludes with practical recommendations for upscaling the whole school approach across more educational settings, advocating for the right of every child to health, well-being, and a high quality of life, both locally and nationally.

## References

Ministry of Health, & UNICEF. (2025). *Food for Action: National Initiative Against Childhood Obesity*. Retrieved from <https://www.paxisarkiakaipaiditoolboxes1.gr/>

World Health Organization. (2016). *Report of the Commission on Ending Childhood Obesity*. WHO. <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241510066>

- Covell, K., & Howe, R. B. (2008). *Education in the best interests of the child: A children's rights perspective on educational policy making*. University of Toronto Press.
- Lundy, L. (2007). Voice is not enough: Conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. *British Educational Research Journal*, 33(6), 927–942. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01411920701657033>
- SHE Network. (n.d.). *Schools for Health in Europe Network Foundation*. <https://www.schoolsforhealth.org>
- UNICEF. (2009). *Child-friendly schools manual*. <https://www.unicef.org/documents/child-friendly-schools-manual>
- UNICEF UK. (2015). *Rights respecting schools award: A guide for schools*. <https://www.unicef.org.uk/rights-respecting-schools/>
- World Health Organization. (1997). *Promoting health through schools: Report of a WHO expert committee*. World Health Organization.

**Presentation language:** Greek

Presentation language: English ☐ Greek ☐

CV

Maria Dimopoulou is a teacher and works as Environmental Education Officer at the Primary Education A' Athens. She is also founder of the Network Schools4climate

Georgia Gyftoula is an English teacher and principal of 3rd Primary School of Zografou. She works towards a sustainable school profile and encourages participation in national and global networks and projects supporting a whole-school approach.

Niki Kokkinopliti, Kindergarten Teacher at the 21st Kindergarten of Athens. He is a member of the network Schools4climat