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## School food program expands to cover 50,000 students this year

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**In class all is good**, but once the bell rings for recess, students at an increasing number of Greek schools are separated between those who've brought their lunch with them and those who have none, those who have money to buy a snack and those who have to wait to get back home. The crisis has certainly created deep fissures in society between the haves and have-nots, but nowhere is this more shocking than in Greece's public school yards. At 300 schools in some of the poorest parts of the country, however, these rifts will be partly bridged this year.

Following the success of last year, when a program to provide healthy food to all students at participating schools was launched by the Prolepsis Institute of Preventive Medicine, Environmental and Occupational Health and the Stavros S. Niarchos Foundation, more schools have been included in the scheme this year.

Thanks to a 10-million-euro contribution to the program from the foundation, the number of schools benefiting from healthy lunches will rise this year to 300 from 163 in the 2012-13 academic year, feeding 50,000 students across Greece.

"No one can tease me because I need to eat from food handouts because now all the kids are eating the food handouts," said one pupil at a school that participated in the program last year.

"It is important that everyone eats the same thing," said a professor, who wished to remain unnamed. "It allows the kids to open up more, especially those that used to sit all by themselves at recess because they didn't have any food."

From April 2012, the program has distributed nearly 3.2 million meals, 3.25 million servings of fruit, 1.67 million individual cartons of milk and over 200,000 servings of yogurt. The number of meals in the 2013-2014 academic year is expected to exceed the 6-million mark.

The menu is designed by a scientific team from Prolepsis, comprising doctors, nutritionists and food engineers, and is aimed at covering all the major dietary needs of students depending on their age. The daily lunches consist



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of a cheese and vegetable sandwich or a vegetable pie and a fresh fruit. Low-fat milk or yogurt is served three times a week. The menu covers 24-31 percent of students' energy needs and 53-64 percent of their protein needs.

At the start of the program in 2012, 60 percent of some 16,000 families whose children attended the schools in the program said they were insecure about their ability to provide adequate nutrition and 23 percent said they were having problems buying food or were facing hunger. As a result of the program, a survey revealed that the number of families responding that they have gone hungry dropped to 19 percent. Furthermore, the number of children who were underweight dropped 48 percent at the end of the first year of the program, 13 percent of obese children dropped to their regular weight and 34 percent gained weight. Those conducting the survey also found that children consumed 40-47 more fruit, vegetables and unflavored milk outside school as a result of the program.