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Check Mate to ignorance.

The Dallas school district uses chess to improve performance.

By Matt Goodman

The movement of chess pieces over the wood board replaced the background sound of chit chatter and running that was normally heard at the cafeteria in Hery B. Gonzalez elementary school.

The group of chess, Chess-in-the-Schools Inc., of Dallas, was the host of a five round tournament this Saturday for the students of the Dallas school district (DISD) ranging from kinder garden to eight grade.

For the division winners, the awards were scholarships. The winner of the division for 5th and 6th grade received a distinction to attend the **University of Texas at Dallas (UTD)**.

“We hope that once they receive the scholarship they continue with their education until reaching university,” said the director Luis Salinas. “We are using chess as a vehicle to achieve better performance in school.”

The scholarship Academic Distinction grants 1,000 dollars per semester during eight weeks to help with tuitions and other quotas.

“Many of these students come with scholarships,” said Salinas. “We organized about 20 of these events but the ones offering scholarships are very rare.”

Chess-in-the-Schools in the Dallas area, started to sponsor similar chess tournaments in the elementary schools around the city. The one on Saturday was considered the most important for the scholarship being offered, explained Carmen Chairez, volunteer and member of the Chess Federation of the United States.

“The schools of DISD are in charge of admissions and providing the facilities, while the volunteers are in charge of the rest,” said Chairez. “We are trying to reach Forth-Worth to have a competition between them and DISD.”

During the five rounds of the tournament, kids compete against each other based upon their scores during the day. The winner of each game receives a point and the loser none. If the game ends in a tie, each player receives half a point.

“The best way for children to learn is by participating in the tournament,” said chess instructor of Hexter elementary school, Philip Natale. “Its one of the few things kids can do to play against other kids of the same age in other schools.”

Socrates Salinas, of 10 years, sat in the table to play cards while they waited for the start of the third round. The student, with a lot of self confidence, used his seven years experience in chess to win the first two matches.

But not all of the students had as much experience as Socrates. Marcos Martinez, of 10 years, started to play chess very recently. Despite loosing his first two games, said he liked the game and the experience.

“Even though I lost I had a lot of fun,” he said. “I like to play chess a lot so one day I can become an expert.”

Chairez said she does volunteer work in these tournaments to promote the game.

“We try to make this the most professional way possible,” she said. “I want to make sure the children, the parents and the teachers have a lot of fun.”

-Translation, Jose Carlos Gomez, Center for U.S. – Mexico Studies.
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