

*"Seeing it, there's no doubt chess is helping these children become better thinkers and problem solvers."*

Cheryle Gonzales, Hamilton Park Pacesetter Magnet principal



Photos by KARL STOLLEIS/Special Contributor

Justin Solis (left) and Christian Chester enjoy a chess game at Hamilton Park Pacesetter Magnet. University of Texas at Dallas students instruct Hamilton Park chess players before and after school as well as twice a week in a class. UTD is studying the game's effect on student learning through the pilot program.

# Putting 'an academic spin' on chess

## With UTD's help, school uses game to sharpen minds

By KRISTINE HUGHES  
Staff Writer

Suddenly it's cool to play chess at Hamilton Park Pacesetter Magnet.

Students can earn chess passes for good work and citizenship, allowing them to play during lunch at a special checkered-cloth-covered table set up in the cafeteria.

They can also play with the chess club before school, with the extended day program after

school and during a daily enrichment class.  
"Our hope in the second semester is that when you walk into the school you see students playing in the hallways, challenging each other," principal Cheryle Gonzales said.  
Hamilton Park has had a club for years. But a unique collaboration with the University of Texas at Dallas this year has made chess more than just a game.  
UTD provides instructors for

the pilot program, which organizers hope to take to other schools and school districts. The ultimate goal is to study the game's effect on student learning, said Jim Stallings, UTD's associate director for chess and education. UTD is one of two universities approved by the World Chess Federation to study chess curriculum. The other school is in Moscow.  
"Their approach has been to see how quickly you can develop chess masters. Our approach is to see how you can use chess to benefit children academically," Mr. Stallings said.

See HAMILTON Page 8S



Griffin Goetzmann plots his strategy while watching John Sned's move. Hamilton Park Pacesetter's principal says more than half of the school's 600 students play chess.

# Hamilton Park using chess to sharpen students' minds

*Continued from Page 15*

Research suggests that chess enhances students' critical-thinking, problem-solving and planning skills. However, no one has tried to determine the best time for students to begin learning the game, whether it should be taught in school, how it should be taught and so on, Mr. Stallings said. UTD's provost recently approved the creation of a center for chess and education to address those questions. So when parent Steven Matza approached Mr. Stallings about working with Hamilton Park, he jumped at the opportunity to create the pilot program.

One thing he's already learned is that parent and teacher support will be crucial. Mr. Stallings said he won't be able to rely only on UTD students for instruction because the elementary and university semesters don't match and college students have limited free time.

He's trying to gauge how the elementary school teachers could use the game in their curriculum and what costs might be associated with training them.

For now, one UTD student meets with the Hamilton Park chess club before school and in class twice a week. Another teaches the after-school program with the assistance of a parent and a teacher.

"We wanted to put as much of an academic spin on chess as possible to make sure they could use what they learn [to play] the game but in their academic life as well," said Dennis Rylander, a UTD graduate and UTD chess club member who volunteers at Hamilton Park.

The native of Sweden said he has been playing chess since second grade, and although lately he has less time to play, the game will always be part of him.

"Even now ... I still use a lot of

## CHESS IN RISD

Several Richardson school district campuses have chess clubs. However, Hamilton Park Pacesetter Magnet may be the first to teach the game to students during the school day.

### **Apollo Junior High**

Club meets before, after school

### **Berkner High**

Club meets outside of school hours

### **Bowie Elementary**

Club meets before school on Tuesdays

### **Brentfield Elementary**

Fifth-grade club meets before school once a week

### **Dartmouth Elementary**

Club meets after school on Mondays, Wednesdays

### **Hamilton Park Pacesetter Magnet**

Club meets before school on Wednesdays and Thursdays. Students receive classroom instruction the same days. Chess also is taught in the extended day program on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

### **Lake Highlands High**

Club meets weekly

### **Merriman Park Elementary**

Forming a club next semester

### **Mohawk Elementary**

Club meets after school every other Wednesday

### **Richardson North Junior High**

Chess is taught in the extended-day program

### **Yale Elementary**

Club meets after school

### **Wallace Elementary**

Club meets before school on Tuesdays, Thursdays

SOURCE: Richardson Independent School District

the skills I learned," Mr. Rylander said. "I notice it in my analytical skills and creativity and problem solving."

Mrs. Gonzales said well over half of Hamilton Park's 600 students play chess, and they're not only those who are making A's. Indeed, the game has become so popular that the biggest obstacle could be having enough boards.

"You get kids on all different academic levels. There they are, playing a game that's academically challenging, interacting with kids they might not normally interact with, and they're enjoying it," the principal said. "They don't even know they're

learning."

On Wednesday, the school conducted its first Winter Chess Fest, with more than 160 students participating in two divisions — beginner and more advanced.

Participants and winners will be recognized in the school's weekly awards ceremony Friday.

"Seeing it, there's no doubt chess is helping these children become better thinkers and problem solvers, but I see it in their attitudes, too," Mrs. Gonzales said. "It's cool to be smart."