

Dallas elementary students vie for scholarship at chess tournament

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The clatter of chess pieces on game boards replaced the soundtrack of smacking sounds and chit-chat that usually echo through the Henry B. Gonzalez Elementary School cafeteria.



RANDY ELI
GROTHER/DMN
Joseph Kennemer, 12,
(second from right) makes
a move during the 2008
Dallas Area
Chess-in-the-Schools
Scholarship Tournament
Saturday at Henry B.
Gonzalez Elementary
School in Dallas.

Dallas Area Chess-in-the-Schools Inc. hosted a five-round chess tournament Saturday for Dallas school district students in kindergarten through eighth grade. Scholarships were awarded to division winners. The winner of the fifth- and sixth-grade division was awarded an Academic Distinction scholarship to the University of Texas at Dallas.

"We're hoping once they get the scholarship that they stay on the right track leading up to college," tournament director Luis Salinas said. "We're using chess as a vehicle to get them to perform better in school."

The Academic Distinction scholarship provides \$1,000 each semester for eight semesters and is applied toward tuition and other fees.

"Many of the students come for the scholarship," Mr. Salinas said. "We organize maybe 20 of these a year, but those that give scholarships are rare."

Dallas Area Chess-in-the-Schools has begun sponsoring similar chess tournaments in elementary schools around Dallas. Saturday's tournament is considered the most important because of the scholarship offering, said Carmen Chairez, volunteer and United States Chess Federation member.

"The DISD schools take care of registration and provide facilities, while volunteers do the rest," Mr. Chairez

said. "We're trying to get this to spread to Fort Worth so we can have a competition between them and DISD."

The tournament's five rounds pitted children against one another based on their win/loss records throughout the day. The winner of each game received one point; the loser received no points. If the game ended in a draw, each player received a half-point.

"The best way for kids to learn is by playing in the tournaments," Hexter Elementary chess coach Philip Natale said. "It's one of the few things kids can do to play against kids their age at other schools."

Socrates Salinas, 10, sat at a table playing cards with teammates while waiting for the third round to begin. The confident fourth-grader used his seven years of chess experience to win his first two matches.

But not all students were as experienced as Socrates. Marcos Martinez, 10, only recently began playing chess. Though he lost his first two matches, he said he enjoyed playing and gaining experience.

"Even though I lose I still have fun," he said. "I like playing chess so one day I can become a master."

Mr. Chairez said he volunteers at student tournaments to promote the game he loves.

"We try to run this as professionally as possible," he said. "I want to make sure kids, parents and teachers are all having fun during this."