

Berkeley Chess School Oakland Outreach Program

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True to its mission of enriching the lives of children from all backgrounds, Berkeley Chess School has outreach programs that provide in-school chess instruction at no cost to students in Oakland's public Title I schools. The goal of the Berkeley Chess School's Oakland Chess Program is to reduce the achievement gap among Oakland's disadvantaged youth by:

- (1) improving test scores in both Math and English Language Arts, especially reading comprehension;
- (2) enhancing cognitive development — sharpening memory, concentration, developing strategic and critical thinking and nurturing creativity;
- (3) building self-confidence;
- (4) developing good judgment, the ability to “look before you leap”; and
- (5) instilling a lifelong love of learning.

Program Details and Evaluation

Our Oakland Outreach Program provides weekly in-school chess instruction to 400 3rd through 5th graders from five low-income Oakland Title I schools, once a week for 25 weeks. Classes are held during the school day within regular class hours as a part of the teacher's lesson plan. The outreach classes are taught by three of our most senior instructors who have 30-years of combined experience in chess instruction. **Chess instruction is given to all students—our chess program is not an elective.** At the end of the school year, all children in the program are invited to a tournament to exercise the skills they have learned and interact with their peers at other schools. This tournament is a press event, open to the public and is an opportunity for the students to celebrate their achievements with the community.

Oakland Outreach began in the fall of 2008 following on a similar Berkeley Chess School program in Richmond Title 1 Elementary schools which provided enrichment to students who mainly came from Spanish speaking immigrant families. Formal research by the independent educational consultancy Berkeley Policy Associates determined that chess instruction has a significant impact on academic performance, classroom behavior and attendance, and attitudes towards learning. Students with at least 20 weeks of chess instruction performed better than expected in CST math, and attendance increased in two subgroups significantly. The collected data from year to year gives fresh insights into the ways chess, properly taught, enhances academic performance and personal development for children from economically-disadvantaged backgrounds.

The Community We Serve

The five schools currently in our Oakland Chess program – Maxwell Park Elementary, Learning Without Limits, Esperanza, Futures, and Santa Fe – are schools with extremely limited resources for academic enrichment. They rank 1 out of 10 on the state of California's Academic Performance Index (API), the lowest possible score. The 300 3rd - through 5th -grade students that are currently participating in our chess program are from low-income families: Ninety percent are on the free- or reduced-price lunch program. About 40% are African-American and 51% are Latino. 14% are classified as “English Learners” with limited English proficiency.

Program Funding

Chess instruction is provided at no cost to the Oakland schools or students. The program is funded by individual donors, BCS board members, friends of Berkeley Chess School and foundation grants. Oakland Outreach has been funded by: The Toni and Arthur Rock Foundation, The Hellman Family Foundation, The Morris Stulsaft Foundation, The Irene S. Scully Foundation and In Dulci Jubilo Inc.