

Friday Plus programs

Chess for Success

Alexzander Mack keeps a firm grip on his queen as he chases Daniel Irwin's king across the chess board.

Irwin moves one space to the left. Mack mirrors the move to line up his queen.

"Check!" he says.

Irwin moves his king again.

Mack keeps in pursuit.

"Check!" he says again.

Irwin grins and Mack giggles at the standoff.

The two are part of the Chess for Success (CFS) programs offered through Friday Plus at Brooklyn Primary School, South Baker Intermediate School, and Baker Middle School. CFS provided chess boards, t-shirts, coach stipend, and entry fees to CFS tournaments.

Jay Billings is the coach at Brooklyn, which averages about 15 students every Tuesday and Thursday since the program started in November.

"The idea is to teach them, and then allow them to think through it," Billings said. "They have to learn to keep track of what the opponent's doing as well."

Second-grader Isaac Miller doesn't hesitate when asked about his favorite part of chess.

"Trying to beat people," he says with a grin.

Travis Jensen, who teaches English at Baker High School, is coaching chess for students from South Baker Intermediate School. They meet afterschool in his classroom at BHS.

At the beginning, he wanted to see how much each youngster

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**— Travis Jensen,
chess coach**

already knew about chess.

"I went around and had them show me how everything moves," he said. "I wanted to see what they did consistently. These guys needed structure for how to start a game."

Jensen learned chess when he was 8. As an adult, he plays several games every week.

"It's great for their analytical thinking, and teaches basic sportsmanship," he said. "And it's straight good for your brain. Chess at the basic level is a series of puzzles."

Chess for Success sessions continue through March. Brooklyn and South Baker programs meets Tuesdays and Thursdays; Baker Middle School gatherings are Wednesdays.

The program wraps up in March with a local tournament. It will be open to Chess for Success participants and YMCA chess players.

Ten kids from each team get to participate in the regional CFS tournament Feb. 22 in Hermiston.

First-grader Alexander Mack, left, and second-grader Daniel Irwin finish up a game during a Chess for Success session at Brooklyn Primary School.



Grady Petrik and Cash Lay, foreground, battle out a chess game during a meeting of South Baker Intermediate students with Travis Jensen at Baker High School.

