

Chess for Success Evaluation – Final Report, Submitted to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Program, U.S. Department of Justice from the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, Kim Yap, Project Director (2006)

Chess for Success (“CFS”) was formed in Portland Oregon in 1994 with the mission “to help children develop skills necessary for success in school and life by learning chess.” At the end of the 2009 school year, Chess For Success had 83 chess clubs in 16 school districts and was serving over 3200 students in Oregon and Washington state. The core philosophy for Chess for Success is captured by the tagline on the organization’s home page: “Helping Children Succeed One Move at a Time” (see <http://www.chessforsuccess.org/>). The primary goals of the CFS program are to use the game of chess to train and enable children to be patient and analytical in all problem solving situations so that their academic achievement, as well as their self esteem, will improve.

The noted study specifically focused on 61 Title I schools in the Portland Public School system. Generally, Title I refers to those schools with a high percentage of students from low-income families and refers to a set of programs set up by the United States Department of Education to distribute funding to these schools. The study considered data over a three-year period. Its findings included the following long- term program impacts:

1. Math scores for CFS participating students were significantly higher than for the non-participating comparison group.
2. CFS participating students had a higher percentage of meeting and exceeding reading and math benchmarks than non-CFS participating students.
3. No significant differences were found between CFS participating students and non-participating students in measures of self esteem and student behavior.

Findings for short-term program impacts included:

1. Improving students’ abilities to follow directions, plan ahead, and think about the future.
2. Improving students academics, attention/focus, concentration, logical reasoning, patience, problem solving, and self esteem.
3. Teaching commitment, consequences, cooperative behavior, resource management and sportsmanship.
4. Providing a safe, happy, comfortable social environment.

The study shows, among other things, that the Chess for Success Program is meeting its primary goals of training and enabling children to be patient and analytical in problem solving situations so that there is an increase in their academic achievement and self-esteem.

Summary by Brad Rosen