

## Checkmate!

*Northwoods Elementary School  
Eau Claire, Wisconsin*

**N**orthwoods Elementary School took strategic game play to a whole new level last fall with Chess Clinics Partner Schools, Parents and Kids, an evening of chess instruction and play for parents, and students from across the district.

Members of Northwoods' Action Team for Partnership (ATP) started the event in response to questions from other schools and teachers about how to play chess and how to start chess clubs at their sites. Northwoods' chess club, which is quite popular among its students in second through fifth grades, supported the clinic. The chess club coach, a high school teacher and life-long game enthusiast, agreed to take a lead-teaching role at the clinic, hoping to broaden the thinking skills of students, and parents, and increase competition at school chess tournaments. ATP hoped the learning experience would strengthen parent-child relationships across the district. Members worked with district leaders to notify other schools, designing a flier that was distributed to 13 schools.

Northwoods hosted the clinic. The \$1 admission covered the minimal expenditures, such as refreshments and handouts. Because the school already had chess sets for its club, it did not have to buy new equipment. The PTA bought the original sets years before with its own startup funds.

Forty students and 40 parents from across the district came to learn the game and a little more about each other. The hour-long clinic began with the distribution of nametags and beginner material packets. Each adult-child pair had a board. The chess coach then gave a PowerPoint presentation, introducing players to the board setup and pieces, rules of chess, and some basic game-playing strategies. Chess players were able to watch and learn from their partners. In this case, the adults were actually learning with, and from, their children. The pairs then faced a series of chess problems that

they attempted to solve.

"Working with their parents is a plus for any child. Learning together can be fun," said the school's partnership coordinator, who was instrumental in creating and planning the clinic. "But the greatest thing is for children to be able to learn this game, which involves a high level of problem-solving and thinking. This is a true brain builder."

Only one school invited to participate did not attend because of a schedule conflict. The school was so enthusiastic about the idea, however, that it asked the Northwoods' chess coach to host a private clinic for its students at a later date. The event was such a success that administrators want to host two of them next year—one in the fall and one in the spring.

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