



Whittier Union HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

To Achieve and Maintain Excellence...

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: May 24, 2021 **CONTACT:** Andrea Garcia **PHONE:** 909-273-9840

Whittier Union Correspondence Chess Players Gain National Prominence

WHITTIER – When Whittier High School senior Isabel Luna joined the school’s Chess Club, she was looking to challenge herself and connect with her peers in a way that went beyond Zoom conferencing. At first intimidated by what she perceived was a male-dominated sport, Luna learned that chess can be mastered with patience and dedication.

Quarantining at home, Luna discovered correspondence chess, which is typically played through the postal system or email. Through correspondence chess, Luna has sharpened her skills in the comfort of her home, gained new friends and exercised her brain. In the process, Luna has emerged as one of the top-ranked female correspondence chess players in the United States.

Luna, along with eight of her Whittier High Chess Club teammates, are listed in the U.S. Chess Federation’s Top 20 Women Correspondence players for May 2021. Joining Luna on the list are Whittier High seniors Sadie Cruz and Amanda Guevara; juniors Sophia Reyna, Mary Lusinyan, Samantha Silva and Marie Molina; sophomore Ena Pejovski and Whittier High Class of 2020 graduate Lee Chu. Several other chess club members are working toward qualification.

“I wanted to show myself and others that anyone can play chess,” Luna said. “Correspondence chess is a great way to learn and build your chess skills. Anyone can play, no matter what age or gender, and it’s never too late to start learning. I would encourage anyone to play, especially girls who are interested. Give chess a chance. You may surprise yourself.”

The growing interest and participation of Whittier High students enabled Chess Club adviser Kele Perkins to secure a \$2,500 grant from U.S. Chess Women to develop its correspondence program.

“Correspondence is a great way for new players to learn the game, and it’s perfect for these times,” Perkins said. “Our kids play via email. Although it can take weeks or even months to complete a correspondence game, the pace allows players to take their time and slow down in critical positions. The kids learn more this way than they would playing a fast-paced timed game.”

In 2020, Perkins noticed that the U.S. Chess women’s correspondence Top 100 player listing was almost completely devoid of names, with only the top two slots filled. Perkins sensed an opportunity to expand chess club membership and diversify its ranks with female participation. Perkins began a recruitment drive, with students responding enthusiastically.

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The correspondence list is one of several memorable moments for Whittier High chess players during the 2020-21 school year.

In March, Whittier High was the top scoring high school in the 2021 Southern California SuperStates Chess Championship, K-12 division, a competition that included public and private high schools from all over southern California and a number of players who have achieved the title of International Master and National Master.

Junior Joaquin Perkins led the six-member team with four points. Perkins, who has won 9 national scholastic titles and is the son of Kele Perkins, survived six grueling rounds and finished in fourth place overall.

“I’m glad the team was able to compete despite the limitations,” Joaquin said. “We each had our tough games and losses, but everyone managed to score some points.”

The SuperStates championship is Whittier High’s first varsity state title since 2017. Whittier High won JV state titles in 2016, 2018 and 2019.

“Chess has been a tradition at Whittier High for many years, thanks to the hard work and dedication of Kele Perkins and his students,” Whittier High Principal Timothy J. Liggett said. “It’s exciting to see our Cardinals get national recognition, but it’s even more rewarding to see the enthusiasm and rising participation rates among students.”

PHOTO CAPTION

WUHSD_CHESS1: Whittier High School Correspondence Chess Players from left to right: Isabel Luna, Soledad DeAguayo, Mary Lusinyan, Sadie Cruz, Sophia Reyna, Amanda Guevara and Samantha Silva. Not pictured: Ena Pejovski.

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