



WHITTIER UNION

HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

To Achieve and Maintain Excellence...

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: May 12, 2025 **CONTACT:** Andrea Garcia **PHONE:** 909-447-2403

Whittier Union Chess Club Celebrates Successes While Inspiring Academic Leaders

WHITTIER – For more than 20 years, the Whittier High School Chess Club has provided students with opportunities to match wits with classmates, develop their math, logic, and problem-solving skills, and engage with fellow chess enthusiasts from other schools throughout the state and nation.

From a team perspective, the WHS Chess Club has dominated the Del Rio League, capturing the league title 12 times since 2008, being crowned Southern California Chess Federation (SCCF) State champions twice, while its junior varsity (JV) team has secured first place in the SCCF seven times. In the early 2020s, WHS female correspondence players dominated the United States Chess women's correspondence rankings.

Individually, Whittier High chess players have made a considerable impact on the game, including WHS alumni Joaquin Perkins, a nine-time U.S. Chess Federation national champion; Isaiah Salazar, the most active blitz chess player in the U.S. in 2021-22; 2018 JV state champion Martin Lusinyan, and Joaquin Garcia, the 2024 Super States Best Unrated Player.

"Over the years, chess has become an enduring part of the culture here at Whittier High," Whittier High social studies teacher and Chess Club advisor Kele Perkins said. "Our door is open every day at lunch for students who are looking for a casual game. Kids wander in, play a game, and always want to learn more. Our students are highly motivated to succeed."

The Chess Club serves two functions: to teach students the game and to help prepare students to compete in tournaments.

Whittier High has hosted more than 200 free chess tournaments in the school library since 2013, and in 2022, Perkins received the Local Tournament Director Award from the U.S. Chess Federation.

Whittier High senior Andres Gutierrez has been a member of the Chess Club since arriving at the school as a freshman, serving as both president and vice-president. Coming in with some playing experience, Gutierrez's game has skyrocketed, rising from the novice ranks to become a two-time Del Rio League individual champion.

Gutierrez said his favorite game style is blitz – a fast-paced game that is typically completed in 10 minutes or less. Gutierrez estimates that he has played thousands of blitz games.

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"What I enjoy about blitz chess is the time control, that you have to think quickly and clearly," Gutierrez said. "It's easy for opponents to get careless during a blitz game, making moves that will leave them vulnerable. There's so much to love about chess. There is the social element, having fun playing a game with your friend, and the competitive element."

Gutierrez is also a member of the Whittier High Cardinal Academy of Technology engineering pathway and is building a go-kart for his senior project. Gutierrez said he feels that the logic and reasoning skills that he relies on during a chess match align perfectly with his education and desire to become an industrial engineer.

"In chess, you have to think of every possible move and what the result of that move will be," Gutierrez said. "The same logic applies to engineering, because of all the trial-and-error involved. Designing the go-kart, my team needed to put in a brake system, and we had to look at the problem from every option. My experience playing chess helps me in this process."

Gutierrez plans to attend Cal Poly Pomona to study industrial engineering, joining an impressive list of Whittier High Chess Club alumni who have gone on to prestigious universities, including Stanford, Cal Tech, MIT, Columbia, University of Pennsylvania, University of Chicago, UCLA, and UC Berkeley.

Although many Whittier High Chess Club players have distinguished themselves academically, Perkins said the keys to being a successful chess player are the ability to employ logic and spatial reasoning. The logic, perseverance, and planning it takes to win chess games helps, in the long term, to develop skills that carry over successfully to other academic subjects and games.

"Chess is considered intellectual, but that shouldn't deter anyone from playing the game, because the social benefits are so great," Perkins said. "Any student can join the Chess Club and they will receive enthusiastic instruction and encouragement from our more experienced members. Once they get used to the game, the students are looking to test their skills in a tournament. This is a big reason for our success over the years."

PHOTO CAPTION

WUHS_D_CHESS1: The Whittier High School junior varsity chess team celebrates its first-place finish at the 2025 SuperStates Scholastic Championships in March. The Whittier High Chess Club serves two functions: to teach students the game and to help prepare students to compete in tournaments. The Chess Club has dominated the Del Rio League, winning 12 league titles since 2008.

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