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LEARNING NEW MOVES

El Segundo youngsters immersed in chess get lessons in strategy, sportsmanship

A friendly handshake first, then it's time to get serious. With stern faces and careful hands, they align their pieces before sitting down to play.

Now it's "go" time.

It's a brisk Friday afternoon, but cold air is no match for a hot chess game — especially when some 100 squirming elementary school students are

the competitors in question.

A contingent of kids at El Segundo's **Ridmond Street School** is mastering chess moves in weekly sessions with the nonprofit group **Chess Tutors**, which teaches the game of strategy and wits to students across Los Angeles as a means of enhancing academics.

"It's very interesting and pretty challenging," said player

Keegan Finney, 10, a shaggy-haired fourth-grader who looks like he'd be more at home on a surfboard than sitting at a chessboard. "But it gets simpler when you get used to it."

Besides advancing their cognitive skills, the lessons give children a few subtle life lessons, too, like sportsmanship and the importance of considering all their options before

making a move. "You can tell kids 1,000 times to think before you act and they won't get it," Assistant Principal **Janice Hickey** said, "but when they see it in a game it starts seeping in."

The tutors and their trainees are meeting every Friday for six weeks for in-depth chess lessons and practice games. Their work will culminate in a tournament Jan. 12.