

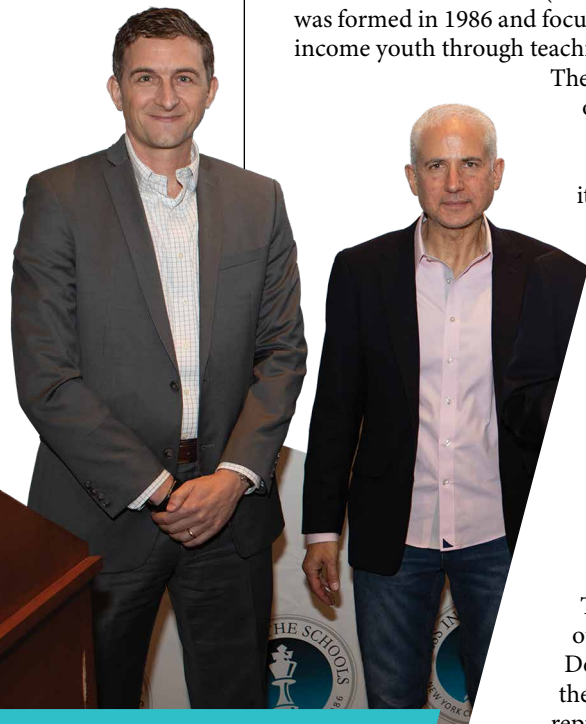
THE FIRST ANNUAL ANDY LERNER AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN CHESS EDUCATION

They help to grow in chess... and life!

Established by the New York City based organization Chess in the Schools (CIS), and named by its esteemed Board of Directors' member, this nationwide annual award recognizes the educator's impact on the chess community and students.

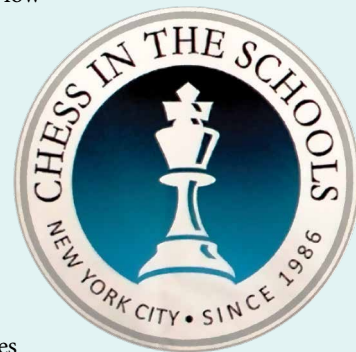
■ By FM Alec Getz

Chess in the Schools Board Members Richard Wagner (left) and Andy Lerner (right)



The first annual Andy Lerner Award for Excellence in Chess Education was held at the historic Grolier Club on Manhattan's Upper East Side, and I got to experience first-hand the celebration of the chess educators who've put their heart and soul into making an impact on children with our royal game. The award was made possible by National Master and Managing Partner of a venture capital firm, Andy Lerner, who is also a member of the Board of Directors of Chess in the Schools (CIS), a non-profit organization based in New York City that was formed in 1986 and focuses on the intellectual and social development of low-income youth through teaching chess.

The organization has given chess education to over half a million students overall – ninety percent of which are students of color – and upwards of 10,000 pupils per year throughout its programs, which include more than 40 public schools, college-bound and career building programs, summer learning programs, a Teacher Training Institute, a new College Success Initiative, and the biggest free tournament system of its kind in the United States. The award recognizes the impact that chess educators have had on their students and their community, through alignment with Chess in the School's mission.



The finalists of the contest

The ceremony began with a short speech by Kayvon Thibodeaux, a football outside linebacker for the New York Giants and an avid chess player. Then, Debbie Eastburn, CIS President and CEO, transitioned to the recognition of the finalists, who were chosen by a judging panel that included educators and representatives of the wider chess community. The finalists were announced by CIS board member, Richard Wagner, to rounds of applause from the crowd:

- **Matthew Morales**, Chess Program Manager at Success Academy Charter School from New York City
- **Carlos Graupera**, Teacher at P.S. 503 School of Discovery from Brooklyn, NY
- **Mark Indermaur**, the President of the Indermaur Chess Foundation from Raleigh, NC
- **Vaughn Bennett**, Executive Director of the DC State Chess Federation Club from Washington DC
- **Jose Garza**, Chess Coach at four public schools in the East Side community of Chicago, IL

FM Alec Getz was a multi-time national scholastic chess champion and member of the United States Chess Federation's All-American Team. He received the gold medal at the Pan-American Youth Championship and came runner-up in the US Junior Championship. He has all of his International Master norms and enjoys keeping up with the game. In addition to his articles on Chess.com, he has been a published author for *Chess Life* and currently serves as Features Editor for *American Chess Magazine*.



Kayvon Thibodeaux, an American football linebacker for the New York Giants

Each finalist received \$2,000, which was split between them and their chess programs, and the winner received \$10,000 – of which \$5,000 to the educator and \$5,000 to the affiliated organization.

Last but not least, one of the finalists, Mr. Vaughn Bennett summed up the essence of teaching chess and its huge social impact: “Being recognized as a finalist for such a prestigious award is an immense honor, and I am humbled by this acknowledgment. It serves as a testament to the unwavering dedication and passion I have for chess education – a field that holds a special place in my heart.

The Andy Lerner Award for Excellence in Chess Education is particularly meaningful to me, as it shines a spotlight on the significance of chess education beyond its surface-level teachings. Chess goes beyond the mere rules and strategies of the game; it cultivates critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and enhances cognitive abilities for individuals of all ages. It empowers students to develop life lessons like patience, resilience, and the ability to analyze complex situations.

In his paper, *The Morals of Chess* (1779), Dr. Benjamin Franklin said, “The game of Chess is not merely an idle amusement. Several very valuable qualities of the mind, useful in the course of human life, are to be acquired or strengthened by it, so as to become habits, ready on all occasions. For life is a kind of chess...”



Chess in the Schools Program Director Ron Boocock plays chess with Dakim Vanterpool, a CIS alum and a ChessKid.com business development representative.



Left to right: Samantha Velez, chess coordinator at PS 279, Tristan Stovall CIS's program manager and chess instructor, Vincent Bogert, recipient of the Lifetime Achievement Award, and Shehab Hasan, CIS alum.



Chess in the Schools students enrolled in CIS's College Bound Program



Being a part of the chess education community has allowed me to witness firsthand the transformative power of this ancient game. Chess brings together people from diverse backgrounds, fosters a sense of inclusivity, and promotes social interaction. Witnessing students develop not only their chess skills but also their self-confidence and personal growth has been incredibly rewarding.

I would also like to emphasize the broader benefits of chess education. Beyond the game itself, studies have shown that chess has the potential to positively impact academic performance by improving problem-solving abilities, concentration, and logical reasoning. Moreover, chess encourages creativity and imagination, allowing individuals to think outside the box and approach challenges from different angles. Additionally, research has shown that chess helps delay the onset of dementia in senior citizens, highlighting its long-term cognitive benefits.

I would be remiss not to express my deepest gratitude to my students, colleagues, and mentors who have supported and inspired me throughout my journey in chess education. Their enthusiasm and dedication continue to fuel my own passion for teaching and promoting this wonderful game.

Once again, I am incredibly honored to be a finalist for the Andy Lerner Award for Excellence in Chess Education. I hope that through my work in the field, I can contribute to the growth and recognition of chess education as a powerful tool for personal and intellectual development."

Overall, it was a wonderful event and celebration of excellence in chess education, the first of (hopefully) many more to come.

Earlier this fall, Chess in the Schools announced the next round of nominations for the Lerner Award. Check the award's details visit CIS's website at www.chessintheschools.org



Jon Edwards, chess player, writer and columnist, in conversation with guests



Kayvon Thibodeaux playing chess with CIS program manager Tristan Stovall



Award winner and finalists, left to right: Vaughn Bennett, Mark Indermaur, Vincent Bogert, Jose Garza, and Carlos Graupera



THE WINNER

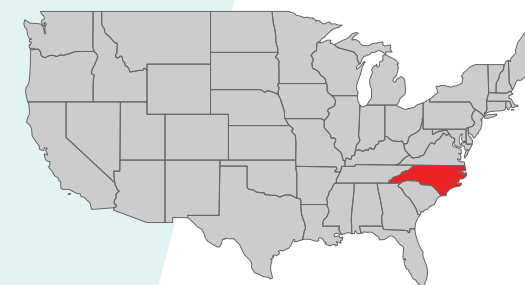
Mark Indermaur

president of the Indermaur Chess Foundation from Raleigh, NC

Immediately after receiving this prestigious award, the winner Mark Indermaur shared his thoughts exclusively for ACM readers: "I would like to thank Andy Lerner and Chess in the Schools for offering this generous recognition for chess educators who are helping students and schools across the country. I am honored to receive the inaugural award and inspired by the accomplishments of the other finalists.

Chess has so many educational benefits. It helps students improve concentration and problem-solving skills and teaches life skills like learning from mistakes and considering consequences before acting. Compared with other sports or academic competitions, chess is a great equalizer. Chess players do not have an advantage based on their age, gender, physical size, race, religion, or socio-economic status. As we well know, young children who practice regularly beat older opponents.

Since chess is such a fun game that anyone can play, it is also a great community builder. In school chess clubs, students quickly make friends in every class and grade across the school. Chess clubs are also excellent inter-generational programs for libraries and community centers, because they appeal to young children, retirees, and everyone in between!



Mark Indermaur with his students



Mark Indermaur is a volunteer chess coach who has run chess clubs in schools in low-income communities of Raleigh, North Carolina for twelve years. He teaches lessons, runs club tournaments, and provides US Chess memberships and ChessKid accounts. He also runs programming for teachers and parents plus summer activities for his students. He encourages girls to play in the male-dominated sport as well. With the help of parent volunteers, he manages these two large school-based chess clubs. In 2019 he and his wife Meredith founded a non-profit, the Indermaur Chess Foundation to help 65 NC schools, libraries, and community centers start chess clubs. The funding of the foundation provides chess sets, instructional materials, ChessKid accounts, online support, and facilitates online tournaments. Overall, Mark is empowering 750 chess players through his wide-ranging efforts. To quote his student Allison Owens, who wrote a letter of recommendation, "Coach Mark made an impact by giving me a place to grow in chess as I grew up in life." For his "day job" Mark works at IBM in product management.



My wife and I saw hundreds of families experience these benefits through the chess clubs where we volunteer, so we started our nonprofit Indermaur Chess Foundation to help start more chess programs in North Carolina. Since 2019 we have helped 78 schools, libraries, and community centers in 36 of NC's 100 counties start chess clubs. We provide each group with chess sets, Chess-Steps instructional materials, ChessKid accounts, and online support. We organize free weekly online tournaments on ChessKid and regular over-the-board tournaments for our clubs.

We are excited to leverage the Andy Lerner Award to reach the remaining 64 counties in NC. I am inspired by the creative ways that my fellow finalists are serving their diverse communities in New York, Chicago, and Washington, DC, so, in addition to expanding our geographic reach, I would like to support chess programs in NC's two school districts for students whose parents serve in the military, our American Indian school district, and our three schools for students who have hearing or vision loss.

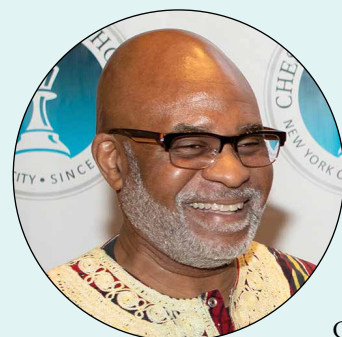
We modeled our non-profit's program after recreational sports leagues where the league provides training materials and support to volunteers who then coach their teams. The vast majority of these volunteers were never professional or even collegiate athletes. In the same way, you don't have to be a grandmaster to coach a school chess club."

Mr. Indermaur also had a special message to ACM readers, though: "While parents and teachers are willing to start a chess club, they can still feel nervous about teaching chess. As a reader of *American Chess Magazine* you clearly enjoy and appreciate our beautiful game, so if you could offer to periodically help a local school or library chess club, it would give the club's leader the confidence to proceed. You could teach a few lessons during the year, play a simul, review games during a tournament, or help the club run their own tournament at the end of the year. However you could help, you would make a difference to so many families, and you would help grow our amazing chess community. Thank you!"



Matthew Morales is the Chess Program Manager at Success Academy Charter School Network in New York City. He oversees a staff of nearly 40 chess instructors at Success that instructs more than 8,000 students. Matthew has worked at Success for over 10 years, rising from Instructor, to Content Lead developing the curriculum, to his current leadership role. At Success Academy, chess is taught during the school day to all students in grades K-2, and then as an elective and an afterschool club in the higher grades. Success offers in-house tournaments as well as providing opportunities for high-performing students to compete in local, state, and national tournaments. His students have earned impressive titles, trophies and awards. As a youngster, Matthew

himself was a CIS student and on the Bronx middle school team that won Middle School Nationals and was coached by the famed David MacEnulty who is here in the audience. We consider Matthew to be part of the CIS extended family.



Currently, Executive Director of the DC State Chess Federation Chess Club, **Vaughn Bennett** has coached chess and run tournaments for decades at a wide range of schools, libraries, camps, and even universities. His students and teams have won trophies and awards, and he has received media coverage in newspapers, television, radio, and film. DC State Chess provides free chess classes in all eight wards of the city. Tournaments and teacher training are free too. Vaughn is a volunteer and he is known for his drive to increase access and equity in chess to include the racial and ethnic groups that are reflective of the diversity of the city. The parent of a student wrote, "Through the seven years since my son has studied with Mr. Bennett, his commitment to empowering young chess players has been unsurpassed and unwavering."

Carlos Graupera is not your typical chess coach. He is the visual arts teacher at P.S. 503 in Sunset Park. He sees chess as both an art and a science. The chess team, sporting Carlos's team t-shirt designs (and handmade by him), is a source of community pride. Carlos and a group of dedicated parents

launched the chess program in 2010 with the help of Chess in the Schools. The elementary school serves a predominantly immigrant population from China, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Mexico, Central and South American countries, Yemen, Egypt, and Palestine. He works with students, staff and parent volunteers across languages and cultures to bind his team together. He volunteers his time to personally chaperone his chess team to weekend tournaments across the city as well as to States and Nationals. Carlos has created connections with middle and high schools to enable his students' continued growth in chess after they graduate from P.S. 503. As one parent wrote, "Carlos is the heart of the chess program at our school."



Jose Garza may be retired, but he is still hard at work. This former mechanical engineer is a board member of the Chicago Chess Foundation where he is a very active volunteer chess coach and tournament organizer. For 15 years he has coached in the elementary, middle, and high schools in the community where he grew up. He has been called the biggest promoter of chess in Chicago's Latinx population. Jose is in the schools every day of the week, working with 100 students. On Saturdays, he is with his chess teams at tournaments. In the summers, he runs a free one week summer chess camp for 40 low-income youth. He takes a group of 20 students out of state to Nationals each year. His motto about chess is, "Anyone can play it, and if you can play it, you can do anything."



Special Award Winner

Vincent Bogert

veteran chess coordinator at P.S. 279 in Bronx



Left to right: Richard Wagner, Andy Lerner, Vincent Bogert and Debbie Eastburn, CIS's former President & CEO.

Vincent Bogert, a veteran chess coordinator at P.S. 279 in Bronx, NY, was honored with a special *Lifetime Achievement Award for Excellence in Chess Education*. As announced by Richard Wagner:

"At P.S. 279 in the Bronx, chess began 30 years ago. Chess in the Schools arrived and never left. **Vincent Bogert** was a classroom teacher and next the School's Business Manager until he finally retired in 2010. Since then, he has volunteered his time to keep the program vibrant. Throughout the 30 years, he has been the steady encouraging presence. P.S. 279's chess club serves about 50 kids each year. He and his fellow club coach, the ever-upbeat Samantha Velez, chaperone students to almost every Saturday tournament that CIS offers across all boroughs plus they have brought groups to Nationals.

Jean Dalton, the principal of P.S. 279 has known Vincent Bogert for 25 years. According to Jean, "Mr Bogert's success goes beyond what can be measured in chess. For him, chess is a tool, a means to an end, a tool to help students reach for immediate AND long-term success. The graduation rate and the rate of advanced degrees among our chess players is quite impressive. Every year former chess players come back, and they speak of all the successes they are having and they attribute a lot of it to him."

Here's how Mr. Bogert felt after receiving this very special award: "I really do appreciate this honor. Over the years I have done my best to get students to our club and tournaments I have also tracked students' academic progress. As with chess, their level of achievement varied widely. Generally, success in chess did lead to academic progress, but we need to be certain

that is happening. We need to always monitor student progress before making that claim.

I must be modest about this award. I do have some chess skills going back to my high school days in the 1960s. However, in 1995, after just a year of chess club, I had my doubts about my ability to help students get to a higher level in chess. It was easy to teach the basics, maybe even implement more advanced lesson plans, but it would be difficult to inspire more advanced players given my limited chess skills. Fortunately, I met Chess in the Schools at that time. They provided the kind of expertise required.

I do consider one measure of success to be student achievement in chess. That has varied widely over the years. We do not have any former students who made it to the master level, although we do have three former students who are currently employed as chess instructors. However, our former students have achieved on another measure, success in education, as measured by graduation from four-year colleges. Again, we must be modest about that. We empower students with our chess program, but it is their determination and support from their families that take them as far as they get. CIS College Bound program also helped in many cases. I believe very much in the value of chess, but it is just a part of student success.

When an organization like Chess in the Schools calls my efforts an achievement, that is an affirmation. It inspires me to carry on. I am feeling some of the effects of age, but I will summon the energy to get back with the program as we recover from the impact of the pandemic. That may mean up to 25 chess tournaments next year. If our students get out of bed early on Saturdays to attend tournaments, I must match their effort. I really can't think of a better way to service my school community.

Victories on the chessboard at PS/MS 279 Bronx are important, but the lessons learned by students through chess are equally and possibly even more important."

CIS's College Bound students, left to right: Selvin Ramirez, Shesit Moreno-Lopez, and Sharon Lu

