Applicant: Murray Language Academy
5335 South Kenwood Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60615
(773) 535-0585

Date of Submission: 1 July 2003

Contact Person: Jill Allison White
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Team Budget: $4,420.00 per year

Amount Requested: $2,000.00

Requested for: September 2003 – June 2004

Summary of Proposal:

Murray Language Academy is a K-6 public magnet school located on Chicago’s south side. Students are chosen to attend Murray through a random computerized lottery process, and represent roughly the same ethnic/socioeconomic demographic breakdown as the city at large. Like many of Chicago’s public schools, Murray receives no extra-curricular funding. As a result, the Murray chess club, which during the 2002-2003 school year met twice a week after school and comprised approximately fifteen third through sixth grade students, has had to rely on the leadership of volunteers who know how to play chess but provide little comprehensive instruction to the students. There are few parents at Murray who can afford the $156.00 per-year per-child cost to hire a coach, and a glut of already-established fundraising activities at the school makes raising funds in-house difficult.

Studies have shown that the study of chess has a positive impact on the cognitive development of young children, particularly the development of logic, memory, awareness, analysis, and pattern recognition. A properly coached chess team at Murray would be tremendously valuable for these children, whose school places 30-plus students in each classroom due to budget constraints. To this end, Murray is seeking funding to hire Wayne Smith, a US Chess Federation “A” player and experienced chess coach, to provide the children with challenging instruction and the opportunity to participate in tournaments. In addition, the school would like to establish a scholarship fund for those students whose parents cannot afford club dues or tournament expenses. Long-term goals for the Murray chess team include hosting area tournaments, which will afford the opportunity to raise funds through concession sales, and the establishment of a “junior” instructional club for the kindergarten through second grade students.
History of Murray Language Academy

Murray Language Academy is a Chicago Public School located in the Hyde Park neighborhood on the south side of the city near the University of Chicago campus. Murray was opened as a public elementary school in the neighborhood in 1954, and became a World Language Magnet School in 1981. CPS magnet schools offer curricula organized around a specific theme, such as math/science, fine arts, world language or humanities. Students from throughout the city may apply to any magnet school, and are selected to attend through a computerized lottery. Students from the school’s “proximity” (1.5-mile radius), who may represent no more than 30% of enrollment, are selected through a separate lottery. Murray’s students thus reflect Chicago’s diverse racial/ethnic and socioeconomic demographics. In 2002, the student population (342) was composed as follows:

- 23.7% white
- 68.1% African-American
- 4.4% Asian
- 1.2% Native American
- 17.5% low-income

Even more significant than Murray’s demographics is its high level of attendance. The school’s truancy rate in 2001 was 0%, with a daily attendance rate of 96.7%. This is an impressive accomplishment in a city where high truancy rates are common. These high attendance rates reflect positively on Murray students’ test scores, which on the 2002 Iowa Tests of Basic Skills were the highest in Hyde Park:

- 94.1% of Murray students scored at/above national norms in Reading Comprehension
- 92.1% of Murray students scored at/above national norms in Math

Murray is currently undergoing a major building expansion that will increase its enrollment to 450 students, affording even more children from throughout the city opportunities unavailable at their neighborhood schools.

The school's mission is to offer an enriching curriculum that develops students' abilities to communicate effectively, to reason critically, and to analyze and solve problems logically. In addition to regular academic subjects, all Murray students take daily French, Japanese or Spanish classes beginning in kindergarten and continuing through sixth grade. Murray also values extracurricular activities that enrich and challenge its students, and—despite a complete lack of funding to pay for such activities—manages to offer its students after school programs like basketball, cheerleading, dance, reading and chess.

The Murray after-school chess program began in 2001 under the direction of second grade teacher Robert Wimberly. Mr. Wimberly’s program included instruction along
with play and was popular among the third to sixth grade students. When Mr. Wimberly transferred to another school the following year, chess club members continued to meet twice a week to play after school in the library under the supervision of two student volunteers from the University of Chicago. The club has continued to be popular, with consistent attendance of approximately fifteen students. Parental support has been strong; many parents have made special arrangements with after-school caregivers in order to allow their children to participate in the chess club.

**The Problem**

Murray and its chess club have accomplished much in spite of many difficult conditions that exist at the school due to a constant shortage of funding from local, state, and federal governments.

- Murray has struggled for years with inadequate facilities. There is, for instance, no kitchen in the building. With no kitchen in which to prepare meals, the school has no choice but to provide highly processed packaged lunches to those students who purchase or receive free lunches. Whether they eat the school lunches or bring lunch from home, all three hundred-plus students must eat at their desks every day, due to the lack of a cafeteria. Other inadequacies include a gym that is so small that assemblies are held in two stages in order to accommodate parents, a closet-sized special education room off of the library, and a teachers’ “resource room” that consists of a copier and some shelves in the hallway. Some of these problems will soon be alleviated as, after twelve years of planning, Murray has finally begun its long-anticipated building expansion project.

- The classrooms at Murray are very crowded, as the funding to hire extra teachers is insufficient. In the 2002-2003 school year, the smallest classes were the Kindergarten, with 28 students, and the first grade, with 29. All other classes from second through sixth grade had a minimum of 31 students. The entire faculty shared one teacher’s assistant, who left at the end of the year and will not be replaced, even though the student population will increase by 58 in the 2003-2004 year. So, unless a teacher can keep a constant stream of student teachers in the classroom, he or she must manage 30 plus students, for five and a half hours every day, alone.

- Despite a strong commitment to the arts, Murray has no funding to support an arts curriculum. There is no music available at all until third grade, when students join the choir. Once a week, the third through sixth graders spend an hour singing with a teacher from the Chicago Children’s Choir, who has additional responsibilities at several other schools. This teacher, though highly qualified, lacks the time and materials to teach the students to read music or play instruments. Violin and wind instrument instruction were offered at Murray in the past, but funding for these activities has stopped, and while Murray does provide networking with private music instruction programs in the area, many parents are unable to afford these programs. The situation with fine arts is similar: children have fine arts once a week in their classrooms under the
direction of one of the library employees, who manages to work small miracles with Popsicle sticks, markers, construction paper and the like. No funding means few art supplies and no art room.

- These obstacles make extracurricular opportunities even more vital for Murray students, whose overworked teachers have little time to give students individual attention or to infuse their teaching agendas with relaxing, enriching activities. The generally smaller size of the after school groups allows for a greater level of individual attention and gives students something to look forward to at school. Of course, the lack of funding means that parents must accept the burden of the costs for these programs, which can be as low as $5.00 for a four-week arts and crafts program, or as high as $10.00 a week for a year-long dance program (which runs to approximately $350.00 total). These programs are also utterly dependent upon volunteer leaders, whose qualifications are simply not a priority.

- Murray is a school in a constant state of fundraising. From the first day of school—when teachers typically solicit donations of paper towels, tissue paper, pencils, and other supplies—to the last, various Murray groups are continually asking for support. Support raising includes ventures like bake sales; raffles; donut, bagel, caramel apple, popcorn, soft pretzel, and ice cream sales; book fairs; and an annual walkathon. At any given time, these ventures are for the benefit of the PTO, the Friends of Murray, the cheerleaders, the basketball team, the French students, the Spanish students, or the Japanese students. This creates quite a glut of fundraising at Murray, and students end up soliciting the same people over and over again.

- All of these difficulties have a decided effect upon the Murray Chess club. A dearth of funding requires the club to rely upon volunteers to run it. With the departure of the highly-qualified Mr. Wimberly, Murray’s chess team turned to two University of Chicago students who know how to play the game and are willing to work for free, but have no other chess-coaching qualifications. These volunteers are kind to the children and provide good supervision, but do not offer any comprehensive instruction in chess strategy. Students are not being taught important chess-playing skills like algebraic notation, which would allow them to record, review and discuss particular chess games. In addition, because the college students do not have permanent residence in Chicago, they have no history with or connection to the local chess community. The Murray chess players thus have no opportunity to participate in tournaments, which are a vital part of learning scholarship chess. Besides offering valuable social experiences, tournaments allow students to build and hone their chess skills and to advance in their US Chess Federation ratings. Remedying this situation requires hiring a qualified coach, but few Murray parents can afford the cost. Wayne Smith, a local chess instructor, charges $40.00 per hour, which yearly equals $3,120.00. With 20 team members, the annual cost per child is $152.00, not including fees for tournaments and equipment. Murray’s overworked fundraising apparatus makes the possibility of raising these funds through the usual channels unlikely.
Our goals and strategies

Because the Murray Language Academy goals include offering “an enriching curriculum that develops students' abilities to communicate effectively, to reason critically, and to analyze and solve problems logically,” chess is an ideal after-school activity for the Murray students. Chess is known to enhance the critical reasoning, analytical thinking and problem solving skills of young children. These benefits are well documented; for example:

- In a Texas study, chess-playing students showed twice the improvement of non-chess-playing students on a state standardized test.

- A Canadian study found increased gains in math comprehension and problem solving with the addition of chess to the math curriculum.

- In Zaire, a group of chess-playing teenagers showed significant improvement in spatial, numerical, and verbal abilities compared to a non-chess-playing group. (Source: http://ourworld.cs.com/kaech5/benefits.html 5/7/03)

Chess' unique characteristics make it an ideal complement to our school curriculum. Through the study of scholastic chess, students learn:

- **Strategy**: Success at chess requires no luck; only know-how, skill, and strategy will result in a win.

- **Patience and self-control**: Chess strategy requires players to consider their moves carefully, and to anticipate those of their opponents. This requires patience and an ability to control frustration.

- **Sportsmanship**: If a chess player loses a match, she must analyze her moves and learn from her own mistakes; there is no blaming the loss on another team member. Chess thus requires children to learn how to take responsibility for their own actions.

- **Self-esteem**: For the same reason, no one else can take the credit when a child succeeds. Young chess players earn the right to be proud of themselves when they win games.

- **Cognition**: The complex and infinitely possible moves of the game promote logical thinking and memory. Its ability to assist the development of logic, memory, awareness, analysis, and pattern recognition has made chess a required part of school curricula in 30 countries.

These social and cognitive skills have a profound impact on a child's behavior and school performance. Given these benefits, Murray has several goals for its after-school chess program.
1. **To hire Wayne Smith, an experienced local chess coach, to lead the Murray Chess Team.** Our objective is to establish a competitive scholarship chess team that will provide the greatest benefit to the students and significantly raise the levels of their chess skills. The $4,420.00 annual budget will be used to pay Coach Smith and to establish a scholarship fund.

2. **To raise the number of students on the team to at least twenty.** The objective is to increase the level of parental involvement in and support of the chess team and to improve the level of competition and challenge for the students by increasing attendance.

3. **To host at least one tournament each year at Murray.** Our objective with this goal is to establish a presence in the Chicago chess community. Hosting a tournament will increase the school’s reputation and visibility. An additional objective is to raise funds at the tournament through sales of concessions and souvenirs.

4. **To establish a scholarship fund with an annual budget of $1,300.00.** The objective of this fund is to defray the cost of tournament fees and team dues, particularly for lower-income students. This fund will be particularly helpful for reducing out-of-pocket expenses for travel to tournaments, which can run anywhere from $150.00 to $300.00 per student.

5. **To establish a “junior” chess club for the K-2 students.** Our objective is to provide younger students with strong chess instruction in order to prepare them to join the team in third grade.

**Timeline**

- **Summer 2003:** Raise sufficient funds to begin the 2003-2004 school year with Coach Smith. Meet with Coach Smith to plan beginning-of-year meeting with parents. Determine availability of school facilities. Order team t-shirts.

- **September 2003:** Meet with parents and students. Order chess sets. Schedule and begin chess team practice.

- **October 2003:** Solicit assistant coaching help from U of C volunteers.

- **November 2003:** Prepare for K-12 National Championship. Participate in K-12 National Championship.

- **Spring 2003:** Continue team practice. Participate in local tournaments. Host tournament.

- **Ongoing activities:** Team practice, participation in local tournaments, fundraising.
Evaluation

1. At least twenty students will sign up to participate on the chess team.

2. Attendance will be consistent, with no more than two absences per student each quarter.

3. Team members will participate in at least one tournament per quarter.

4. At least 75% of the team will participate in the 2003 K-12 National Championship.

5. Murray will host a tournament during the spring quarter of the 2003-2004 school year; in subsequent years, Murray will host two tournaments or double the attendance at the spring tournament.

Budget

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Grand Total $4,420.00

Projected Costs for Parents

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<tr>
<td>Regulation Chess Set*</td>
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*one-time expenses
Personnel

Wayne Smith, the chess instructor, will meet with the chess team students for instruction and practice twice a week after school and will supervise students at tournaments. Mr. Smith has 35 years of experience playing chess, and five years of experience coaching children. For the past four years, he has coached the Beasley Academic Center Chess Team, which has won the Chicago City K-12 championships four years in a row. He also leads the University of Chicago Lab School’s after school chess program and the chess program at Kennicott Park in Chicago's North Kenwood neighborhood. He is a graduate of Dunbar Vocational High School and is currently employed as a mechanical engineer in the food manufacturing industry. See attachment one for more details.