

Outdoor chess draws excitement from Montessori students

Spencer Lahr Aug 30, 2017 Updated 6 hrs ago



Montessori School of Rome student Charl Glover, 7, carefully steps back from a chess piece he moved on the school's outdoor board on Monday, Aug. 28, 2017, while Ronik Patel, 6, looks on. The students got to play a game even though the board hasn't officially been opened to all students since the mondo grass between the tiles hasn't fully acclimated yet. (Spencer Lahr / RN-T.com)

As she stood looking over the 12-by-12-foot board, strategizing the movements of the giant chess pieces with her two teammates, 10-year-old Ansley Combs determined that she had never played the game like this before.

Combs is a fifth-grader at the **Montessori School of Rome**. On Monday, she and four other chess club members got to test their skills in a match on the new outdoor chess board at the school.

The five students were split into teams — three against two. They walked amongst pawns, rooks and knights, stepping from square to square to swipe a piece off the board or to make a simple move that was part of a greater plan. The students collaborated on their decisions, leaning in close to share thoughts with their partners.



"I think it's pretty cool," said Ronik Patel, a first-grader, while standing next to chess pieces that peaked at or above his knees.

Combs said she felt much more involved, like she was in the game.

Shemi Kumar, the head of the school, said there will be some introduction to chess classes for other students, and the board will be open for play during recess. Chess teaches kids to think three to four steps ahead, pushing them to deliberate more on what they will do next, she explained.

Kumar said the space also will be used as an outdoor classroom, to put students out into the environment they are learning about. Something that has an ever-increasing importance as the wonder of being outside is disappearing in the digital age, she continued.

The school has wanted to develop such an interactive place for students for three to four years, Kumar said, and the effort picked up steam with the financial support of the school's boosters, who are like a "little PTA arm."

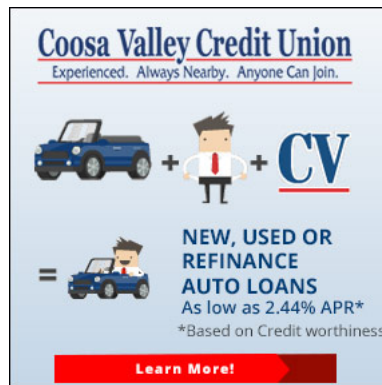


Beth Dunay, a Montessori parent and an architect for ED Design, which she owns, volunteered to see the project through from design to completion.

Eric McJunkin said workers with his company, McJunkin Lawn Care & Landscaping, followed Dunay's plan and had it put together in about a week. The circular space has a diameter of 20 feet. Retaining wall blocks were used for the two sections of bench seating that curve around the board.

The board is made up of stepping stones for each of the 64 squares. AstroTurf carpet acts as the walking space outside of the board. Mondo grass fills the spaces between the stepping stones, and it gives the space a cleaner look and keeps the tiles intact, McJunkin said.

The space hasn't been opened up for daily use because the grass still needs more time to acclimate, McJunkin said.



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