

ALABAMA STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION STATEMENT OF SUPPORT FOR THE ALABAMA CHESS IN SCHOOLS INITIATIVE

Emerging educational research suggests that playing chess benefits students both cognitively and affectively, thereby increasing their abilities in focusing, strategizing, problem solving, critical thinking, perseverance, and self-confidence. All of these skills are critical for successful performance in school. By integrating the strategies of chess through reading/literature, math, social studies, and science, students oftentimes find that chess is extremely motivating and engaging.

The **Alabama Chess in Schools (ACIS) Initiative** is a three-year pilot program sponsored by the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) based on a proposal by the Alabama Chess Federation and National Chess Education Consultant Jerry Nash. The ACIS Initiative prepares educators through expert training to write curricula that teaches academics and life lessons through chess. The initiative offers opportunities for students to participate in chess as an integral part of the school curriculum.

The ACIS Initiative is unique in nature in that it is teacher-driven, linked to the Alabama College- and Career-Ready Standards (ACCRS), scalable and sustainable, and embedded in research. Progress has been made in setting up a conceptual framework, creating support networks, selecting pilot schools, training teachers, and providing ACCRS-linked curriculum related to chess.

The ALSDE believed so strongly in the potential benefits of the ACIS Initiative to strengthen both academic and life skills of students that significant discretionary funds were allocated toward its initial start-up. The objectives of the initiative address the following:

- Recruitment of general education teachers in Grades K-6/8 to use chess as a medium for mathematics, reading/literature, social studies, and science instruction.
- Staff development training for educators who are not expert chess players, enabling them to custom-design related curricula, making chess instruction less intimidating.
- Early and continued experience with chess for more students that will increase their higher-order thinking, focus, and perseverance, as well as provide some who are motivated to become competitive chess players.

Alabama is the first state in the nation to organize a chess in schools initiative that is integrated with its state educational standards. The ALSDE is proud of the progress to date and excited by the positive reception the initiative has gotten from teachers, administrators, and the communities in the three-year pilot program.

