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For the love of chess: annual tourney attracts crowd of kids

Free event open to all students in grades K-12 in Grant and Adams counties.



by Randy Bracht, Editor Updated February 09, 2026



Over 100 kids from across the Columbia Basin gathered at Parkway School in Ephrata Saturday morning for the 19th Waypoint Foundation Scholastic Chess Tournament. Photos by R...

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EPHRATA — The 19th Waypoint Foundation Scholastic Chess Tournament attracted 106 youth participants from across the Columbia Basin to Parkway Intermediate School in Ephrata on Saturday.

“It’s the most players we’ve ever had,” said Roger Pugh, who helps organize the annual event with his brother, Troy.

The free tournament is open to all students in grades K-12 attending public, private, or home schools in Grant and Adams counties. Registration is typically limited to 100 entrants, but officials opted to include a handful of extra players who had signed up.

Ben McLain, an 11th-grader from Ephrata, emerged as the 2026 winner, prevailing in the round-robin championship against opponents James Barber of Moses Lake (9th grade) and Ezekiel Klopov of Soap Lake (9th grade).



Waypoint Foundation Chess Tournament officials Matthew Truscott (left) and Troy Pugh, championship round finalists Ezekiel Klopov, Ben McLain, and James Barber, and Waypoint official Roger Pugh. McLain

emerged as the 2026 champion in Saturday's event. Photo courtesy of Waypoint Foundation
 There were five rounds of play, starting in the morning and continuing into the early afternoon, with cash prizes awarded up to \$500 for first place. The event is also a regional qualifying tournament for state-level high school team and elementary individual tournaments.

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A pizza lunch was provided to youth participants.

“And why do we play chess?” Roger asked the crowd of kids during their opening orientation.

“To have fun,” replied one little girl.

The Pughs agreed. They also said the game helps young people display sportsmanship, develop strategy, learn to make choices, and see the consequences of decision-making — all beneficial experiences as they grow older.



Organizers Roger and Troy Pugh (above at right) provided pre-tourney instructions to the players, both tall and small.



Tables and timers awaited the entrants during the group orientation.



Then it was time to sit down and match wits and strategy as the competition got underway.



13-year-old Cash Sieverkropp of Ephrata pondered a move in his initial bout.



Drew Weitzel, 16, (at left) appeared to experience a moment of anguish following a move charted by 12-year-old Vivienne Springs, both

from Ephrata. But Drew rallied for a win against his younger opponent in one of the longer opening-round matches of the day.



David Klopov of Soap Lake (above at left) reaches high to snap a photo of his 6-year-old son, Josiah, who was participating in Saturday's event. Klopov, now 30, was among the initial participants, and one of the top placers, when the tournament first began two decades ago. And does Josiah enjoy chess? "Oh, he loves it. More than I did," said his father. "He bugs me to play all the time." At right, a message on a shirt seemed to embody the spirit of the competition.



The action even extended out to the school's main hallway, where a group of kids gathered for an impromptu match on the floor.

 by Randy Bracht, Editor Updated February 09, 2026



EPHRATA TIGERS

Weekly Schedule

Friday, Feb 13

BOYS WRESTLING 5:30 PM

Districts at Toppenish

[Directions](#)

GIRLS WRESTLING 5:30 PM

Districts at Grandview

[Directions](#)

Saturday, Feb 14

BOYS WRESTLING 9:30 AM

Districts at Toppenish

[Directions](#)

GIRLS WRESTLING 9:30 AM

Districts at Grandview

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