

'Electronics out of the equation': Bridge tournament for Calgary grade school students

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CALGARY -- More than 120 students from nine Calgary schools got together Wednesday in the gymnasium at St. Phillip School in the southeast community of Parkland.

The students, who range from Grade 4 to Grade 6 hail from both the Calgary Catholic School District and the Calgary Board of Education where they take part in school bridge clubs.

They typically play at lunchtime or recess, but on Wednesday, students were grouped into teams of two and played about eight games for the one-day tournament.

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The program is organized through the American Contract Bridge League, Calgary Unit 390.

It's a national organization that supports bridge in North America with approximately 150,000 members and 1,000 in the Calgary unit.

Myron Achtman, co-ordinator of the bridge tournament, said it began three years ago in one school with 12 kids.

"It takes the kids away from their technology, which is the things like the tablets and the phones, because with this game there is no place for a tablet or a phone and you're engaging in one-to-one, face-to-face with another person in a social situation and you're taking the electronics out of the equation," said Achtman.

Bernie Varem, principal at St. Philip, said the card game helps the kids with math skills and learning strategy.

"Then there's just the etiquette of bridge. You have to be polite, you have to say thank you, you have to do all the different things in order," he said.

"There is a process that has to be followed so the kids are learning all of that and it's just a great way of bringing them together."

Grade 5 student Emma Mather likes playing with a partner in teams of two at the tournament.

"I like playing card games so I thought this would be fun to play with my friends," she says.

Luca Todea, in his second year at the tournament, is in Grade 6 and is playing with his brother.

"It helps pass the recess time. It's fun, it's exciting, it's unpredictable, it's complicated," he said.

Achtman said kids who start playing young have the ability to learn the game, which makes them better players than people who start as adults.

"It increases their ability to rationalize situations that are not necessarily working out the way they anticipated, not just in bridge," he said. "I'm talking life situations where you start to think of alternative ideas to deal with situations rather than saying, 'I'm stuck, I don't know what to do.'"

A number of other schools participated in weekly lessons and are also competing at the tournament, including St. Jude, Father James Whelihan, St. Philip, St. Augustine, Nellie McClung, Captain John Palliser, Griffith Woods, Louis Riel and Briar Hill.

You can find out more about the [Calgary Duplicate Bridge Association online](#).

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