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## Chess match in space exposes kids to science

By **BENJAMIN MIRASKI**  
*MetLife News Service*

**WASHINGTON** — About 240 miles above the Earth, aboard the International Space Station, astronaut Greg Chamitoff is playing on a homemade Velcro chess board in his latest match.

He made his first move Sunday night and waited while his opponents on Earth deliberated their choices.

His opponents are a group of students at Stevenson Elementary School in Bellevue, Wash.

They are the National Elementary Chess Champions, crowned last May in Pittsburgh. Most of the 11 kids are in the third grade or younger.

"It is just really cool to be involved with something like this," said David Hendricks, one of the coaches of the championship team.

It is an opportunity for the students to play chess and to have more exposure to science at an early age, a step that has been shown to make it more likely for students to make it a career.

Robert Tai, an associate professor of science education at the Curry School of Education at the University of Virginia, is one of the authors of the first study to examine the link between early exposure to science and career choices.

The information was collected by the National Center for Educational Statistics, which tracked a group of stu-

dents through high school from 1988 through 2000. Tai matched answers involving their career interests early in the study to what they actually chose to study in college.

"To make the kind of commitment long term that results in a tangible outcome like earning your baccalaureate degree in that [science] major, there is no fooling around," Tai said.

"You had to take a lot of classes; you had to go to college.

"There is a lot that they had to do to get to that outcome."

### Teachers get message

The results of Tai's study were published in *Science* magazine in 2006, but his work continues to influence the way he shows future teachers how to teach science.

Tai stays away from terminology and discourages taking notes.

Instead he focuses on experiments and the experiential factors of learning.

First-hand experiences, like the Earth-to-space chess match, "are going to generate excitement," Tai said, and when undertaken at an early age can grow into something more expansive.

"It has the opportunity to develop from this passing thought of 'Oh, that's kind of neat rock,' to a deeper kind of interest: 'I want to find about things,'" Tai said.