



More Than Just a Game

Esports can prepare students for college and a career





INTRODUCTION

For some students, the prospect of earning a college scholarship for doing something they love — playing competitive video games — is a dream come true.

Others are just looking for the camaraderie that comes from playing a team sport, something many haven't done before.

Whatever their reason for participating, esports has exploded in popularity over the last few years.

According to EdTech Magazine, there are nearly 200 varsity esports teams at U.S. colleges and universities, and collectively they award millions of dollars in scholarships. There are also thousands of high school teams in at least 23 states and provinces across North America.

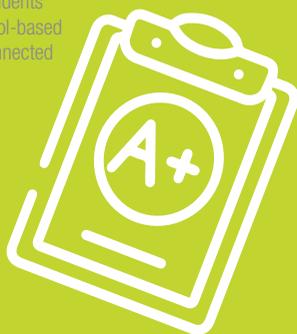
Grand View Research reports that esports was a \$2 billion industry in 2021. Research firm Statista estimates that esports viewership will top 600 million people worldwide by 2025.

Why has esports become such a huge phenomenon? What do students get out of competing? Perhaps most importantly, how can you create a successful esports program in your own school or district? Read on to find out.

Four Key Benefits of Esports

Students do better academically.

It's a well-established fact that when students take part in an extracurricular activity, they're more engaged in school and are less likely to drop out. Esports appeals to many students who haven't found their niche in more traditional school-based activities — giving them an outlet for feeling more connected to the school community.



They learn critical 21st-century skills.

Esports is a great way for students to learn skills that are highly valued in the workplace, such as teamwork, communication, problem solving, critical thinking, perseverance, self-confidence, and leadership.

In an after-school esports program at Horace Mann UCLA Community School in Los Angeles, students rated themselves and each other on how well they applied 15 specific skills during game play. Both students and their advisor agreed they saw tremendous growth over the course of the program in skills such as handling adversity and working together to accomplish a common goal.

They're preparing for successful careers.

Esports involves many careers beyond just the players. There are roles for students in designing games, marketing or managing teams, covering matches as journalists, and even "shoutcasting" matches, or describing the action during live broadcasts on platforms such as Twitch.

A three-year research study at the University of California, Irvine, found that high school students involved in esports had a greater opinion of the importance of STEM disciplines and more interest in pursuing STEM careers.



They can earn college scholarships.

Esports can be an avenue to a college degree for many students. Arcadia University in Pennsylvania offers scholarships worth up to \$25,000 for its esports team members. The High School Esports League offers more than \$150,000 in scholarships for students to win through its esports competitions. In Iowa, students in the Davenport Community School District have used their gaming skills to earn two state titles and more than \$1.2 million in scholarship offers.



K-12 Esports Leagues



High School Esports League (HSEL)

<https://www.highschoolsportsleague.com>

One of the first esports leagues for high school students, HSEL is also the largest. It's affiliated with the National Association of Collegiate Esports.

North American Scholastic Esports Federation (NASEF)

<https://www.esportsfed.org/>

NASEF is a nonprofit league with no entry fees. It has education at the heart of its mission and offers free curriculum for integrating esports into academics.

PlayVS

<https://www.playvs.com>

As the official partner of the National Federation of State High School Associations, PlayVS is recognized as a varsity sport, with state-sanctioned championships.

Equipping an Esports Program for Success

To create an esports program, you'll need a team coach or advisor, gaming equipment, and an esports facility. Depending on the resources you have available, this could be as simple as a converted computer lab or as robust as a full esports arena, complete with space for announcers and live spectators. Whatever your budget, here are three important considerations for creating a successful Esports program.

Spaces

A key factor in designing your esports facility is how large your teams will be. This is partly determined by interest and partly by the games you compete in, as each game has a different team size. Students who aren't competing can fill other roles, such as shoutcasting or posting live updates to social media accounts.

Aside from a space for practicing and competing, you might want to create an AV-rich area for live streaming matches, as well as spaces for spectators to watch events in person and for team members to unwind during matches.

Furniture

Each player should have a competition station that includes a gaming computer, a large-screen monitor, peripheral devices, and a comfortable gaming chair. You'll also want to furnish your esports facility with an interactive screen for coaching and teaching, as well as the equipment needed to broadcast live matches. If you plan to have live spectators, you'll need a large screen for them to follow the action.

When choosing furniture, it's important for players to maintain a comfortable and healthy posture while they sit at a computer for hours at a time. Use adjustable, ergonomically sound seating that can tilt and includes good back support. Tables and monitors should be height-adjustable to the proper eye level.

Technology

Each player should have a gaming computer, a large-screen monitor (at least 24 inches in diameter) with a refresh rate of 144Hz or better, and a keyboard, adjustable gaming mouse, and microphone headset. While the hardware requirements might vary from game to game, the High School Esports League offers recommended specifications for gaming computers.

Reliable, high-speed connectivity is also essential. Even minor delays can cause havoc during a match. For maximum performance, gaming computers should have a wired connection to the internet — ideally through a dedicated circuit used only for gaming.





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