Esports: Providing Opportunities for Every Student Interest

By John McCarthy, Ed.S. – January 1, 2024

Great esports programs include roles and opportunities for students to do more than play games. Teams, clubs, and intramurals can give rich experiences for students. The planning and implementation of these experiences require a workforce that often is difficult to attain through staff recruitment. Staffing with students not only gets the program running, it gives learners opportunities to take leadership roles in different areas that interest them.

Recruiting and managing a staff of students has greater upside because the experiences promote agency, leadership, and work experiences that can be added to a career and college portfolio. With established roles and responsibilities, students can clearly communicate to employers and college admissions the expertise and experiences they cultivated. Important global professional skills (GPS) are practiced and honed by students, which crossover in usage for academics and personal life. Some of the skills include, communication, collaborative problem solving, creativity, and empathy.

A PEW study found that 90% of students play video games. 83% were female and 97% were male. This level of interest can be met by offering students positions that go beyond the limited number of player spots. Many gamers are not interested in competing at a high level or committing to playing on a formal team. Even if the opposite was true, there are limited player slots for any team. These large numbers from the PEW study suggest that there are many students who could be recruited to immerse themselves in the wraparound support and industry work that strengthen esports programs, including clubs, teams, and intramurals. What follows are areas of student staff teams that could be developed to help run a quality esports program, expanding access to as many students as possible who share an interest in esports.

Establish a Student Esports Tech Team

Student tech teams are great assets to schools and districts. They help staff with trouble shooting computer equipment, freeing up IT departments to address more sophisticated issues. An esports tech team specializes on the esports program. They are instrumental for competitive teams, intramurals, and tournament events. Areas of support can include:

- Test game titles and equipment to operate correctly based on specs.
- Setup equipment for matches and tournament events.
- Troubleshoot basic issues such as peripheral operations like headsets and microphones.
- Coordinate with IT regarding reporting more complex challenges such as network connections and power issues.

Establish a Student Esports Competition Team

During formal competitions by teams, club events, intramurals, and tournaments, the competition team is responsible for ensuring that the event runs smoothly and with competitive integrity. They develop or advise on the competition structure from the perspective of execution. For example, running a one-day

5-hour tournament would be structured differently than for a four-week tournament where teams meet for 2-3 hours each session. They coordinate with the Student Esports Tech Team or the IT department regarding setup, troubleshooting, and shutdown at the end of the event. Areas and roles for support can include:

- Game Starters are responsible for monitoring and managing match starts. They ensure all teams are in the game lobby and in readiness to enter the field. Only then, do they signal the game start for players to begin.
- Referees monitor the matches, ensuring that all players have access to the required equipment without using any unapproved extras. They also determine game stoppage due to equipment failure or technical issues that gives an unfair advantage to one team. They signal for IT support when there is equipment failure and/or technical issues.
- Competition Rules Managers communicate and enforce any disputes as well as implement tie-breaker steps when necessary. They are the final arbiter for such decisions.

Establish a Student Esports Production Team

During competitive events, this student team manages the spectator experience. Their roles include both live production and post-production work. There are several different roles that can be included here or draw from the Student Esports Teach Team. Create a positive and exiting energy is the role of this team. An excited crowd cheering their team and showing appreciation for competition moments is what the production team helps provide. Areas can include:

- Test and setup equipment for recording, streaming, and spectating video and sound.
  To have good esports shows, the audience needs to be able to see what's happening in the match without crowding behind the players. Projecting the match on large monitors for the audience and/or streaming online through Twitch or YouTube gives the audience ways to watch the match. Recording the match is important for post-production work, such as with Open Broadcast Software (OBS). The file can be kept in cloud storage until needed.
- MCs announce the teams competing and get the audience hyped for the upcoming match.
- On-air Talent: Shout casters, such as color commentators and play-by-play commentators, call the game as it's happening. Analyst desk is composed of commentators who do a pre-game and/or post-game analysis. Interviewers talk to players and coaches after a match to get their thoughts about key moments in the game. One or all of these roles can be an exciting addition for giving students opportunities to participate in live broadcasts, while giving the audience a quality experience.
- Pre-recorded Talent plays the same roles as the On-air Talent. The distinction is that this group does all the work during post-production. It is a good way to train and develop students into the roles. If any mistakes happen, such as excited swearing, that can be edited out before publishing the finished product. This team uses the recorded content of the matches.
- Content Creators take the footage to make entertaining content for the general public to consume, such as highlights from the matches.

Establish a Student Esports Marketing Team

Growing support for your esports program is an important goal. Sharing content with the community and school stakeholders such as board members, building leaders, and teachers is a critical need so that they see the efforts and work of students and school staff as meaningful. The student marketing team creates content from the match footage and other content that they collect and design. The purpose of the content may vary based on the needs and the focus audience. Areas can include:

- Promote upcoming esports events.
- Create hype videos about teams, clubs, and intramural programs and events.
- Develop highlight reels of teams, players, and student support staff that can be used for commercials and as artifacts in individual career portfolios.
- Showcase benefits of esports for different audiences.

Grow One Team to Get Started

Each of these student esports teams can play an integral role in all aspects of the program. Start by choosing one area of immediate need and create and recruit the students for that team. Have well defined roles and responsibilities so that students understand the expectations. Then execute the work. Overtime, add more of these teams. If you start with a smaller version of the team to begin with, expand the roles and responsibilities over time as the participants become more confident with the work.

School staff need help to expand the quality and opportunity for what an esports program can provide. It is amazing what students can do with quality and fidelity when given the opportunity. Recruit a student focus group or planning team and share these ideas in the article. See what they create from this to make an even better esports support team that further grows your esports program. It is a win-win for everyone.

Here are additional resources to learn more about the impact of esports at REMC: Esports Amplified: https://www.remc.org/classroom-resources/esports-amplified/

- Engaging Students through Esports in K-12 Education (pdf)
  All references shared in the article can be found in this published paper.
- Leadership Esports Resource Guide (pdf)
- Esports: A Gateway to Opportunities and College and Workforce Skills