

Esports: Opportunities for Community, Engagement, and Workforce Skills

By John McCarthy, Ed.S. – January 3, 2024

Esports is huge. The industry is expected to exceed six billion dollars by 2030. College scholarships have surpassed twenty million dollars. The job market has positions for HR, accounting, marketing, live broadcast production, nutrition, fitness, business, players, coaching, and more. Esports programs in schools do more than just run competitive teams in search of championships. They can provide clubs, intramurals, and courses that empower students with important workplace skills and a social safe space to build friendships and become more reengaged into school, including academics. Let's explore how school esports programs benefits students by providing a welcoming community, growing workplace skills, and promoting opportunities for student agency.

Helping students feel part of the school community

Esports programs are a great way to raise engagement into the school community. This is especially important for students who find school as a place to “get through” and often choose not to participate in extra-curricular activities or other school activities. For disengaged students, traditional options do not reflect what they value. Several studies have found a positive impact of esports on reconnecting students. For example, here is how students at three different esports programs responded to being asked how many formal school activities have they chosen to participate in, including esports:

% of Students Impacted	School District / University	Student Levels	Esports Program
48%	DePaul University (IL)	College	Intramurals
70%	Grapevine Colleyville ISD (TX)	Grades 9-12	Teams and Production
38%	Plymouth-Canton Community Schools (MI)	Grades 6-12	Club Camp

On average, almost half of students in these esports programs responded that the engagement was the first time they ever chose to participate in a formal school function. The national average is 47%.

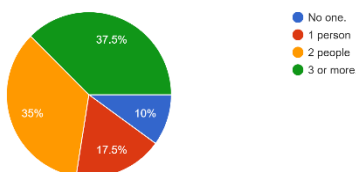
The impact on these students alone is a significant reason for offering esports clubs, teams, and intramurals, at minimum. Students who find their interests reflected in school, as seen with traditional athletics and clubs, are more likely to attend classes, participate in the learning activities, and improve their academics.

Equally important, students find a community who share a common interest, which can lead to potential friendships that originate at a school function. Esports cut across cliques, economic, cultural, and social status because it represents a shared interest that requires interaction to accomplish goals. For example, at the esports club camp by Plymouth-Canton Community Schools, ninety percent of participants made new friendships during the program.



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Did you meet new camper gamers that you had fun with who could be future friends outside of camp?
40 responses



Relationships matter. They give students reason to come back and take care of their academics so that they can continue to participate in the activities that happen in the esports program.

Esports grow workplace skills

Esports programs are not just students playing games. Good programs focus on developing global professional skills (GPS) by students as they play games and participate in the planning, implementing, and participating in activities. These skills are what help students do better academically, be prepared for the workforce, and improve their gaming performance. Some of these skills include problem solving, working in a team, strong work ethic, analytical/quantitative skills, communication, and empathy. The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) in annual surveys to their membership [consistently find many of the skills listed above as highly sought](#) from incoming students and employees.

Strong esports programs embed practice and reflection of these skills so that students hone them to be better team members and players. This results in crossover usage in the classroom and personal lives. Because students see the value of these skills for their gaming, they are often motivated to focus on growing their capacity. As with traditional sports and clubs, there are many non-player leadership roles that students take on that gives them practice of the global professional skills. This greater exposure and experience with the skills can give students of one school district a greater advantage over other schools.

Esports programs promote student agency

A large portion of students in each school play or have an interest in video games. According to a PEW study, 90% of students play video games. 83% are girls and 97% are boys. However, not all gamers are competitive or want to commit to a competitive esports team. These gamers are interested in participating in activities that they see performed by those who have made a career. Playing on a team is only one opportunity for students. The competitive side can include student staff who scout, analyze data about game updates (changes in the meta or rules), IT for setup and troubleshooting equipment, entertainment production of the games, coaching, and player recruitment portfolios.

Outside of the competitive teams, students lead clubs, create marketing, run intramural tournament events, create content, broadcast games, and play games. This wide range of opportunities gives a place for anyone interested in esports to be part of a wider community. The opportunities for student agency experiences enables them to practice the global professional skills and feel connected to a healthy community.



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Colleges offer esports scholarships for players based on their performance and attitudes. Opportunities for scholarships are not limited to players. Students with strong experience in many of the performance areas shared above can find their way into colleges. An added value of the non-player roles is that such experiences can lead to finding jobs in local markets where esports competitions, marketing, and production is a need.

Esports programs are an important avenue for students to participate in school, develop valuable workplace skills, and participate in many esports-related activities. Playing games is only the beginning. Engaging students through a wide variety of activities while building global professional skills benefits students with building new relationships and confidence in themselves as to what they can accomplish in gaming, academics, and life. Game on!

References

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: Providing Opportunities for Every Student Interest



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