PowerUp EDU

MiEN

Using Esports to Teach K-12 Academic and Social Emotional Skills

DESIGN OF ESPORTS ENVIRONMENT SUPPORTS SKILL DEVELOPMENT OUTCOMES

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Introduction

According to leading advocate and educator Chris Aviles, scholastic esports between schools provides the same social and emotional learning (SEL) benefits as traditional athletics, such as teamwork, leadership, and sense of belonging, but can also be used to teach a variety of subjects from career and technical education (CTE) to literacy and STEM.

Esports is the term given to competitive online video gaming. The esports ecosystem is projected to surpass $1.8 billion by 2022. Schools, media, and investors are all keeping an eye on the growth. In 2021, there are an estimated 26.6 million monthly esports viewers up from 11.4 percent in 2020.[1] By every estimation, a healthy, growing industry.

The growing popularity of esports is supported by the North America Scholastic Esports Federation (NASEF). The organization produces a free state-approved curriculum for esports that can be used during the day or afterschool. Their mission is to provide opportunities for students to use esports to develop STEM- and STEAM-based skills as well as SEL attributes such as communication, collaboration, problem-solving and even leadership that will help them thrive in school and career.
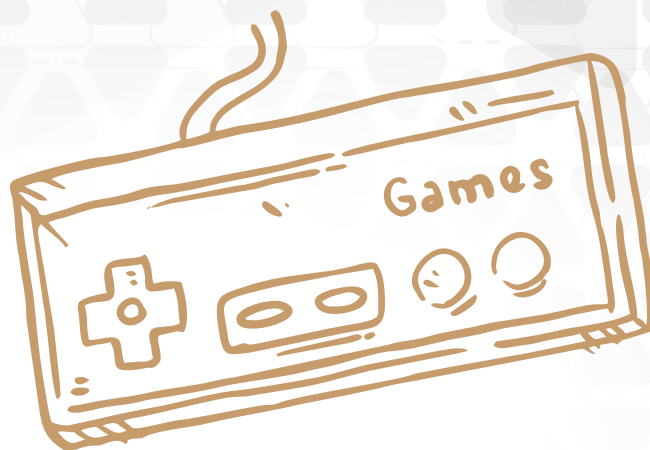
The Esports Ecosystem

Research shows that 80 percent of esports teams are comprised of students who have never before participated in extracurricular activities.[3] Much like participation in an athletic team, esports players learn how to work together as an effective team by communicating and collaborating with each other. They also spend time analyzing plays, game statistics, and strategic planning. These have a direct correlation to skills required to be successful in college and career.

Some of the STEM careers that are associated with esports are game design, graphic design, multimedia design, technology management, broadcasting, coaching, video editing, and cybersecurity.[4] In addition, public relations, marketing, customer communications, project management, and business management incorporate some of the skills learned through esports programs. This infographic from NASEF

NASEF Esports Core Values

THE NASEF VISION IS TO ENSURE THAT ALL STUDENTS HAVE THE KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS THEY NEED TO BE SOCIETY'S GAME CHANGERS: EDUCATED, PRODUCTIVE, AND EMPATHETIC BY:

- Connecting learning and play in and out of the classroom so that students, educators, and families can experience interest-driven learning.

- Creating opportunities for safe and engaging spaces so students can play, learn, and grow.

- Building community with interconnected scholar players who demonstrate leadership, accountability, commitment, and fortitude.

- Honoring diversity by helping participants celebrate individuality and differences.

- Encouraging respect of self and others to honor human potential.[2]

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[1] https://www.insiderintelligence.com/insights/esports-ecosystem-market-report/ | [2] https://www.nasef.org/about/about-the-federation/
[3] https://www.dandh.com/media/pdf/pages/esports/2020/Esports-Whitepaper-For_Partners.pdf | [4] Ibid.

shows how students can connect their passion for esports into careers that are meaningful to them.

The NASEF esports courses are aligned with ELA, CTE, ISTE, NGSS, and SEL learning standards, and most qualify as STEM curriculum. Each of the four domains in the curriculum—Strategists, Organizers, Content Creators, and Entrepreneurs—has a corresponding curriculum pathway. Step one of each pathway begins with the appropriate courses, links to certifications, develops specific skills, and ends by suggesting multiple careers based on the pathway.[5]

Esports Leagues and Scholarship Opportunities

The High School Esports League currently partners with approximately 3,000 high schools. They offer a STEM.org accredited gaming experience and curriculum that provides access to grant and funding opportunities as well as college scholarships. Competitions are observed by college recruiters and professional players just like any other sport. The 2021 fall season included two weeks of preseason matches; eight weeks of regular season games, and two weeks of playoffs and finals. Through competitions supervised by teachers, "students will tie their commitment to gaming to their success in academics and future careers." Games include Overwatch, CS:GO, Rocket League, Rainbow Six: Siege, Hearthstone, NBA 2K21, and Minecraft: Survival.

The Middle School Esports League is a sister league to the high school league. This league harnesses middle school students' love for video games through competitions in a safe environment so students, teachers, and parents can feel secure about preteen participation. One advantage to starting esports at a younger age is that it provides an outlet for gamers as well as introducing them to potential career paths at an earlier age. Games include Rocket League, Knockout City, Minecraft: Survival Games, Pokémon Unite, and 10 Minute Chess.

College esports scholarships are on a fast growth track as more colleges and universities field esports teams. There are more than 150 colleges and universities that are members of the National Association of Collegiate Esports and have varsity teams. Scholarships are awarded school by school and can range from $500 to
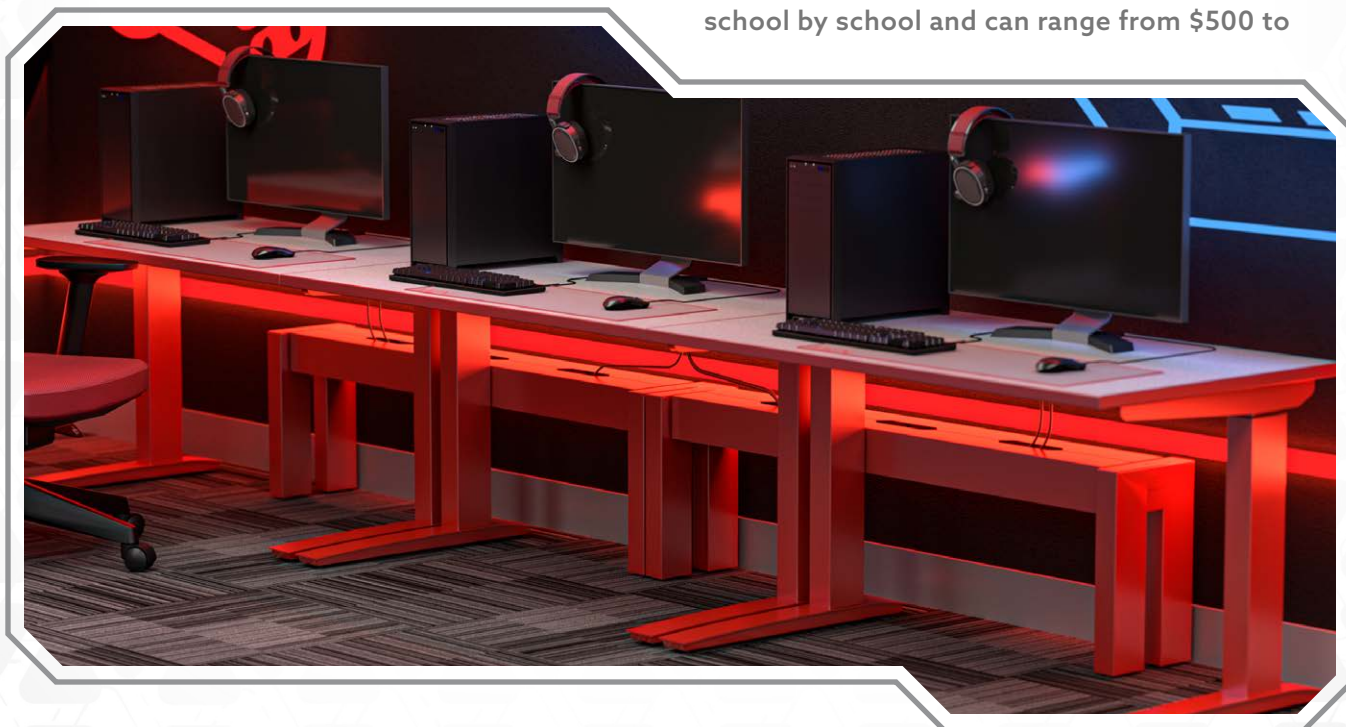
[5] https://www.nasef.org/media/2612/ecosystem-career-pathways-graphic-update-3_9_2020.png

$8,000 per year. Some scholarships renew each year if the student maintains a certain GPA. There are a few schools offering "full-ride scholarships" for their varsity team players such as Harrisburg University,[6] and more come online each year.

Designing a Successful Esports Space

Creating an academic esports team can lead to many opportunities for student athletes and designing an effective space is key to an engaged and successful team. Consider the following factors to ensure a functional and engaging space.

1. CONVERT AN EXISTING SPACE TO A NEW PURPOSE

Consider building out a multipurpose makerspace that can also flex to a gaming room or a space used by CTE programs. Old computer and science labs are a great place to start, with an already effective gaming room layout and ergonomic seating for players.

2. KEEP FUNCTION AND HEALTH IN MIND WHEN CHOOSING SEATING.

Esports players spend hours engaging in play, so comfortable chairs and good posture are critical. Ergonomic, height-adjustable chairs with armrests, adjustable cushions, and back support are ideal for esports applications. Adjustable height tables and desks will also allow players to change positions during play.
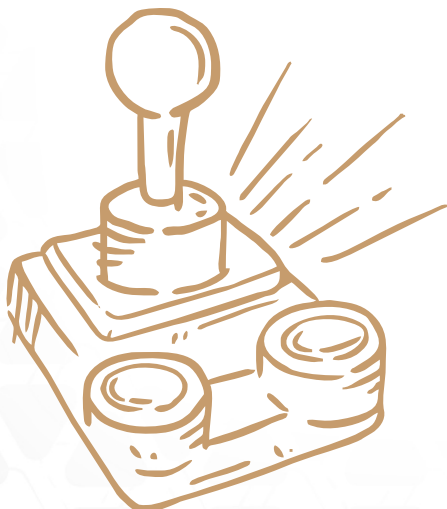
3. CREATE A BREAK ROOM OR REST AREA FOR PLAYERS.

It's important for players to take breaks to rest their eyes and walk/stretch out the kinks in their muscles after an intense match. Having a dedicated space is ideal, but it's also possible to use any school space, including the hallway, as a walking/stretching area with a table and chairs for snacks.

4. ENSURE THE SHOUTCASTING STATION HAS AMPLE SPACE FOR EQUIPMENT.

This station is Command Central for gaming competitions. To be effective, you need lots of power outlets for mixers, keyboards, stream decks, and other tech devices that help capture game plays and make esports competitions so engaging.

5. PLAN A COLLABORATIVE AREA FOR STRATEGIZING AND DEBRIEFING.

Comfortable seating with mobile whiteboards or whiteboard tables encourage a collaborative approach to planning and debriefing sessions. Large video monitors for analyzing replays and brainstorming new strategies is a great team-building exercise.

6. REFLECT THE TEAM'S CREATIVE ENERGY IN FURNITURE AND FABRIC.

Esports spaces should reflect the virtual fantasy worlds and innovative games that students play and compete in. Using a blend of complimentary colors can coordinate with team shirts or uniforms or the colors of the gaming equipment. You want both players and observers to feel the energy in the room during competitions, so keep that in mind as you design the space.

Whatever the size of your budget, you can put together an engaging space to host Esports clubs and competitions. The MiEN Company design team can help create a space that supports actual gaming, tournaments, collaborative planning sessions, and players and fans in an engaging space.
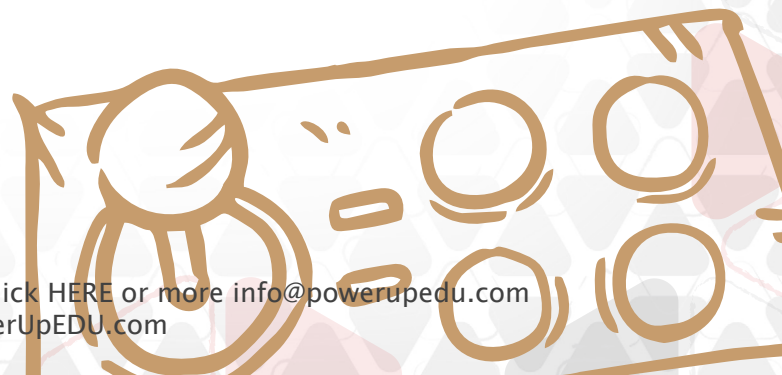
Finding Funding for K–12 Esports

Once you have developed the framework for your program, it is time to build out the budget. Depending on your needs for facilities, people and budget, here are some ideas for fundraising to buy computers, consoles, furniture, décor, table, chairs and so on:

▶ Talk to school leadership to understand if there are any local school grants /funds to support the esports program.

▶ Activate your existing network of stakeholders and community partners, and get institutional advancement (and similar offices) involved from the beginning.

▶ Talk to your local and state governments; they might have grants for extracurricular activities and or specific gaming activities.

▶ Let your tech partners know you want to create a pipeline of career-ready STEM-centric graduates by way of esports. By supporting your program these companies can get frontline access to a future workforce and be a part of that innovation.

▶ Do you know any local business owners that you can speak to about supporting your esports program?

▶ What local companies are existing sponsors of sports and athletic clubs? Meet them and understand why they do what they do. See if your organization can help them with their goals.

▶ Does the city or local government have funds or grants that support local activities for the esports team community youth programs.

▶ Are there any community funders, such as banks, Lions or Rotary clubs, or other organizations that would be interested in supporting your program and goals? There usually are.

Business and corporate social responsibility initiatives will often donate financial support for your program. When they understand the academic skills students develop on esports teams, they are more likely to donate to your

program for the youth opportunities it creates. Create a "Wall of Founders," and offer every company or person, who pays a specific annual sum, a spot on the wall. The "wall of founders", can be a real physical wall with plaques or an online graphic. A lot of local sports clubs do this and offer "your name on the wall," for $300 per year for at least three years. Sell 30 partnership deals, and you have secured $9,000 per year in revenue from that wall. In return, you send the partner a certificate as a PDF as recognition and post on social media.

Look around in your local community, there will be sports clubs, schools, businesses or others, who are looking for help. It could be help at a holiday fair, help with a summer party, or help

with selling tickets to a lottery or an auction. Read local newspapers and be proactive in contacting local fairs, parties and other initiatives, usually it will be a way for you to earn income for your organization. If there are 10 people in your organization, you can earn even more by helping others.

You can also contact every local media outlet and offer them a weekly "Esports News" article for their print and online media. Most media outlets know nothing about esports, and your weekly esports column will bring new, interesting content to their media, which will help them attract a new audience. You can also help them promote esports with podcasts, videos, or blog posts.

Questions to Ask When Launching an Esports Program

GENERAL

Should we launch as an afterschool club program or integrate it into the instructional day?

Which staff will teach esports courses or mentor a club?

Who will organize and manage the program?

What leadership and training programs do we need to build a sustainable program?

What investments do we need to make in equipment and furniture?

What sources of funding do we have access to?

ROOM DESIGN

Is there an existing lab space we can modify or do we need to design a room from scratch?

How many players and spectators can we accommodate?

What level quality and how many gaming chairs and other furniture should we buy?

What is the best room organization to maximize the space we have?

CURRICULUM

Will we use esports to support instruction in specific curriculum areas or build out an esports curriculum? We should design the program for long-term benefits.

Do we have existing CTE curriculum that can support esports content & skill development?

How will we connect to STEM and STEAM pathways and the opportunities that esports can bring to students?

How do we use esports to develop specific college- and career-ready skills?

What are the esports experiences & requirements for students to qualify for scholarships?

TECHNOLOGY

Do we have the bandwidth to host high-definition competitive play?

Should we choose Wi-Fi or Ethernet for gaming speed?

What onsite security protocols do we need to maintain integrity of play?

Which gaming consoles, monitors, screens, headsets, and keyboards should we choose?

Do we need digital signage for spectators to track the play?

Which games do we want to invest and compete in?

How often will we need to refresh and replace consoles?
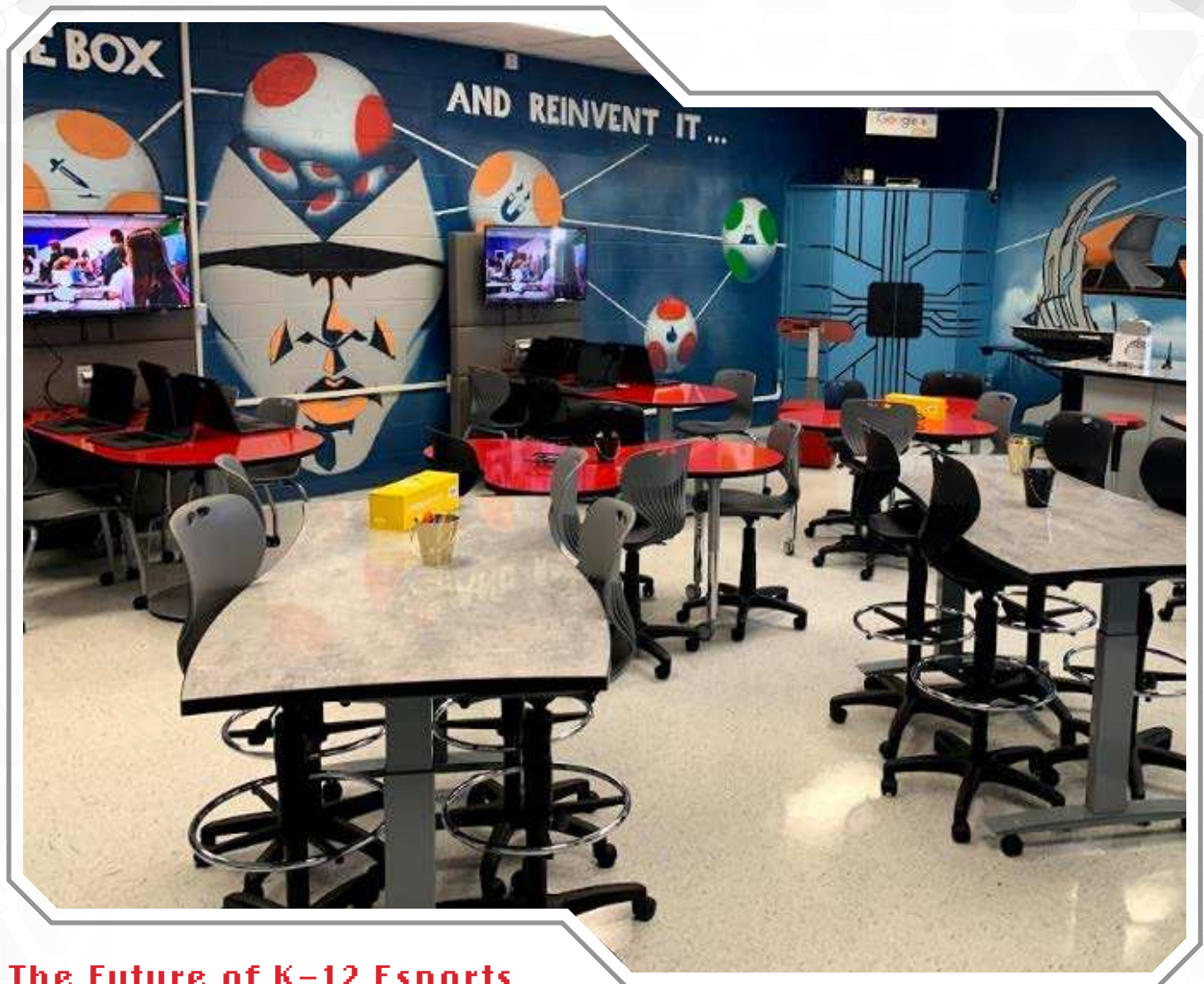
The Future of K-12 Esports

There are now state-level associations that promote scholastic esports through schools. Most educators involved in esports mention how fast growing it is and how it pulls in students who normally do not participate in extracurricular activities. Tony Gragnani of the Missouri Scholastic Esports Federation is focusing on educating athletes on potential career pathways in exports. "We are adding new schools almost weekly, and what excites me the most are the opportunities we are creating for students through esports," he said. "Our students are doing everything from shoutcasting [running commentaries of play] and graphic design to digital production and statistics through esports."

The alignment of esports to the development of higher order thinking skills and social emotional learning with a path toward college scholarships combined with the high interest of adolescents for gaming activities ensures that esports will continue to grow for some time into the future.

Learn More. Contact PowerUpEDU. Click HERE or more info@powerupedu.com
www.PowerUpEDU.com
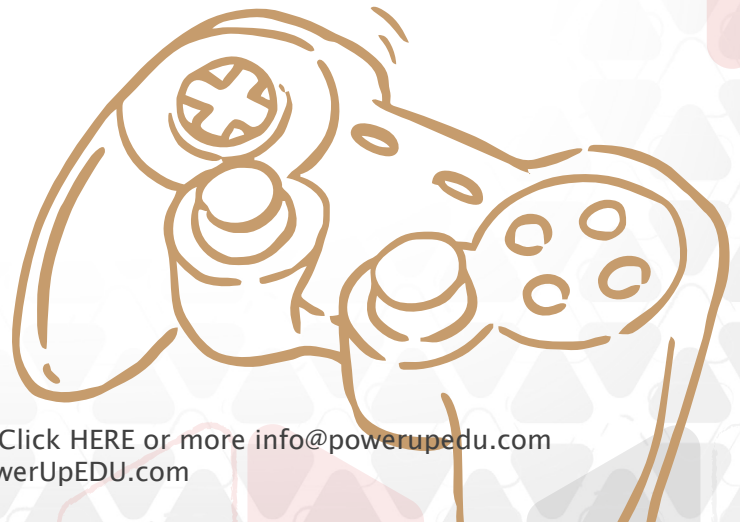
About MiEN Company

Our innovative furniture creates spaces that support student collaboration, learning and discovery, and social interaction that reflect the university's culture and mission. Created by education experts, our award winning designs are flexible and adaptable and meet the needs of today's academic library with an eye to the future.

Author Bio

DR. CHRISTINA COUNTS, VP of Education, is a proven leader with a successful background in transforming learning spaces to modern engaging learning environments. Dr. Counts has worked in education for over 17 years with experience as a classroom teacher, district instructional leader, school administrator, and digital and innovative learning designer. In her most recent position, Christina leads a team of professionals that support schools making the transition to a flexible, collaborative, & student-centered learning space. She holds a doctorate in K-12 Educational Leadership, National Board certified, and Google & Apple certified.

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You dream. We create. They engage.