

ESPORTS



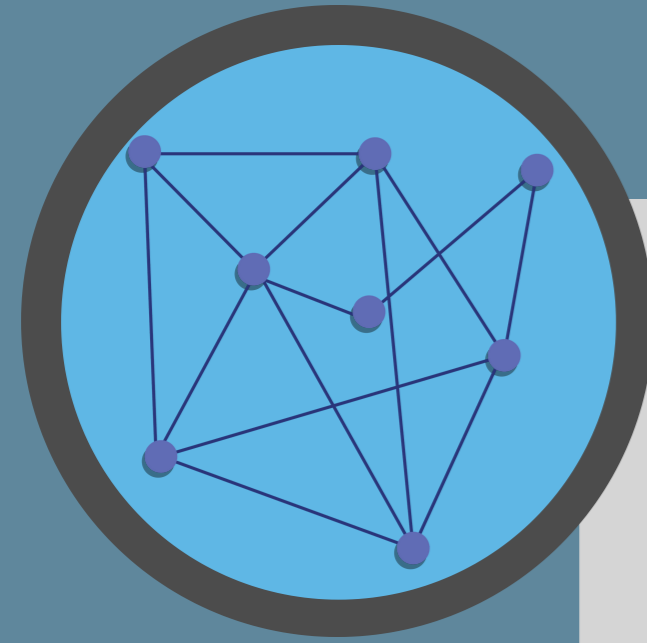
A Brief History of E-Sports

The first official video game competition reportedly took place at Stanford University on October 19th, 1972. Players competed in a primitive space-combat game, Spacewar, with a top prize of a one-year subscription to Rolling Stone magazine. The next major milestone was the 1980 Space Invaders championship in which 10,000 people participated. This marked a major turning point in the mainstream appeal of video game competitions. Arcade competitions continued to steadily grow in popularity, but remained localized to arcade hotspots, until the arrival of the internet. The internet caused an explosion in the popularity of video game competitions. In 2006, FUN Technologies held a Worldwide Webgames Championship in which 71 players competed for a \$1 million grand prize. The growth in the 2000s was exponential, with the number of global tournaments increasing twentyfold by 2010. The next major milestone occurred in 2011, with the introduction of Twitch. Twitch is a streaming platform primarily used to watch video games. The birth of Twitch made gaming tournaments a spectator sport. Games like League of Legends and Defense of the Ancients (DOTA 2) drew millions of spectators during these global tournaments (American Esports, 2020).

Promote/Gain College Skills



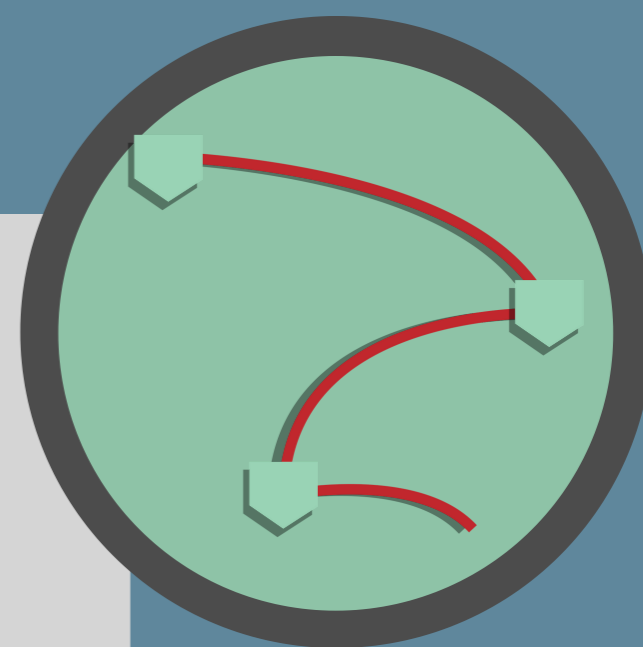
Research has found that esports activities create learning opportunities during play for critical analysis, communication, research skills, and social emotional learning. In particular, esports has also been found to increase "soft skills". Soft skills are defined as intra- and interpersonal skills essential for human development, social participation, and success in the workplace. School superintendent Al Mijares from Orange County, California, stated: "It's an incredible opportunity to build on existing interests while introducing them to 21st-century skills and careers" (Rothwell & Shaffer, 2019). In Orange County, high schools have developed an esports league and incorporated curriculum based on the game League of Legends. The esports league carefully incorporates Career Technical Education (CTE), STEM, English language arts, and social and emotional learning into the curriculum.



Expand Career Opportunities

Esports competitions involve unique opportunities for careers in and around the esports community. Like any traditional sport, there are rare but lucrative careers as a player. One German esports player, Kuro "KuroKy" Takhasomi is reported to have earned around \$5 million dollars competing. What's really exciting however, is that there are a multitude of new career opportunities besides just playing in esports competitions. These include careers in social media and public relations, broadcasting, journalism, and tournament event planning. Furthermore, electronic gaming as an industry includes many technical jobs such as designers, programmers and software developers, animators, and audio engineers. As the gaming industry grows, new careers will continue to develop and increase in demand.

Pathway to College (Scholarships)



Esports can also provide a pathway to college through scholarships. There are 150+ colleges and universities that are members of the National Association of Collegiate Esports and offer varsity esports. While the scholarships offered vary per school, the majority of scholarship awards are partial and range from \$500 to \$8,000 per year. Several schools are beginning to offer full-tuition or full-ride scholarships. Harrisburg University—which won ESPN's inaugural Collegiate Esports Championship in May 2019—became the first college esports program to award full ride scholarships to its entire 16-player roster in 2018. The availability of these scholarships can be an additional motivator for pursuing a postsecondary education.



Healthier Behaviors

Video games may not directly encourage physical fitness or appropriate nutrition, but some esports associations have addressed issues regarding nutrition and healthy behaviors in K-12 settings. Students involved in an esports course in Kansas were required to exercise and practice good nutrition, which was logged and submitted to the sponsor. Some esports and gaming curriculum include lessons and opportunities to discuss the topics of: nutrition, injury prevention, personal health, mental and emotional health, substance abuse, misuse, and addiction. In a K-12 setting, standards for nutrition, grades, and any other form of eligibility may already be established by the existing athletic governing body and could be adopted by the e-athletes. If these parameters have not been established, then special considerations could be put in place by the school for e-athletes.



Social Development

Level Up esports can promote bonding and a collaborative teamwork environment like any other high school club or sport, especially for students not already engaged in traditional sports or activities. This can create a sense of belonging for those who might otherwise feel left out by school activities. These programs can increase student interaction with the school and school culture beyond the esports club.



Benefits for School

Students who participate in highschool activities and competitions do better in school, according to a wide body of research. These academic improvements include higher grades, test scores, and higher education expectations. Rother & Shaffer summarized these findings by comparing students who are involved in extracurricular activities to those who are not (2019). They found three times as many students who were involved in extracurricular activities, had a Grade Point Average (GPA) of 3.0 or higher. In addition to elevated GPAs, twice as many students involved with extracurricular activities scored in the top quarter of math and reading tests compared to those not engaged with extracurriculars. In terms of postsecondary readiness, 68% of students expected to get a college degree compared to 48% of students who were not involved in extracurricular activities (Rothwell & Shaffer, 2019). Level up esports provides a new avenue to reach and engage with students not otherwise interested in school. Some schools have even reported a reduction in tardiness and absenteeism following involvement with interscholastic esports competitions.

References

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