

Chapter 15

Esports Program Development: Building Scholastic Esports Programs, Why and How

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ABSTRACT

This chapter is an overview of student interest in scholastic esports, as well as the ties between extra-curricular participation and student success. The author provides resources for overcoming obstacles present in the implementation of a scholastic esports program. Student interest in esports is current and is only continuing to grow. By implementing an esports program, teachers and administrators can meet students where their own interests are and possibly create a program that rivals or surpasses interest in other activities at their schools. The author has assisted many schools in starting their own scholastic esports programs and addresses some common misconceptions, provides resources for further research, and outlines some concerns and obstacles that might be faced when starting a program.

INTRODUCTION

Among the many things that teachers and administrators observe, the popularity of scholastic esports is one that has most scratching their heads. Some teachers ask the question, “Why would I have my students play video games?” while some administrators might ask, “Why should our school support a video game program?” or “What are the benefits to video games in the classroom?” In this chapter, James will address some of these concerns, including those common to many parents, who are often among the first to claim that their child already plays too many video games. So, why should they encourage them to play even more?

There have been many stories from teachers who observe that they never have seen the level of interest in any club or sport that they see when they first started their esports program. Furthermore, they see very positive results from their students academically, socially, emotionally, and even improvement in student attendance as a result of starting up their esports programs. This chapter will analyze student-reported

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data and interest levels, as well as attempt to shed some light on how this popular global phenomenon known as esports can be used in a school setting. Implementing a scholastic esports program may result in improvement in many areas, among them student attendance, academic achievement, graduation rates, student motivation, and motivation for the students who are less interested in other, more traditional, extracurricular activities. Many programs see a great deal of success even without a strong emphasis on the competitive side of scholastic esports, often with students developing meaningful, relevant career skills that can be applied to future courses and projects.

There are two main objectives of this chapter, the first of which is to provide documentation and evidence regarding the interest and benefits of implementing a scholastic esports program. The second objective is to provide insight and support for teachers or administrators who are interested but who may face challenges in the implementation of an esports program. It will also provide research to support program development, address some common misconceptions, shed light on common areas of concern, and to offer suggestions for overcoming frequent obstacles that schools have faced when implementing an esports program. James' personal experiences as well as current research will be used to support organizations in their development and implementation of a scholastic esports program.

This chapter will investigate the relationship between student participation and interest in scholastic esports, and provide evidence that implementation of such a program can provide benefits to students who might otherwise be uninterested in participation in more traditional extracurricular activities. Recapturing the interest of youths who are typically disengaged from the educational experience can positively impact graduation rates, attendance and academic achievement. These resources and evidence will support the following conclusions:

Conclusion One: There is substantial interest in scholastic esports among students, thus supporting the implementation of an esports program at many school sites.

Conclusion Two: Participation in extracurricular activities often leads to improved student achievement, and many students who are interested in scholastic esports may also not be as interested in traditional extracurricular activities. Thus, the implementation of a scholastic esports program can improve projected outcomes for these students.

It is the belief of James, as well as other teachers whose experiences will be shared within this chapter, that the implementation of a scholastic esports program can and will prove beneficial for students at any school site that starts such a program. In small schools, this can be a program that requires very little upfront investment, especially compared with the costs associated with traditional athletic programs, and yet yields impressive returns. Small schools, particularly ones that do not offer many of the more traditional extracurricular programs, may be able to quickly and affordably offer their students an extracurricular activity that will encourage students to improve their own academic performance, develop relevant career skills, and set them up for future success after leaving the program.

BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The first question that comes to mind when school administrators or teachers think of esports, or competitive video games, is often either, "What are esports?" or "Why should we have this in our classrooms?" Those who move past that, and into the phase of program implementation, will often be faced with a

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