Esports Guide for Schools
Learn how to quickly & easily launch an Esports program at your school

Esports Market Overview
Esports is a term used to describe ‘electronic sports’, multiple player video games played competitively for spectators, usually by professional gamers. The experience can be seen as being similar to watching a live sporting event, with the exception the players are competing against each other virtually (online) and spectators watch their moves on a large screen. Esports encompass many different team games that are growing in popularity. As a new market and concept, it has seen explosive global growth. In 2018 there were 737 major Esports events, which generated $54.7 million in ticket revenue. 2017 had slightly higher numbers, seeing $58.9 million earned from ticket revenue.

Prize money in 2018 totaled $150.8 million, an increase from the $112.1 million earned in 2017. Out of all Esports games, League of Legends landed the most watched spot with live content on YouTube and Twitch reaching 347.8 million viewers. CS:GO had 274.9 million, DOTA 2 had 250.4 million, Overwatch had 101.3 million, and Hearthstone had 54.1 million. Traditional sporting games are also represented in Esports, such as NBA and FIFA games. Esports players can engage directly with their fans like traditional sports players do, and can use social media platforms, events, and analytic systems to grow their community of followers.

Global Esports revenue is expected to reach $1.8 billion in 2022, predicted by New Zoo, with a possible range identified between $3.2 billion and $1.6 billion. This revenue increase is an average of 26.7% year on year. 82% of Esports revenue is predicted to come through brand investments including advertising and sponsorship. Overall brand investment in Esports is expected to reach $1.5 billion in 2022.

Esport is the #2 most watched sport in the world, second only to soccer.

Esports Market Overview

Globally, the Esports audience is expected to grow to 458 million by the end of 2019. The Asia Pacific region leads growth numbers in Esports membership and viewing, with the US and Europe close behind.

There are various streams of revenue within the Esports market, including sponsorship, media rights, merchandise, tickets, advertising and game publisher fees. This total is broken down above for 2019.
Advertising in the Esports market offers a path to a market which has been traditionally hard to reach, younger users. This target market has been hard to reach by traditional media means, since they generally do not watch the same TV programs as adults and use the internet more than watch TV. By bringing a target audience of young viewers to advertisers, there is a constant stream of businesses willing to buy advertising space to be viewed during a game. Such ads have been shortened so not to disturb the user at the level they would be likely to change the feed they’re watching. Advertisements are normally less than 30 seconds. In terms of viewer comparison, more viewers watched the 2016 World Final of League of Legends, at 43 million viewers, than watched the NBA Finals Game 7, with only had 31 million viewers.

The Esports market is comprised of both K-12 and Higher Education market. While there are different end goals for the groups, the main benefit in both is developmental growth and increased opportunity for the player. In the K-12 age group this represents forming basic strategic thinking skills, the ability to work as a team, overcoming shyness, and other aspects of developmental learning that are normal in adolescents. The Higher Education markets main goals are split between Esports related degrees and courses, casual gamers, and varsity sports. College level Esports are concerned about wellness and money, with gender diversity being important to both categories.

The Positive Influence of Esports on K-12 Students

Esports in education has seen explosive growth across the K-12 schools. This growth is due to many beneficial aspects and the positive skills and experiences students have engaging in the sport. There are two main high school organizations for Esports, at present; the North American Scholastic Esports Federation (NASEF) and the High School Esports League (HSEL). The NASEF summarizes the mission of Esports and their organization as “providing opportunities for all students to use Esports as a platform to acquire critical communication, collaboration, and problem-solving skills which are needed to thrive in work and in life.”

Other organizations have integrated Esports as part of investigating the workforce of tomorrow through providing avenues to students to become “fully immersed in their own growth and education” by Esports competition. There are national and state leagues at the high school level, most of which operate the same way. A team will train in one particular game, popular games at present being League of Legends and Overwatch. Over the semester, teams of gamers play in tournament competitions online. There are instructional resources for teachers and other staff members helping in team management. There are suggestions in the resources to promote positive sportsmanship and on how best to manage teams. While some school leagues offer first-person shooter games, others do not. Some schools charge students a monthly rate of between $5 and $16 to participate.

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Esports is authorized as an activity by the National Federation of State High School Associations, who is partnering with PlayVS to bring Esports to twenty states over the next year, with the aim of reaching all states nationwide in the next three years. The numbers of Esports gamers have surpassed the total number of students playing in other school sports offered in school.

Schools that have adapted an Esports program have many positive benefits to report. Students are transformed when they have the ability to join a team that does not have the same physical expectations as other team sports. Integration of students is a natural result of forming an Esports team. Having something they are interested in being a part of, students will come out of their shells and engage with the school and curriculum at a much higher rate. Student diversity is a factor most teachers with Esports teams in their school reported as the biggest change, with academically gifted students engaging in the same activity, in a competitive way, as students who are struggling academically. Both physical and mental health are benefitted through the inclusion of Esports programs.

Positives are gained by students participating in Esports include:

• Gamers are brought into an ‘after school' environment and out of their bedrooms, promoting collaboration between their Esport teammates.

• Creativity is maximized through the collaborative aspect of an Esports environment.

• Esports are naturally interesting subjects and students are willing to engage at a much higher level.

• Strategic thinking is at the core of group gaming, both independently and as part of a larger team to accomplish a mutual goal.

• Social skills are created through the team aspect, and the need to create strategy between members.

• Students not traditionally being able to participate fully in other team sports, can compete within the Esports environment and reach the goal of being part of a team.

• Pride is developed in students for contributing to something competitive and run like any other school age sport competition.

According to a study by Activate, the US market for Esports is a natural growth opportunity because of the tie between sports and gaming, and the strong sporting culture. This is enhanced with fixed broadband availability, which is something other global markets are lagging behind in. For instance, Africa and Latin America hasn’t seen the Esports uptake the US, Europe and parts of Asia have had, due to the lack of available. Fixed broadband is a foundational requirement of the sport.
Esports in Higher Education

Like any other team sport, Esports has a presence in higher education. There are many of the same positive takeaways from an Esports program in higher education as there are for the K-12 range, as the skills gained by Esports gamers continue to improve. For higher education students, there is a focus on job finding opportunities and career paths. At present, 50 universities have created gaming squads, with the first varsity Esports program starting in 2014. Particular career paths open to Esports gamers include going to the Olympics or jobs as broadcasters in the industry. Creativity and strategic level thinking are areas of Esports which continue to evolve at the higher education level, and can play a positive role in the student’s career opportunities across a wide variety of industries.

In the Higher Education category of Esports, having high-quality, dedicated sports facilities are important to establishing a solid team. Collegiate Esports can be seen to have the best chairs, best personal computers with the fastest speeds possible in terms of graphics cards and internet connection speeds. They will also have more pay and play options than in K-12 Esports. There are 3100 results in a Google search of ‘Esports arenas’ within the .edu sites, showing the overall popularity. Higher Education Esports facilities often operate under a fee structure, in order to cover event reservations, operating expenses, marketing, game licensing, staffing, and depreciated equipment replacement. The first collegiate Esports facility opened in 2015; a 3500 sq. ft. space with 72 computers and Logitech gaming gear with gaming chairs. The largest Esports college arena is 11,000 sq. ft.

The collegiate level Esports gamer’s ambition for many of industry jobs can be a natural transition from being on the university team, such as coaching, team management, broadcasting, graphic design, and media. Esports teams represent the first truly inclusive team, which can be made up of introverts, extroverts, athletes, academics, men, women, non-binary, and disabled students all playing as a singular team. Overwatch and League of Legends are the most common choice among university Esports teams due to their popularity, longevity and lack of violence. Collegiate teams have high-level jerseys and are adapted for the sport like many other sports uniforms. Coaching is more prevalent in higher education teams, with fees ranging from $10 to $100 per hour. Monthly wages are also paid to some coaches, which university teams have noted as being beneficial for team building and long term dedicated coaching consistency.

Universities are spending more to recruit the best Esports gamers to attend their schools, a trend set to continue with the rising popularity of the sport. For universities, student retention and recruitment are benefits of starting Esports teams. Academic opportunities ranging from medical research to business management are being offered to potential Esports playing students, as a draw to both their teams and their schools. Comprehensive academic Esports programs are being created, which include game design and production. Undergraduate and graduate degrees are being offered which focus on Esports, as well as, elective Esports related courses. One university offers a Bachelor degree in Esports management, knowing where there is a sports player, there is need for representation. The opportunities are far reaching and expanding regularly in this area.
There is a wide range of popular Esports games being played by students in a school environment.

**The top Esports games ranked in order of 2018 revenue would be:**

1. **DOTA 2** has been listed by some as the biggest Esports team game in 2019, having an international tournament with a prize pot of $25 million, DOTA 2 has awarded the most prize money since the sport was created, and in 2018 held 10 different tournaments.

2. **Counter Strike: Global Offensive (CS GD)** is a first person ‘shooter on the scene’ game, which has many regional tournaments and has been around since 2012. A prize pool of $22.47 million in 2018, across 370 small and large tournaments.


4. **League of Legends** has a much larger player base, 120 million players, which arguably makes it the most popular game in the world, if player base is considered. This game has been played by students on school sponsored Esports teams. $2 million increase on their 2017 numbers, to give out a total $14.12 million in prize money during 2018.

5. **Player Unknown’s Battlegrounds.** A prize pool of $6.73 million in 2018, the company behind the game, PUBG, has announced significant international expansion plans.

6. **Overwatch** has a user base of 40 million gained in two years, with the Overwatch league having their second annual finals being held with a prize pot of $3.5 million. Since being created, three years ago, the company is now worth $1 billion. A prize pool of $6.7 million. The Overwatch League (OWL) does not operate a championship tournament but maintains a traditional sport league structure.

7. **Heroes of the Storm (HOTS)** A 2018 prize pool of $6.52 million. With the HOTS championship being abandoned in 2017, the game slid in prize money and might not hold a future without a structured league.

8. **Hearthstone.** This game had a prize pool of $4.95 million in 2018, which was a 42% increase on prize money since 2017. With five tournaments or season splits per year, Hearthstone has proven to be popular amongst gamers.

9. **StarCraft 2** had a prize pool of $4.5 million in 2018; the game held 12 tournaments and a World Championship last year.

10. **Call of Duty: WW 2.** A game from the popular series of games, Call of Duty tends to bring out a new game every year. That said, the WW2 game held its popularity last year, with a prize pool of $4 million, even though it had been officially replaced by October’s Call of Duty: Black Ops.
The equipment which is necessary to create an Esports team in a school is one of its many benefits – there might be a need to increase the bandwidth of the internet the school campus is using, and there will likely be a necessity to buy new graphics cards and RAM memory cards. The computers which are used for Esports gaming are desktop computers, which most schools will already have in use within the curriculum. By adding to the existing infrastructure, the costs for creating an Esports team remain low. The equipment required to create a team include:

**High speed WIFI connection:** This is a primary aspect of gaming; given the competitive team-on-team nature of a match, the gamers must be able to compete with the best speeds on offer.

**Computers:** The CPU, RAM and graphics cards are key aspects of the computers needed. This can be accomplished through building up the school’s existing computer infrastructure. Most gamers will say that the desktop computer is the prime choice, but some schools have played with laptops.

**Large Monitors:** Larger than average monitors are required to see the game in its entirety; no smaller than 24 inches.

**Gaming Keyboards** are optimal for Esports;

**Large mouse pad** is a necessity to ensure consistent performance, an optical mouse can vary depending on the surface it is being used on.

**Gaming headsets** cancel noise and allow gamers to concentrate.

**Gaming chairs** need to be comfortable to ensure hours of continuous play without fatigue.

**Team jerseys** to align the team and create a sense of inclusion and representation, just like any other sport.

Overall, the costs to upgrade personal computers already available in the school for use by the students, makes it an ideal activity to integrate in the curriculum, as the costs for entry would not be as expensive as it would be to start other sports. Even in schools where there is a limited number of personal computers for use by students and new computers would need to be purchased, the costs are not prohibitively high. There is scope to find sponsorship for such equipment, and the area of Esports sponsorship is continually growing. Just like with any other sports team, local businesses can also be persuaded to sponsor the team in the beginning if needed, and ongoing for a good advertising opportunity. This is a win-win situation for the advertisers and the students.
A school's gaming center needs wired access points as even high speed wireless is usually too slow. Time is a huge aspect of competitive team Esports gaming, with a minute lapse of time like 5 or 6 milliseconds representing the difference between a team being able to win or losing to the other team who has faster internet speeds. The network latency has to be monitored, as does the bandwidth, which will ensure the team can create fast reflexes in the game. A typical gaming arena will have a number of lab stations, 20 or more, all have professional gaming standard PCs, gaming stations with consoles, and highly reactive gaming keyboards and mice which allow for millisecond reaction from the players. High density wi-fi and high speeds are critical for successful Esports competition.

### TYPICAL LAYOUT
(recommended distribution)

- **HEAD COACH OFFICE**: Private office with window out to gaming stations
- **SMARTBOARD**: Outside of head coach office for team meetings
- **GAMING STATIONS**: 
- **ELEVATED PLATFORM**: Gaming stations with graphic backdrop
- **RECEPTION**: Controls access and monitors area
- **FRONT DOOR**: Keycard lock for off-hours for student access
- **LOUNGE**: F&B vending, variety of seating and console gaming

Allocating resources for Esports infrastructure support can be a challenging aspect of creating an Esports team, but there are established gaming leagues that are willing to partner with K-12 schools, like PlayVS and the High School Esports League, who can help with training, charity events, and competitions. Included with the leagues are Legacy Esports, the Electronic Gaming Federation and the North American Scholastic Esports Federation Leagues. Although grant opportunities are limited, there are also crowdfunding tools such as eTeamSponsor, which allow campaigns to be created to gain funding for technology and create the appropriate competitive space for the team.
Why Schools Should Start an Esports Program

Starting an Esports program provides benefits to the student as well as the school. Benefits like Student engagement, Student inclusion, Diversity, Skills building, and Confidence building.

Many teachers have witnessed complete changes in students that were not willing to engage in school before being included in the Esports team. Learning skills that stand in favor of their future is another main reason why schools have chosen to integrate an Esports team into their list of available sports teams. Even though there isn't a physical aspect to the activity, it still has the same core ingredients of other sports: being a team working to win through strategic integration and excellence.

When students develop teamwork skills, they understand how participation in the team synergizes with the other team members. Students learn how to make good decisions as a group and how to communicate within a team environment. These skills are at the top of all school's aspirations, and traditionally there have always been students struggling with these skills through the available sports. The reason for non-inclusion in traditional sports has varied extensively, from disability, being overweight, shyness, or low self-esteem. Esports gaming has introduced a method that cuts through those restrictions, and holds a vast audience of interested people wanting to participate, as either players or viewers.

The sport itself holds career opportunities the same way playing on a baseball team, it can lead to being picked by a team in the major league. Students who choose to play Esports will have their own opportunities to be recruited by professional gaming teams. Companies who sponsor Esports teams might also be interested in securing students for future internship programs or work opportunities. The exposure a student gains through being involved in a team sport in school is always more than if they had not. Students who participate get a chance to get to know themselves better, whether they realize they work better as part of a team or prefer to work alone. Even the latter group has to learn how to work together where necessary, and Esports teach this to every type of student, regardless of their academic status or performance in traditional team sports.

Higher education schools should consider integrating an Esports team into their school, all of the above skills which are gained in K-12 Esports are further honed at the HE level. Representing the country at the Olympics and being recruited to work in the gaming industry become a possibility. Technology companies will find linkable skillsets, the strategic thinking computer-oriented mentality gained through competitive Esports and being involved in the sport becomes a way of showing successful strategic thinking. Opportunities for future employment range widely within the Esports arena, from creating new game content, broadcasting the games, using gaming in relation to other fields like medicine and business, or by representing client gamers, like other sports players.

Diversity is at the core of Esports it offers the first all inclusive sport that integrates all types of people, with no barriers, into one team. There has been increase in the number of Esports teams on the collegiate and K-12 level, with a more professional focus in the higher education realm due to the increased professional outgrowth from the sport team to ongoing career opportunities.

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