Level Up Student Success

The Benefits of Esports for K-12 and Higher Education

MORE THAN JUST GAMES

At our core, humans love to compete. From PE class and spelling bees to World Cup soccer matches and championship football games, we are surrounded by contests at every stage of life. When video games burst onto the scene in the early 1970s, head-to-head competition—better known as esports—was quick to follow. Fast forward nearly 50 years later, and professional esports have taken the world by storm.

With tournament winners taking home millions of dollars in prizes, esports is no longer an underground, niche activity. Just like football or baseball, it's a legitimate entertainment industry with deep potential for expansion into Higher Education institutions and K-12 schools. As we take this dive into the world of esports, you'll get a full picture of the current market, projected growth, and, most importantly, how esports can be used as a powerful recruitment tool for STEM programs.

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A RAPID-GROWTH INDUSTRY

When looking at esports impact through the lens of education, it's important to gain an understanding of both the Higher Education and K-12 markets as they currently stand. As of 2020, there are **475+ colleges and universities with some type of gaming club on campus[1].** And, according to the National Association of Collegiate Esports (NACE), **there are 180+ schools with an official, affiliated esports program[2].** Shifting to the K-12 side of things, the High School esports League lists 2,027 member schools and PlayVS—which includes youth leagues younger than high school—cites **13,000 schools across the U.S. with at least one enrolled player[3].**

To put it simply, esports isn't occurring at a sporadically few number of schools—it's being implemented at schools across the country with students of all backgrounds, ages, and skill levels getting involved. Furthermore, it's meteoric rise shows absolutely no signs of slowing down. In fact, **over 37% of college esports programs started in 2019 alone,** and more schools are sure to follow suit as the true popularity of competitive gaming is realized[4]. When you look at what that means in terms of physical devices being used for esports, Future Source Consulting projects that, from 2020 to 2025, **the number of dedicated esports device units in North America will grow from 29,690 to 37,070[5].**

> ❝
> **We're more than doubling our membership size every single year. I don't expect that's going to slow down in the near-term future.**
>
> – Michael Brooks, Executive Director, NACE [6]
> ❞

> **60% of all League of Legends players go on to major in STEM degrees**[7]

THE STEM CONNECTION

So, as a quick look at the numbers tells us, esports is massive at both Higher Education institutions and K-12 schools. But you may be wondering, why is it so popular, and why should my school be looking to start or expand its esports offerings? The answer can be found by looking at esports outside of just the games and tournaments. In understanding the career advancement, student experience and recruitment benefits that these programs bring to the table, one sees that esports offerings are a necessity for any school looking to compete in the modern age.

Let's start with the career advancement aspect of esports. Educators at all levels understand that it can sometimes be difficult to drum up excitement around and get students interested in "grown-up" concepts such as choosing a career path. With the addition of esports, teachers, counselors, and instructors are able to bridge that gap—especially as it relates to all-important STEM career paths. By enticing video game enthusiasts to learn more about their favorite games and platforms, teachers are able to dive deeper into the many technical aspects of video game design, development, distribution, and more.

When we look at the numbers, we see that the STEM connection to esports is clear For example, 60% of all League of Legends (one of the most-played games in the world) players go on to major in STEM degrees as undergraduates[8]. And, in the extremely vital push to grow the number of women in STEM, it is important to note that women comprise nearly one-third of the esports audience, and are slated to account for half of all growth in viewership over the next year[9].

ALL-AROUND ENGAGEMENT

While it's clear that STEM curriculums and esports programs go hand-in-hand, it's also important to understand the impact that esports have outside the classroom as well. Achieving a good student experience is vital for schools—at all levels—who seek to offer a well-rounded, engaging, and welcoming environment.

Different from traditional sports or the classic extracurricular activities that one might be used to seeing at a school, esports programs are unique because they offer involvement to students who may not typically participate. In fact, 80% of students who play high school esports have never before participated in an extracurricular activity[10].

This statistic is extremely important because it shows how esports programs allow these students to form social bonds and find a community of like-minded peers for an activity that, until relatively recently, was an at-home hobby. Offering these programs outside of the classroom is vital because it adds a level of engagement and social cohesion that, in turn, enhances the complete student experience and truly makes them excited about school as a whole.

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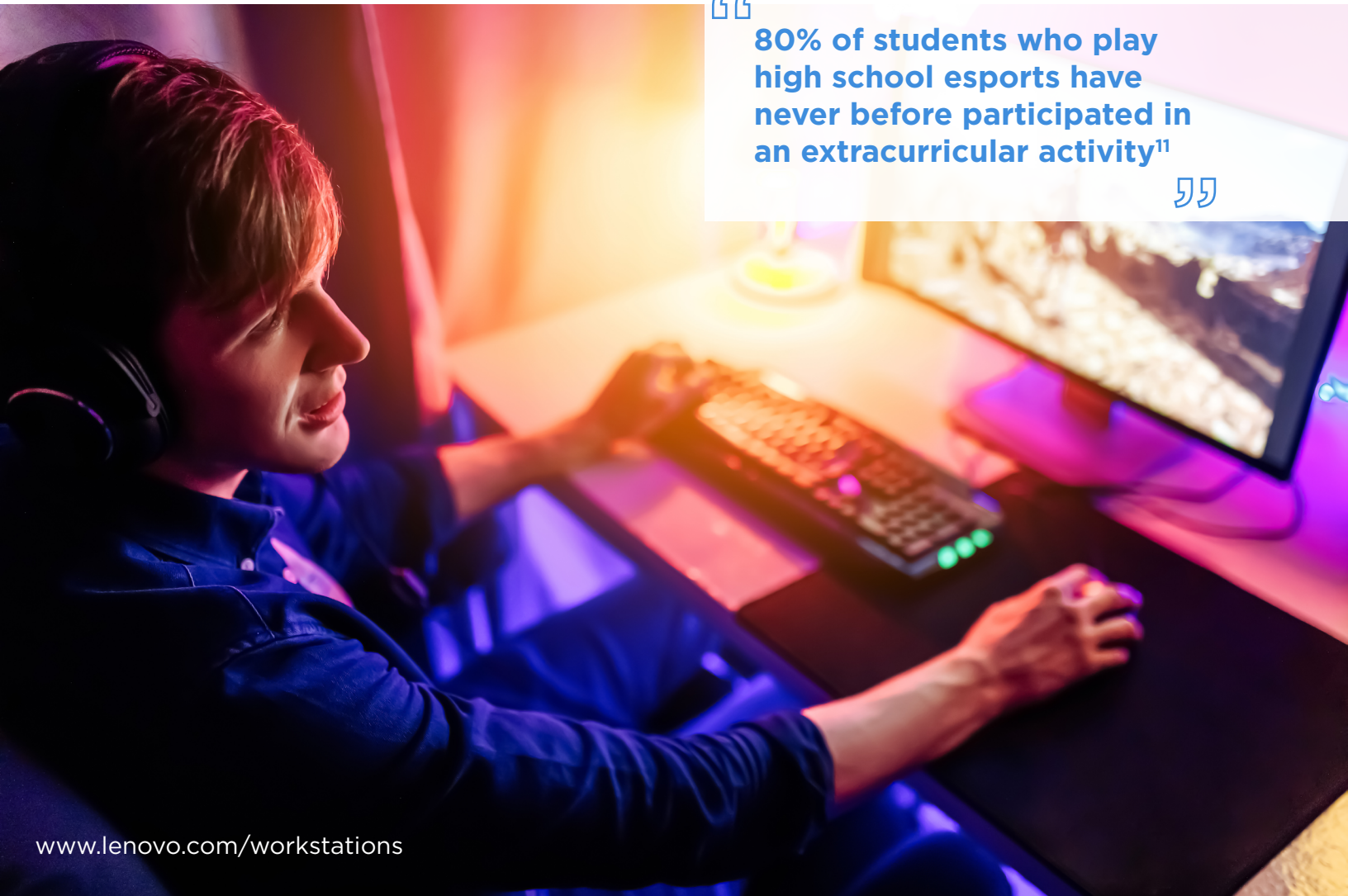
GETTING REAL ABOUT RECRUITMENT

As mentioned before, there are 475+ colleges and universities with some form of gaming club on campus—180+ of those are official, NACE-affiliated esports programs. However, when one dives even deeper, it becomes clear that these schools don't just stop at offering a gaming program. Just like they would with a football, gymnastics, or basketball team, schools across North America are going as far as to recruit students to represent the college or university as a member of the esports program.

Currently, there are around 200 colleges and universities that are offering a total of $16 million in scholarships—a threefold increase since 2015[12]. And, that growth is showing no signs of stopping. **With esports projected to grow to a $1.5 billion industry by the end of 2020**[13] and schools continuing to grow their esports offerings, an ever-increasing amount of scholarships are sure to follow.

These numbers are so important because each scholarship dollar that Higher Education institutions offer for esports is money that goes into the hands of a student, allowing them to realize their dream of attending college. And, furthermore, the more scholarships schools give and the more they invest into improving their esports infrastructure, the more they're able to compete in the never-ending race to increase enrollment. By showing that your school offers, cares about, and even gives scholarships for esports, you engage the massive amounts of prospective students who are looking to take their passion to the next level.

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ENABLING ESPORTS

Whether it's as a STEM career driver, student experience enhancer, or recruitment tool, the benefits of esports are clear. But, before you and your school move forward on starting a program, is your infrastructure prepared? Video games in today's modern age are a far cry from their humble beginnings, and the latest, "next-gen" games used for esports require a healthy mix of security, network infrastructure, and the right equipment. We've put together an "Esports Checklist" of sorts to help you stay mindful of the most important esports IT software and hardware considerations.

Security

Crucial to have protection from internal and external threats. Need specific esports security policies and practices to ensure students are safe online and you know your getting the best organizational protection.

Network Infrastructure

In order to achieve successful online play, it is important to have a network that can handle high level graphics and connectivity. Some colleges and universities have built dedicated practice spaces with their own internet connections for esports.

The Right Equipment

- Serious monitor capabilities

- Keyboard and Mouse that work faster and provide tactile feedback

- Lots of onboard storage

- Intense processing power

TECH FOR YOUR TEAM

There's no question that esports have taken education by storm. The benefits are many, and K-12 and Higher Education schools everywhere are using state-of-the-art tech to enable their esports programs. But exactly what tech should your school be using to start or grow its competitive gaming offering?

It can sometimes be difficult to strike the right balance of enhanced security for online gaming, a network infrastructure that can maintain a high level of connectivity, and equipment that can handle the intense processing needs of modern games. However, there are tech providers out there that offer devices tailored exactly to your school's needs.

Lenovo, for example, has dual-purpose workstations—powered by Intel® processors—that allow K-12 students to work on STEM and related coursework during school hours, and then play games and learn game design after hours. And, for colleges and universities looking to start their own, advanced esports team, Lenovo's Legion line of devices are dedicated to providing the highest level of professional gaming performance.

And, if you're unsure which tech is right for your school as you embark on your esports journey, Lenovo even offers a custom, one-on-one solution to help build a program from the ground-up—Lenovo Esports Solutions for Education. From discovery and consultation all the way to goal setting and future planning, this complementary solution gives end-to-end support in all aspects of gaming software, services, and products.

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Don't Wait, Game On!

On the surface, to some, esports may just look like a bunch of people watching video games. But when you spend any amount of time in the world of competitive gaming, the community around it, or its implications for the education industry, you realize it's so much more than that.

The rise of esports has given a mainstream voice to an entire community that, before, was simply pursuing a hobby. Like with any other sport out there, these competitions have created a place to feel comfortable around peers, engage socially, and do more of what they love. And, as schools at all levels begin to embrace esports, these programs are even going as far as to enhance the student experience, help young adults realize their dream of going to college, and grow the number of men and women pursuing STEM careers.

Esports are here to stay. And any school looking to foster a learning environment that goes beyond traditional education needs to be exploring the world of esports. With the right tech, the right support, and the right mindset, your school is poised to capitalize on the growing popularity of competitive gaming.

If you're ready to enter the world of esports, visit www.lenovo.com/workstations today to begin leveling up with Lenovo.

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