



case studies

i2esports brings together some of the leading esports coaches in education from around the United States. These coaches and other educators have experience building sustainable esports programs in schools. Together with i2e's professional learning specialists, they train, consult, mentor, and provide guidance for coaches starting at season zero through live professional development and written documentation. This case study document includes just three examples of our team's work in their own school systems.

Visit our website to learn more about our approach: i2e-llc.com/esports



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Case study no. 1: Park Avenue Christian Academy



Taylor Lowe 

- ▶ Full Sail University's Extraordinary Educator Award, 2020
- ▶ Park Avenue Christian Academy, Florida
- ▶ Private school for students VPK — 8th grade

It's hard to believe Park Avenue's esports program started season zero with just 6 male students playing in a large closet with busted old desks and laptops that would hardly run Minecraft. By the following year, 12 students signed up and they got to meet in a new computer lab which had been constructed for media classes—and esports. Playing Rocket League this season, 1/3 of the students were female players. By season 2, participation grew 400%, with 37% of the participants being female players. The school constructed an additional 25 seat lab for media classes and esports.

In season 3, the school committed to construct an esports area so the students could compete with other schools more effectively. Total capacity for the program dipped as one entire computer lab was taken offline for construction. However, by season 3, 50% of the student participants were female.

Esports promotes inclusion



Traditional athletics are segregated by gender and physical limitations

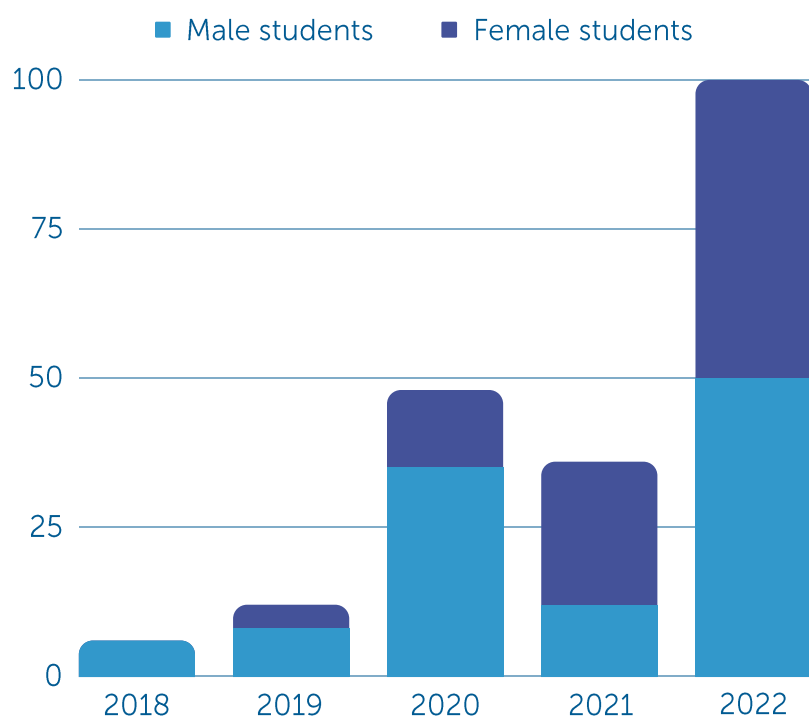


Esports allow everyone to participate regardless of gender or physical capabilities

Esports became so popular in the school that growth was limited only by the equipment and space available for the program. Clubs were only available to middle school students in the beginning, but older elementary students began advocating for their own. The school planned to expand grade levels in early 2020, but the season saw a change of plans after school closures due to the pandemic.

To keep the esports program rolling, Taylor set up a remote Minecraft 2v2 building competition with prizes provided by the local Microsoft Store Team. Park Avenue had over 100 students participate across all grade levels. Taylor empowered the esports student leadership team to help judge the builds and award prizes.

The 2021–22 season was tricky for most schools for a variety of reasons. High absentee rates, lack of ability to compete with other schools, and flexible scheduling made running a consistent team practice almost impossible. During this time, Park Avenue determined their esports program would shift to embrace the reality. Taylor launched an open lab option so many students could be exposed to esports without the commitment of practices or fear of serious competition—and the results were surprising. Many new students showed up after school or during lunch breaks to play, and what was even better to see was the ratio of male to female players was nearly 1:1. The openness, lack of sports fee to play, and casual mindset made esports more approachable to new and non-serious gamers.



Over 5 years, the ratio of male to female student participation in esports grew from 100% male in 2018 to 50% female in 2022.

Achievement is a top priority in schools, and esports can positively impact student outcomes in academic classes. Players for Park Avenue signed an agreement that if students missed any homework for the week, they would not be eligible to play in the tournaments on Friday. Two-person teams created instant accountability between teammates. Taylor also received reports from classroom teachers to confirm that students' overall grades were C or above for player eligibility. Taylor notes, "It was amazing to see the increase in GPAs and the consistency of student work due to this program. For the entire season, every student in the esports program had a 100% homework completion rate, and no one fell below a C average."

Service learning projects make their way into schools through any club or activity, and esports is no different. Taylor's program created Gaming with a Cause, collecting over 34,000 servings of food for local food banks to combat hunger needs in the community. [View photos of the team and their fundraising efforts in Sway](#) [↗](#).

Student impact can't always be measured in raw data. The lifelong benefits that come from feeling included, having success in something new, being a part of a team, and getting recognition from peers is priceless. Following is a favorite memory from Taylor.

“Before esports, at our school, only the traditional sports were celebrated and those students who participated were held as schoolwide celebrities. If they were not playing a physical sport with great success, there was no real way for a student to represent the school.

During our second season, we were at a local tournament hosted by Full Sail University. The student who won the middle/high school category from our school was not a traditional athlete and wanted nothing to do with physical sports. We celebrated his victory in front of the entire school at the following schoolwide chapel. It is amazing how one event can change so much about a student.

For the first time in his nine years at Park Avenue, **this student was seen as a hero**. The student’s confidence level soared. He started making **new friends**, getting **better grades**, and even tried **other activities** including physical sports. All he needed was an opportunity to showcase all his skills and talents—and esports gave him that chance.

Case study no. 2: Elkhorn Area School District



Mike Dahle 

- ▶ NAECAD High School Esports Coach of the Year, 2022
- ▶ Elkhorn Area School District, Wisconsin
- ▶ Public high school

Mike Dahle is the Esports coach and director at Elkhorn Area High School and the President of the Wisconsin High School Esports Association. As a lifelong gamer, Mike became fascinated with esports after a student presented on the League of Legends world championships for a school project. Mike’s school started competing internally and were incredibly excited to be invited to a LAN tournament with school. Mike has helped onboard most schools in Wisconsin and has helped other states develop their own esports associations. What began with seven schools has grown to 100+ schools competing across the state in just four years.

At his own school in Elkhorn, 94 unique students have participated across the four years of his program. Competing with great success, this club has won a state championship title every year. Because of the recognition this receives, two students have received esports scholarships to compete at the collegiate level. Thirteen of his students have participated every single year of their high school career, and two students open enrolled at the school simply because of the esports program. Several students stay after school simply to watch practice, much like the movie cliché of kids staying after to watch football practice. These students are participating as observers but are still positively contributing to the school climate through passive involvement.

Daily, Mike welcomes students into his classroom from his esports team. Minutes after the school opens its doors at 6:45 AM, ten or more members of his team are there to talk about games they played the night before, latest patch notes for games, pro matches, and local tournaments they went to over the weekend. He has students visit during lunchtime as well. Building relationships with students in this way means that they are more connected to the school, to a trusted adult, and to each other.

"Thank you so much for running this program. My son now has friends and a group he eats lunch with every day."

— Parents of a transfer student

"Why didn't you start working here three years ago?! High school wouldn't have sucked so much if we had esports sooner."

— Graduating senior

While the Elkhorn Area High School team averages about 20 student athletes per season, numbers grew 150% during pandemic-related school closures. During this time, students were unable to participate in traditional sports and turned to esports to stay connected at school.

Pre-pandemic



20
athletes
per season

During pandemic school closures



150%
participation
due to esports

Mike has observed the way including esports in a school community positively impacts the lives of students. Following is a story from one of those moments as Mike retells it.

“One of the coolest moments I’ve ever witnessed was this year during our homecoming assembly. We integrated esports into our homecoming games, and four class members competed on a giant projector screen in front of the whole school. Each grade level student section was chanting their representatives’ names and, at the end, the winner ran back to their section in the bleachers where all the students formed a circle around him. They were jumping and cheering around him like he had just scored the winning touchdown. I saw him in the hall as he was leaving and I asked, ‘How awesome was that?!’ And he replied, ‘This was the best day ever,’ with a smile that went ear to ear.”

Case study no. 3: Fresno Unified School District



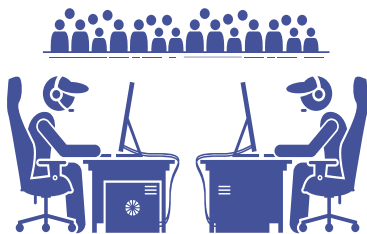
Julie Mavrogeorge 

- ▶ NAECAD High School Esports Director of the Year 2022
- ▶ Fresno Unified School District, California

Fresno Unified Esports League (FUeL) has a mission to create college and career-ready graduates. The team at FUeL has created an esports pathway from elementary through high school that creates opportunities for students to pursue all types of careers.

In fall 2020, Julie launched the first district-wide elementary Minecraft Education esports league in the United States with 29 volunteer coaches from 22 school sites. Totalling 26 teams, 250 students participated in the inaugural league. Students worked in teams of 4–10 athletes to compete for an eight-week long season. They built Egyptian pyramids, spacecraft, treehouses, and amusement park rides as part of their build battles. Students employ code in the game using the Agent and learn how to use Redstone to power their creations.

While students are building, judges watch the builds. Shoutcasters narrate the action, and observers can watch the live stream. When the timer runs out, students describe their build to the judge, who can ask questions. These battles are judged from a rubric and then awarded points to determine the winning teams.



The Minecraft build battle approach gives players opportunities to practice creativity and collaboration through competition. Players also learn critical thinking and communication skills along with problem solving. These skills are 21st century expectations for the modern workforce. While not specifically assessed in schools, career readiness hinges on students who practice good sportsmanship and work ethic. Esports programs are a perfect place to learn these skills!

In February 2022, Fresno Minecraft Esports rolled out a new League of Literacy in grades first through sixth. League of Literacy specifically integrates reading with esports. Scholastic esports is a new way to incorporate esports into the school day. In partnership with the instructional design team, teams of students were assigned competitive builds based on literature they had read in class. To complete a build with many details, students must have read and comprehended the text. It was astonishing to hear kids talk about their builds using evidence from their reading, down to the page number. In spring 2022, over 100 students were involved in the League of Literacy esports tournament.

Fresno’s Minecraft Esports champions have competed three times against the school champions from Curro, South Africa for the Minecraft Esports World Championships. In spring 2022, the Baird Explorers won this honor for the first time. Building cross-cultural relationships through esports has had an incredibly positive effect on these students. The coach competition matches have been especially popular.

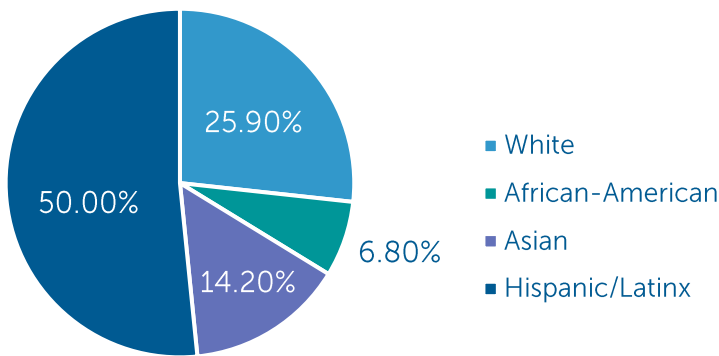
"One student said to me, 'This is the best thing that has ever happened to me at school.' It is quite literally the competition venue of the future."

— Bob Nelson, Fresno Unified Superintendent

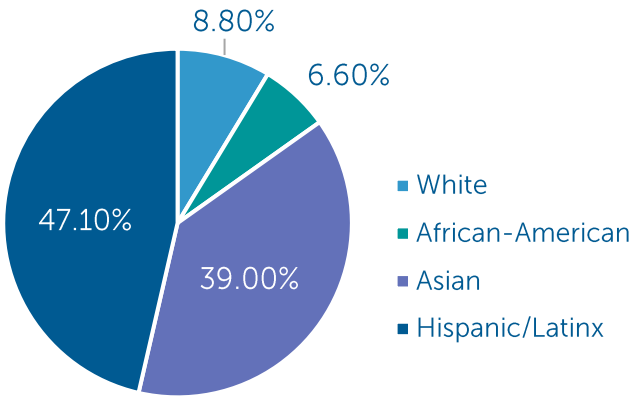
In the summer of 2022, 90 students in grades 4–12 participated in an esports summer program powered by CTE and STEAM departments. They learned teamwork, collaboration, strategy development, and communication, all while competing in gaming. Most amazingly, **98% of summer camp attendees had never participated in an after-school activity because nothing “fit” for them at school.**

The esports programs at FUeL are diverse. In fact, they are more diverse than the demographics of Fresno, California. According to the US Census Bureau (July 2022), Fresno is 25.9% white, 6.8% Black/African-American, 14.2% Asian, and 50% Hispanic/Latinx. FUeL’s esports program participants identify as 8.8% white, 6.6% Black/African-American, 39.0% Asian, and 47.1% Hispanic/Latinx.

Fresno population diversity



FUeL esports program diversity



These program also have a history of including students who don’t self-identify as advanced gamers. 65% of the students participating in FUeL respond that they are beginners when asked, with only 7% claiming to be advanced gamers. It is incredibly important in esports programs that all students feel welcome regardless of their expertise, and FUeL is getting it right.