



THE 2025

ESPORTS GUIDEBOOK

FOR USAEL COACHES

TURN YOUR GAMERS INTO MAKERS



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01

INTRODUCTION TO ACADEMIC ESPORTS

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the world of competitive gaming has undergone a transformation. What was once a mere pastime in entertainment has become a global, billion-dollar industry, captivating millions and sparking the creation of thousands of academic esports programs across the world – from college varsity teams to elementary afterschool clubs.

Gaming in education is the new cutting-edge, offering a unique and innovative approach to learning and skill development for students. If you're reading this guidebook, you're part of the team that's bringing academic esports to your school – to build communities and shape the innovators of tomorrow.

WHAT IS ACADEMIC ESPORTS?

For many parents and educators, gaming and esports feels like a mysterious world, often seen as simply a pathway to becoming a professional player, much like aspiring to join the NBA or MLB. Yet out of the hundreds of millions of young gamers worldwide, only a tiny fraction ever reach the professional stage.

Should we really encourage every student who loves gaming to chase a career as a pro esports athlete? *Probably not.*

That's where **Academic Esports** comes in.

GAMING

The activity of playing video games. Over 85% of K-12 students identify as gamers, and it's a known fact that they love playing games.



ESPORTS

Organized competitive gaming that promotes teamwork, communication, strategic thinking, and community building. It takes "just gaming" to the next level and provides structured opportunities for growth, skill development, and connection.



ACADEMIC ESPORTS

A dynamic learning environment where educators harness the excitement of gaming and esports to teach valuable STEM, STEAM, and transferable life skills that students can carry into any career path.



At the USAEL, our mission is to combine decades of experience in education and esports to create innovative curriculum and competition experiences that empower educators like you to engage students through their passions, transforming gameplay into lifelong learning.

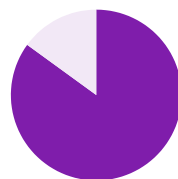
Imagine using Minecraft, a creative, immersive game about building complex worlds, to help students explore the great eras of history. Or leveraging Rocket League, where rocket-powered cars play high-speed soccer, to teach the fundamentals of math (with the collateral benefit of raising test scores). The possibilities truly are endless.

BENEFITS OF ESPORTS

It's exceedingly likely that your students are already participating in esports in some capacity, as a player, a viewer, a fan, or an aspiring industry professional.

With the help of a planned curriculum, the time your students spend gaming can be productive, even transformational. Gaming is, by nature, an endless loop of setting and achieving personal goals – frequently in a social environment. When tied back to tangible soft skills and future career opportunities, playing at school can help students build a meaningful connection between having fun and learning. This is especially important for students who wouldn't normally have an opportunity to find social or competitive success through traditional sports.

For more information about the benefits of academic esports, [read our full research paper](#).



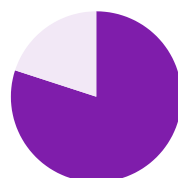
85%

of teens play video games, with about 40% playing at least once per day



300+

Universities offer Varsity Esports with **\$15M+ in esports scholarships** offered each year.



80%

of K-12 esports participants weren't in other extracurricular activities

* Participation is linked to better attendance, grades, and graduation rates

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GETTING STARTED

BUILDING YOUR TEAM

Every esports program needs the right team to succeed. In the K-12 world, your key team members are **school administrators**, **parents**², and a **teacher or coach** to run the program. If you're reading this guidebook, you most likely represent one of this dynamic trio, but we'll explain how to build support amongst all three.

It's important to remember that, while many are unfamiliar with academic esports, most become strong advocates once they understand the value it brings to students, schools, and communities.

Administrators

Administrators are responsible for the long-term success of the school. When speaking with administrators, focus on how academic esports supports your school's existing goals:

Student Engagement & Retention

Esports has the power to reach students who may not otherwise actively participate in class or extracurriculars, and can help build a sense of purpose and belonging at school.

Skill Development

When paired with our curriculum, esports can help develop 21st-century skills like communication, leadership, digital literacy, and critical thinking.

Curriculum Alignment

Our curriculum integrates naturally with pathways in STEM, media arts, business, and CTE programs.

Positive Outcomes

Growing research links esports participation with improved attendance, higher GPA's, and likelihood to pursue STEM careers.

Parents

Parents often need reassurance that esports is a productive, safe, and healthy extracurricular for their student. When speaking with parents, focus on how academic esports means **more than just playing games**.

Student Safety

All student participation happens in a supervised school environment, on secure learning and play platforms, and with adult guidance.

Standards-Aligned Curriculum

Our curriculum is standards-aligned, self-guided, and covers a broad variety of topics, from math to history to game development.

Social & Emotional Growth

Esports helps students develop problem-solving skills, teamwork, communication, and self-confidence – similar to traditional sports.

College & Career Readiness

Colleges are offering scholarships and varsity opportunities, and gaming and esports industry has a wealth of career opportunities (art, design, engineering, finance, broadcasting, business, etc.)

Supplemental Materials

Use and share these resources to help initiate the conversation with teachers, administrators, and parents:

 [Parent Awareness Flyer Template](#)

 [Benefits of Academic Esports Whitepaper](#)



TEACHER & COACH RECRUITMENT

ESPORTS COACH

An educator or teacher in charge of advising, overseeing, and/or operating the esports program on campus.



At the heart of every esports program is a dedicated Coach who provides guidance and structure to the students. An academic esports coach does not need to be a game expert! If you're reading this guidebook, that coach is probably you. If not, consider this section a resource on how to select and properly support the right coach for your school's esports program.

Coach Qualifications

- Willingness to learn about the world of esports alongside the students
- Conflict resolution & team-building skills
- Strong communication & organizational skills
- General knowledge of technology

Coach Responsibilities

- **Facilitator:** Esports players often have more game knowledge than coaches, which is perfectly acceptable. A coach's key role is to manage the team's operations effectively.
- **Teammate:** Coaches are crucial for maintaining player motivation throughout a season, offering encouragement and support.
- **Mediator:** Understanding player personalities is essential for effective communication. Great coaches encourage honest feedback from players while remaining neutral.



Coach Needs

Administrative Support

Because academic esports is a new space, esports coaches tend to have newer and different needs than coaches for other extracurriculars. As an administrator, empowering your coaches to request program-specific needs through IT and facilities departments can help them pivot more quickly to the needs of their students.

Parent Support

Similar to traditional sports, parents should encourage students to have healthy habits, get enough sleep, monitor screen time, and keep up with their academics. Teachers are entrusted to help your students reach their potential both in and outside of the classroom, reminding them that you are part of their team. Partner with the esports coach for PTO/A support and possible fundraising opportunities (speak to school Administrators before moving forward with any money-earning activities).

Remember, esports coaches focus more on facilitation than gameplay. While gaming knowledge is helpful, **it is not a requirement** for success as an esports coach. All coaches really need is a passion to connect with students and provide them with a space to pursue their goals.

USAEL Coach Onboarding

To help onboard and support each school's selected esports coach, we offer video-based onboarding, professional development courses, online workshops, and live support to all coaches within the USAEL network. These resources are detailed in our **Coach Roadmap** on page 11 of this guidebook.

Additionally, if you're an administrator or faculty member in charge of finding and recruiting an esports coach, we have an editable flier template that you can use for staff outreach:

 [Coach Recruitment Flyer Template](#)

UNDERSTANDING YOUR ESPORTS PROGRAM

Before you think about recruiting students, it's important to step back and reflect on your school's goals, available resources, and desired outcomes.

- Are you looking to introduce esports primarily as a learning tool, or do you envision competitive play as a central focus?
- Do you have the staffing, time, facilities, and student commitment to participate in frequent practices and tournaments?
- Is esports best suited for your students as an after-school club, or could it be integrated into the school day as an academic course?

Answering these questions can help you identify which program stage aligns with your vision and capacity, whether that's a foundational start using only curriculum, or an established esports program that seeks to compete at the highest level. We'll show you some examples below, but remember that every esports program has different resources, goals, and outcomes.

	FOUNDATIONAL	DEVELOPING	ESTABLISHED COMPETITIVE	ACADEMIC CREDIT COURSE
Status	New or developing program, limited resources.	Growing team with integrated gameplay.	Actively competing in esports at higher levels.	Esports offered as a graded class.
Objective	Curriculum & Casual Gameplay	Curriculum & Competitive Gameplay	Curriculum & Competitive Gameplay	Curriculum & Competitive Gameplay
Format	Club	Club	Club	Inside the Bell Schedule
Meetings Per Week	1-2	2-3	4 or more	Daily
Length of Each Meeting	75 - 90 mins	2 hours	2 hours	Varies by School
Time of Day	After-School (typically)	After-School (typically)	After-School (typically)	Curriculum During School & Competition After School)
Season Length	8 weeks	8-10 weeks	8-12 weeks	Semester
Recommended Courses	PES	PES, EPE, and/or IGD	EPE, CEE, BES, and/or IGD	Use PES & EPE for structure, add in other courses to supplement.

*Most schools are Foundational in their first year.

STUDENT RECRUITMENT


Once your school has a dedicated esports coach, the support of the administration, and a clear understanding of what your resources are, it's time to launch the program. Luckily, students absolutely love playing games, so most of the work is usually just getting the word out.

Step 1: Finalize Your Program Structure

The first step is to finalize how your esports program will run. As part of the USAEL, you'll have access to our curriculum, our competitions, and all of our support services, but every program utilizes them differently. During your first onboarding call with us, we'll help you assess different program formats that fit your goals and needs, but if you already have a clear vision in mind, you're clear to go full steam ahead.

Step 2: Announce Your Esports Program

The second step is to announce that an esports program is coming to your school campus. This can be shared via school announcements, newsletters, or fliers. Be sure to emphasize that this is an organized program with competition and curriculum, not just a place to play games.

 [USAEL Student Recruitment
Flier Template](#)



Step 3: Student Survey (Optional)

The first step is to finalize how your esports program will run. As part of the USAEL, you'll have access to our curriculum, our competitions, and all of our support services, but every program utilizes them differently. During your first onboarding call with us, we'll help you assess different program formats that fit your goals and needs, but if you already have a clear vision in mind, you're clear to go full steam ahead.

Survey Ideas

- What game titles are most exciting for your students to compete in? You can view the games we host in our USAEL Open League [here](#).
- What types of gaming curriculum would your students like to explore? You can pull from our full course list [here](#).
- How seriously do your students want to compete? Do they want a set practice schedule or just casual matches?

Whether you decide to host a blend of curriculum and competition or a focus on one, it's important to make sure your students are invested into the final decision.

Note

There's many more steps that programs can choose to take, like formalizing an esports team, hosting team tryouts, recruiting support staff, and more. We'll cover those in other guides, and you're free to consult our team if you have specific ideas in mind.

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USAEL COACH CHECKLIST

STEP 1: SETTING UP - ADMIN/PURCHASER

First Logistics

- ☐ Your sales representative will connect you with our Academic Services team.

If you are unsure who to contact, please reach out to support@usacademicsports.com.

- ☐ Activate your USAEL account. A member of Academic Services will send you an activation email.
- ☐ Setup a logistics call with Academic Services.
- ☐ Begin recruiting faculty and coaches that intend to use USAEL curriculum and/or competition using our Coach Recruitment Flier.
- ☐ Send your Academic Services representative the list of teachers and coaches that intend to use the platform. Please include:
 - First Name
 - Last Name
 - Email

IT Logistics

- ☐ Review the [IT Requirements](#) Guide with your IT team to open platform and online gaming access.
- ☐ Identify (and if necessary, purchase) esports equipment.
- ☐ Download selected esports titles onto devices.
- ☐ Create game accounts to access online play as needed (eg. Epic, Nintendo). For more information, see the [USAEL Game Installation Guide](#).

STEP 2: TEACHER AND COACH ONBOARDING

Learn Platform Onboarding

- ☐ Schedule and attend a curriculum onboarding call with our Academic Services team.
- ☐ Activate your USAEL account. A member of Academic Services will send you an activation email.
- ☐ Create your first classroom.
- ☐ Begin rostering students. Refer to the Learn Platform Guide following onboarding as needed.
- ☐ Develop a curriculum plan. See our sample schedule to get started.

Competition Onboarding

- ☐ Schedule and attend a competition onboarding call with our USAEL Competition Team.
- ☐ Recruit students that are passionate about building an esports program!

Use our [USAEL Student Recruitment Flier Template](#) to create your own recruitment fliers.
- ☐ Select which titles your school will compete in. See USAEL Competition offerings for the semester [here](#).
- ☐ Host Tryouts and decide your team rosters.
- ☐ Select students to round out your support staff. This may include (but not limited to):
 - Team Managers
 - Analysts
 - Social Media Coordinators
 - Graphic Designers
 - Broadcasters
 - Commentators
- ☐ Establish a team contract and schedule to ensure accountability and consistency.
- ☐ Share our [Esports Benefits flier](#) with parents to establish understanding and communication.



PHASE 3: LET'S PLAY!

Dive into Competition!

- ☐ (Optional) Create accounts for the student-athletes on the USAEL Learn platform. This will allow students access to curriculum via the Learn platform and competition via the Play platform.
- ☐ Register for competition.
- ☐ Create your team rosters on the USAEL Play platform.
- ☐ Submit a schedule form.
- ☐ Join the queue from Friday to Sunday to inform tournament organizers you intend to compete next week.
- ☐ Receive your matchup (Monday of competition week).
- ☐ Ensure your games and devices are updated before match time!
- ☐ Log on to the USAEL Play platform at match time.
- ☐ Set up a lobby with your opponent using the in-platform chat tool.
- ☐ Play the match!
- ☐ Report scores and repeat weekly as desired!

Supplemental Activities

- ☐ Refer to our [USAEL Calendar](#) and [Self-Hosted Events Guidebook](#) for Community Events and Professional Development opportunities.
- ☐ Join a Coaches Clinic to learn more about esports coaching and new strategies for running a scholastic esports program.
- ☐ Host a Watch Party to engage students in esports competition from a different perspective.
- ☐ Run a LAN Tournament to build community through the spirit of competition!
- ☐ Email photos or recap to our Academic Services team to earn credits toward our incentive program and unlock gift cards, coaching sessions, and more!



04

RESOURCES

Research & Advocacy

[2024 Esports Benefits Whitepaper](#)

A data-supported overview of academic esports and the academic and personal benefits that is perfect for presentations with administrators or parents.

Recruitment & Informational Fliers

[Coach Recruitment Flier Template](#)

Recruit a coach to lead the esports program!

[Student Recruitment Flier Template](#)

Capture student interest in joining an esports team!

[Parent Informational Flier Template](#)

Inform parents about what academic esports is all about!

Technical Support

[IT & Game Installation Guide](#)

Learn about all the IT requirements to get started using the USAEL platform and getting your students online for gaming!

Posters

[Esports in Universities Statistics](#)

Show off the major and scholarships statistics for collegiate esports.

[Social Emotional Skills in Esports](#)

Visualize critical personal traits that enable team success in esports.

Planning & Curriculum

[USAEL Calendar](#)

Stay up to date with all the competition and community events!

[8-Week Sample Lesson Plan](#)

Get started with an adaptable lesson plan and adjust to fit your schedule and students' needs.



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