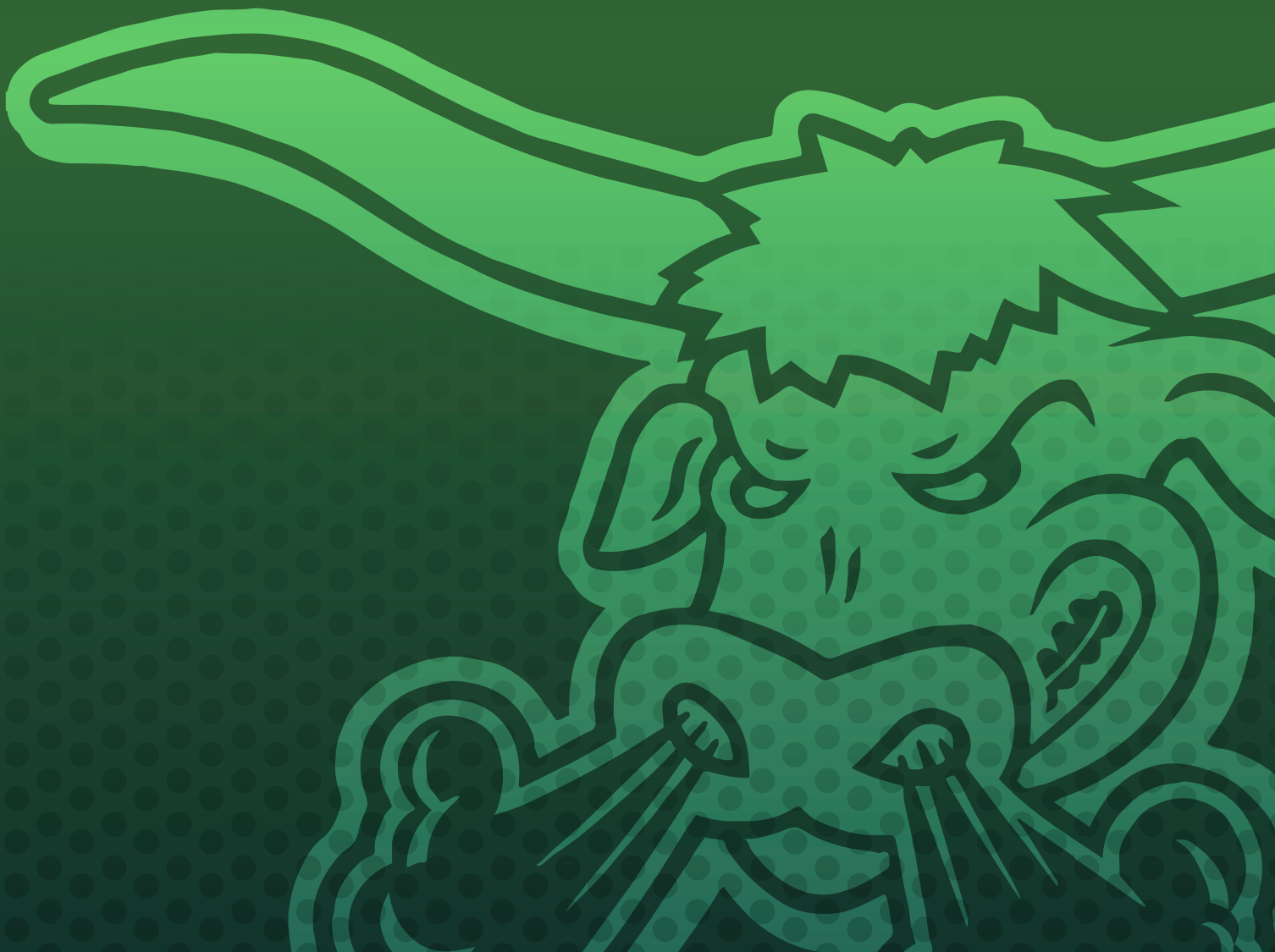# WEST FARGO HIGH SCHOOL
PACKER ESPORTS
BUILDING AN ESPORTS PROGRAM FROM THE GROUND UP

Program Initiative Developed by Jamie Odum Thompson, eSports Advisor, WFHS

WHO WE ARE & HOW WE'RE SETTING THE STAGE FOR THE FUTURE OF OUR PROGRAM IN WEST FARGO

As our school enters the world of competitive gaming with eSports, we are looking to our community to help us build our new future. My goal, as this program's advisor and coach, is to provide my students with the best opportunity to build lifelong skills. With this, we will work to make them feel integrated into, while also understanding the importance of giving back to the community. This would also set them up for more learning opportunities as they move on to higher education. Providing our students with a computer lab would be an opportunity to take a step forward into the technology field. This lab would not just be for competitive gaming, but for teachers that want to integrate VR into their lessons, and a chance for a Career Technical Education program that will let kids explore, learn about, and develop skills for IT systems and practices, along with computer engineering.

In the last few years, there has been substantial growth in the world of eSports. The World Cup for "League of Legends" fostered more viewers than the Super Bowl, peaking at 46 million concurrent viewers, for 2020. What this tells us, is that there is opportunity out there for students who game[1]. As the game's popularity grows, we will continue to see an uptick in viewership and investment opportunities. "League of Legends" stands as one of the most popular on streaming platforms, but we can see how the landscape of gaming can evolve and change over a few years when new games are released. Our current games include "League of Legends" and "Rocket League", but as we grow our program, we can see more diversity in the games being played along with the talent it brings in. As we build relationships with other schools, colleges in and outside of the state, and members within our community, we are hoping to build a solid foundation of viewers as we partner with our broadcasting program.

Our vision for our Packers eSports program is to focus on our students, give them the opportunity to take the lead on projects and learn new skills from their advisors and peers. These students will have the opportunity to develop communication, marketing, event planning, fundraising, content creation, computer engineering, and information technology ingenuity. We would want to create a lab that has a place for our gamers, a separate server area, that could keep up with games and live streaming, and a collaborative space for hands on learning. Our classroom in this space would have the students build, maintain, and support a server and network of computers. In addition, it could support the program by building computers and other machines that would help mitigate fundraising within the curriculum.

As this program's advisor, I am not just looking for talented gamers. I am looking for curious individuals that want to make a difference in our district. Being a gamer means being part of a larger community in and of itself. My students cannot be defined by traditional sports that follow gender roles. Anybody can be a gamer. We welcome any player regardless of how they identify themselves, those that are differently abled, and students from any kind of background. This would be a chance for our community partners to be part of this emerging program that can impact all our students. As we move in a direction where eSports can be streamed through video engines like Twitch and YouTube, with our students at the helm, we would have the chance to reach a wide audience that see our Packer students succeed. Every one of them has a part to play, and they can excel in whatever aspect they are passionate about — whether it be the game itself, broadcasting or the many supporting roles that come with this industry.

> ## " Esports is a family that you can count on to have your back.
>
> ### -WFHS Student, eSports Player 2021

Our secondary focus for this program would be how our players, and support staff, give back. This would be through connections with our neighboring schools, educational camps like we currently see at Minnesota State University Moorhead in their summer programs (such as Girl Code), and through mentoring our younger players on how to be respectful to each other when playing games online. We would work in partnership with our neighboring high schools, middle and elementary schools, and state universities, to create something that educates kids on being compassionate and patient with each other, and through the understanding that knowledge can come from places we least expect it to; we just need to stay curious and keep asking questions until we find the answers we seek. This curiosity will lead them down the road to creative problem solving, towards a future where they know the work involved in seeking those answers, and the means to solve them.

When looking at my current program, I am already facing the fact that I have twenty active members and only seventeen computers set up for e-gaming. We can work around staggering the days for different groups to compete, but with the anticipation of the program's growth, I see more students drifting into playing "League of Legends" whose games all are scheduled on the same day. This game also requires five person teams, opposed to "Rocket League" that only needs three. Our biggest need would include gear, and a proper server that can handle the amount of strain our gaming computer currently inflict. Having a stable network would allow for better supports for our computers to prevent lag and frame rates dropping but would also provide the additional power needed to support streaming and shout casting to our gamer audience.

As far as costs, we would be grateful for a room renovation, if something can be worked out with our administration, and a chance to get more equipment for our players. These costs could range depending on the scope of the renovation and the impact our community wants to make for our students and educators. Ideally, this space would be for not just our students, but would evolve into a hub for all those that want to learn through modern technologies. It would be a place where we can host camps, workshops for our future

students, and, potentially, for parents that just need a better handle on technology, gaming and how to keep their kids safe online. A larger build, if possible, or potential school expansion, could also have the option of naming rights, logo appearance/ads/shout-out in live commentary and casting, and brand promotion integrated into the design in accordance with West Fargo Public Schools school board policies. This kind of larger build would require a much larger time commitment to see the vision fully realized. Options could be explored to keep it student oriented and create a cooperative build with our trades building program. This would gives students a chance to build their own legacy.

For companies that wish to help but may not have the resources for a larger contribution, donations of a computer or laptop would run around $2k for the entire set up, other gaming gear (headsets, gaming chairs, monitors, etc.) and jerseys would also be an option. This would be a good fit for the $500-$50k range. More options can be explored where the object donated could carry the logo or name of whom it was donated by (as a sticker or small plaque). Any marketing tactics, such as posters, social media and wearables would also have the option for logo representation to call out specific contributions. These donations could also be distinguished by different tiers allowing higher recognition for our biggest supporters – again this would have to be in accordance with WFPS regulations. Once we are a sanctioned sport, we will have the option to look into hosting sponsored events, in which, a company would have a chance to cohost with our student team. If a company wanted to investigate donating the server/network room, we could work to navigate naming rights for that room/equipment area. The rough estimate on that would run around the $35k mark or $3500/sq meter. Donations can always be directed through our booster club program through WFHS and would qualify for 501c3 or equivalent.

Our hope in all of this is starting with the right foundation and mindset for our program. Right now, we can teach kids how to respect themselves and each other. Through learning partners like NASEF (https://www.nasef.org/learning/curriculum/), we can work on building curriculum that keeps our kids in school. Like traditional sports, our students will need to keep their grades up to play. Most of our players have stronger STEM skills because of the games they play, and the strategy involved. A lab for these students would be equivalent to a stadium for our football players. We want to build that nostalgia for our players, a place they can always call home long after they graduate. The hope is that some will make their way back to us as coaches and mentors for our new players. They can be role models for kids and demonstrate how they can succeed in their own high school and higher education journey.

When we look at how gaming impacts education, we can see a wide range of skills that can be learned from this program. We can develop curriculum that caters to an academic model. English lessons can enrich a student's ability to tell stories. Marketing can cater to entrepreneurship and selling merchandise. Along with event planning and promotion. CTE programs can cater to IT support, content creation, social media management and engagement, and promotional material creation. Looking at curriculum study provided by NASEF, we can identify four main areas that have a direct correlation to future occupations. When they break this down, we see four main target areas[2]:

STRATEGISTS

In esports, teams use strategists to compile data to improve in-game performance. Career pathways include: Performance Coaches, Data Scientists, Mathematicians, Theory Crafters, Financial Advisors and Analysts.
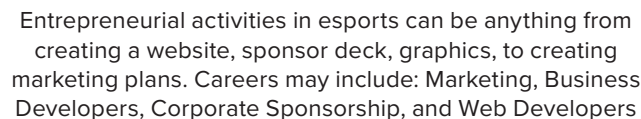
ORGANIZERS

Big events like DreamHack, leagues like LCS and OWL, and other major esports programs are only possible because of the stellar coordinators working behind-the-scenes. Careers may include: Event Planner, Team General Manager, Venue Coordinator, Project Manager, Cybersecurity Specialist, or Community Organizer.
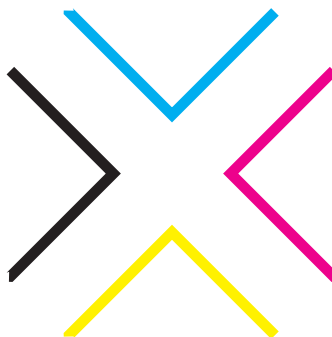
CONTENT CREATORS

Content creators help tell the story of each team, streamer, company, or organization they represent. These careers include: Journalists, Shoutcasters, Streamers, Software Developers, and Fandom Art & Media.

ENTREPRENEURS

Entrepreneurial activities in esports can be anything from creating a website, sponsor deck, graphics, to creating marketing plans. Careers may include: Marketing, Business Developers, Corporate Sponsorship, and Web Developers
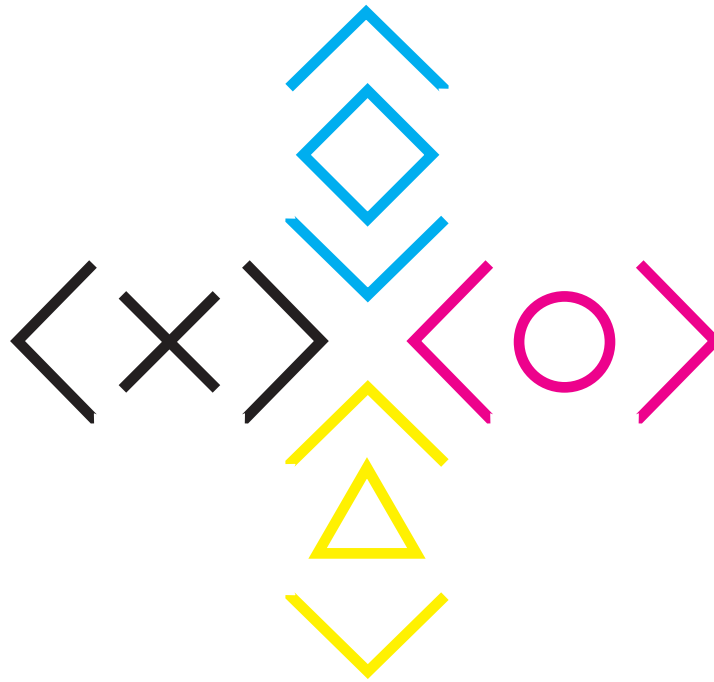
In addition to the impact these programs can make on careers, we see how organizations, like NASEF and its partners, focus on the overall wellbeing of our students:

HEALTH AND WELLNESS LEARNING

With this health and wellness initiative, NASEF is making strides to positively support and improve the health and well-being of ALL students.

Well-being is far more than just being healthy. Students who are well are confident, satisfied and have a positive outlook on their lives. They have strong relationships, feel valued and have social and emotional skills that provide the strength during challenging times. Students who have a high sense of well-being are also more successful in school and on their teams. Studies show that these students have fewer absences, are more focused and have higher achievement in school.

Making the right choices about nutrition, sleep, exercise, and friendships is challenging, and scholar gamers face additional hurdles to achieve a sense of health and wellness. Having energy, feeling connected to others, and following their passions helps students practice better, play better, and game better. Having these skills on the teams transfers to our lives and to our communities. When our scholar gamers are well, our esports ecosystem is better.

NASEF, along with its partners the Susan Samueli Integrative Health Institute, UCI Esports, Dr. Wayne Jonas, and the San Diego County Department of Education partnered to create a health and wellness framework for scholastic esports. This framework addresses four domains of youth life that reveal skills and attributes that impact health and well-being. Against the backdrop of scholastic esports, "Play Well. Be Well.", offers structure and support for activities, lesson plans and resources to help educators and scholastic esports leaders integrate a successful wellness element to their esports program.[3]

> **Esports, is something you can't just force to work you have to work with it. What I mean you can't force a team to work exactly with each other, it takes time to perfect and time to become more and more of a better person and player. It impacts the player and the community, the player is effected by the win or loss they receive, but in each game it teaches them what they can do better for their team and what they need to work on to better the team and not be the star that outshines the ones who got them that far.**
>
> **ESports it self is a community unit that is reliable to go to and hear you out. They help push you and make you strive for better and to do your best but to overall have fun. That's the impact eSports has taught me so far, if I want to be where I personally want to be I got to go to work to get there.**
>
> **-WFHS Student, eSports Player 2021**

For businesses, there are plenty of advantages to supporting kids who game. They are supporting future problem solvers and students that can actively get involved in their community while maintaining a work-life balance. Having their brand associated with eSports also opens a company up to a wider audience. This support can be seen within the school, on player gear, and through broadcasting channels. With our area being a tech-oriented career landscape, this would also appeal to kids that want to stay in the area and work with the companies that supported them while they were involved in the school. They can, essentially, become leaders and liaisons that help bridge a path with companies that want to break into this industry and engage its viewership. There is brilliance in their future as long as we guide them along the right path. I am a strong believe that these kids will do great things. By them having more opportunity at their disposal, there would be nothing that could stop them in creating wonderful things for our community.

In conclusion, we understand the value and impact a computer lab renovation would have for our students; the sense of home it will create for our gamers, but also the tools it will provide our educators. We are asking for a chance to create this dream. To create a place where you can be anybody and find success. A place where we can host charity events to help impact those in need in our community. A place where our students can do good in the world and impact the lives of others. This would be a place in our school that can be utilized year-round. We can create a lasting impact during our fall season, spring season, summer workshops and winter off-season. By our local businesses investing in us, it will create an opportunity, in our future, to make a difference and foster a positive driving force in our physical and digital community. We just ask for the opportunity to be seen, be heard and for our community to see us for who we are. We are gamers, but we are also part of this community's future. Let us show you what we can do.

References
1. Roundhill Investments Team, "ESPORTS VIEWERSHIP VS. SPORTS IN 2020" (Updated as of September 25, 2020) https://www.roundhillinvestments.com/research/esports/esports-viewership-vs-sports
2. NASEF, "Career Pathways" (2021) https://www.nasef.org/learning/career-pathways/
3. NASEF, "Health and Wellness Learning" (2021) https://www.nasef.org/learning/wellness/

HOW THIS PROGRAM IMPACTS OUR STUDENTS

When asked what eSports has meant to them:

"ESports is a family that you can count on to have your back. You start to learn people and how they are when you get to know them and play and have fun. Overall, eSports is something I won't be able to forget, the fun memories and overall enjoyment of it."

"ESports has given me something fun to do after school and has been a fun and challenging way to experience gaming and to see competitive gaming from different perspectives."

When asked how they feel eSports has or can benefit their time at WFHS?

"It is another family that no matter what you can depend on. They can help you out when you need it and overall listen to you when others won't."

"ESports can really change your view of the game and give you more of a team-oriented stance."

About the impact playing competitively had on their perception of video games at school?

"Make me want to play better, learn more about the game, that school isn't just hard work, and that I can enjoy school."

"They are fun and try to make you better when you have to strive to push your limits and know what you can and can't do in game and in reality."

"Playing competitively at school really changes the game, because you know their are other schools competing and it makes it feel more real."

When asked what skills they feel like they are gaining by being a part of this program:

"I have definitely learned to work with others in this program. Video games are played completely differently when both sides have organized teams and communication systems. Being successful in high school eSports isn't about raw skill, but rather collaboration. The program has taught me to think of what is best for the team, rather than just my character. I've learned to apply this outside of the program when I'm working in a group to ensure the success of the team. The selflessness required to succeed in this program makes great team members and prepares students for collaboration in college and the workplace."

"Communication, trust, friendship, overall many needed skills to be used both in school and outside to impact your future and overall give you a better chance than most would think."

"ESports really improves your sense of teamwork, because there is no way one player can win on their own."

From their perspective:

"I have really enjoyed experiencing this club and I would like to see where it goes in the future but there is also so much more opportunity in eSports. The first thing is the school should consider trying more variety of games because there are lots of games that are eSports titles that the school could try. Overall, I have really enjoyed this club and I look forward to seeing where it goes in the future."