

4 Surprising Benefits of Gaming for K–12 Students

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Classroom

Administrators and parents may be uneasy about the addition of video games in school, but experts have found new evidence that esports can help students grow.

by

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Historically, many adults have derided video games as a waste of time at best, and actively destructive at worst. But research shows there may be benefits to conquering virtual bad guys and dunking on on-screen friends.

When Saddleback Valley Unified School District in California introduced esports to their program, administrators saw an **increase in teamwork and engagement from participating students**.

It's all about creativity and collaboration," says Ron Pirayoff, director of secondary education for Saddleback Valley USD. "Those are tenets that we're trying to support every day in all of our subject areas. I look at esports as a vehicle for engaging kids. It's really been a way for us to reach a different population."

Esports also encourages **more social engagement from students** who might have trouble fitting in.

“I can’t tell you how many teachers and parents have written in about students completely turning around, coming out of their shell, smiling and having a good time,” says Mason Mullenieux, CEO of the High School Esports League.



4 Ways Esports Improves K–12 Skills

1. **BETTER SPATIAL ATTENTION:** One study found that playing action video games improves the ability to locate a target stimulus among distractions – a test that predicts driving ability. A meta-analysis of 111 video game–related studies recently published in the *Psychological Bulletin* found **10 to 30 hours of gameplay** can help students improve their spatial cognition and multitasking. The report’s primary author, Benoit Bediou, points out that different games come with different benefits. While a puzzle game might help more with spatial awareness, a fast-paced action game could be more beneficial for quick decision-making.
2. **ENHANCED PROBLEM-SOLVING:** When adolescents reported playing strategic video games in one long-term study, they tended to improve both their problem-solving abilities and their school grades the following year. Game developer and researcher Jane McGonigal says that because gamers spend a majority of their time failing (about **80 percent**, she says), they are encouraged to develop alternative thinking strategies, which are applicable to real-world situations.
3. **PRACTICE, PATIENCE AND PERSEVERANCE:** The Association for Middle Level Education points out that video games often require kids to perfect their strategies and methods of attack through repetitious trial and error. “Delays of gratification have been correlated to better study behaviors and decreased drug usage,” the association notes.

4. **INCREASED PHYSICAL ACTIVITY:** A Harvard study showed – somewhat counterintuitively – that kids who played sports video games were frequently motivated to take up athletics in real life. And some games, such as Pokémon GO, require participants to move around in the real world.

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