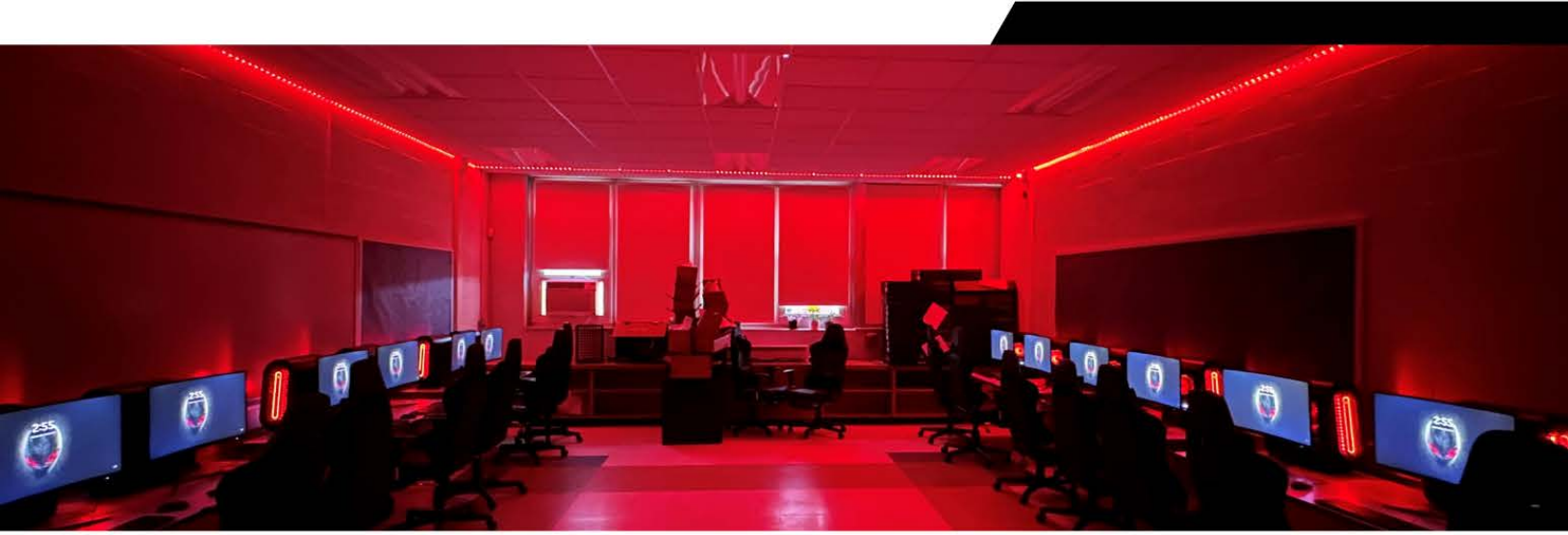


# ESPORTS

Connetquot High School's Journey Into The World of Gaming



## The Beginning

In the summer of 2022, we began exploring the possibility of offering an Esports class at Connetquot High School. All I knew about Esports at the time was that video games were popular among teens and competitive gaming was a growing industry. I'd seen Esports broadcast on ESPN and other mainstream media outlets, so I knew there was potential for our students to gain something meaningful from the class.

I met with a few companies that offered Esports curricula in an attempt to find the right fit to meet the needs of our students. After an initial meeting with High School Esports League/Generation Esports, I knew we had found our partner. They confirmed what we had expected, that Esports can prepare students for various jobs in this booming industry, including programming, management, production, streaming, sales, human resources, engineering, and many more. In short, you don't have to be a professional gamer to make a profession out of gaming.

But what we learned next is what helped us commit to building a full-scale Esports program. Gaming, as it turns out, provides benefits to students way beyond the scope of our expectations.

Coming out of the COVID pandemic, educators nationwide sought ways to help students make social connections, boost self-efficacy, and rebuild their self-esteem. When done properly, Esports does all of this. Armed with this information and a desire to help our students reach their full potential, the Connetquot Esports Team was born.

## What Is Esports? And Why Connetquot?

Esports is organized video gaming where players compete against one another, often in a team environment. And research shows students perform better in the classroom when they feel connected to their school and community. So in creating a school-sponsored team, we could foster this connection and give our students a source of pride by representing Connetquot High School in a competitive gaming environment.

With the help of Mrs. Christina Poppe, Mrs. Louise Burger, Mrs. Alise Pulliam, and our IT staff, we immediately started laying the groundwork for the team. We outfitted a lab with gaming computers, monitors, chairs, and keyboards. We searched for and found two incredible managers, Mr. Jonathan Agatstein and Mr. Kevin Heyman, both of whose impact on the program's success cannot be overstated.



Then the recruitment of players began. There was an anticipation that levels of student interest would be high, which proved to be true. Close to seventy students attended our Esports informational meeting, confirming our belief that this was something our students wanted. Our managers then explained to students the commitment required to be part of the team. Esports would function like any other sport, with practices multiple days a week after school and an expectation that team members would be present at all games and practices. Everyone needed to be all in.

### The 2023 Season

On Monday, January 30, 2023, the Connetquot Esports team held its first practice. Team members selected the games they would play, signed Codes of Conduct, and of course, played games. Mr. Agatstein and Mr. Heyman determined which players would compete on which teams, and one week later, the season began.

Connetquot Esports joined the High School Esports League (HSEL) Spring Major and competed in two team games, Valorant and Rocket League. Valorant is a team-based first-person tactical hero game set in the near future. Rocket League, simply put, is 3-on-3 car soccer. We had three Valorant teams, which functioned like varsity, JV, and freshman teams, and one Rocket League Team. Three additional students competed in individual games, two in Minecraft and one in Chess.

The teams played one game weekly at 4 pm throughout the regular season and practiced from 3:00-5:00 pm on non-game days. All games and practices were held in the Esports lab.

So how did we do? Better than any of us could have expected.

Varsity Valorant completed the regular season with an undefeated 8-0 record, good for the #2 overall seed in the HSEL East Region. The team won its first playoff game in the Championship Bracket before being eliminated in the Round of 16. JV Valorant qualified for the “Redemption Road” playoff bracket, which consisted of teams ranked #33-64 in the East. They went on an impressive run, making it all the way to the semifinals of their tournament.

Our Rocket League team also had an incredible season, winning many of their games in dominating fashion and qualifying for the HSEL East Region Championship bracket.

## Looking Forward

The winning was great, and watching our students build the foundation of a strong program was incredible. But the real success of Esports goes well beyond wins and losses. What we’re most proud of is the dedication the students showed. They came to practice every day, worked together, demonstrated sportsmanship, and represented their school and community with integrity. All the while, they built leadership and teamwork skills that will help them find success throughout high school and beyond.

Next year, we’re looking forward to competing in the HSEL Fall and Spring Majors and offering a full-year Esports course for business and computer science credit.

