MiHSEF School and Coach Guidebook

2025-2026

Complete Guide to Starting and Sustaining Your Esports Program

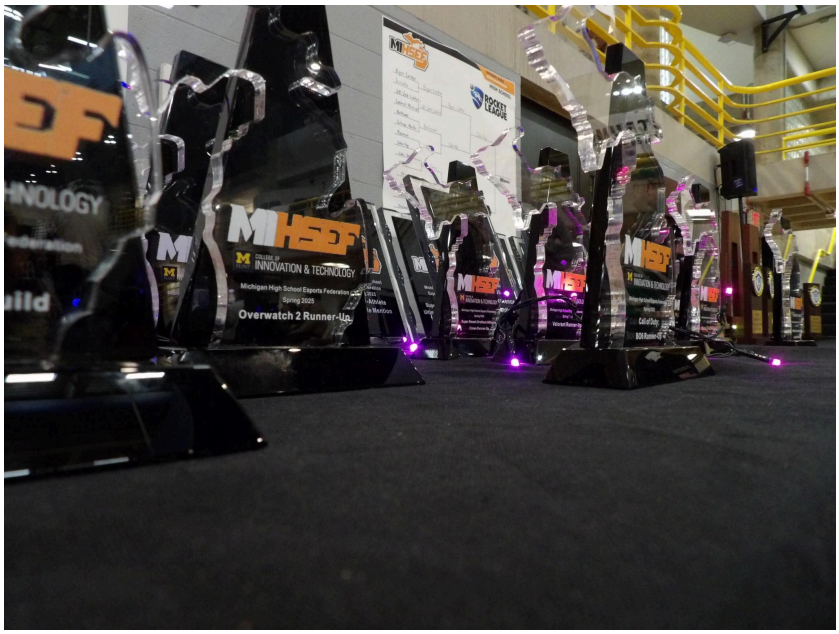
Table of Contents

Introduction: Why Esports and MiHSEF?

Esports (competitive video gaming) is one of the fastest-growing activities in schools, engaging students in new ways. Programs like the Michigan High School Esports Federation (MiHSEF) provide organized competitions where students develop teamwork, communication, and technical skills. In fact, schools have observed that esports participation can boost student engagement – MiHSEF reports improved attendance and grades among esports students. Beyond academics, esports opens pathways to college scholarships and STEM careers.

MiHSEF is Michigan's free-to-join, educator-run esports league for high schools and middle schools. They host both fall and spring seasons with a wide variety of games and the state's largest in-person scholastic esports events. This guide will help you start a school esports program focused on high school, with notes on adapting for middle or even elementary levels. We'll cover how to structure your team, choose games, set up equipment (with budget-friendly options and recommended specs), join MiHSEF competitions, coach effectively, and sustain your program from year 1 through year 10.

Note: While elementary esports programs are not yet common, many of the principles here apply at scaled-down levels – focusing on fun, learning, and age-appropriate games.



Program Structure and School Support

Starting an esports program requires a solid foundation and buy-in from your school community. Begin by securing support from administrators and staff. Schedule a meeting with your principal or activities director to explain the benefits of esports for students (teamwork, STEM engagement, inclusivity, etc.). Emphasize that an esports team can draw in students who might not join traditional sports, and it can be run at relatively low cost compared to athletics.

Next, identify a coach or advisor – typically a teacher or staff member. This adult will supervise practices and matches, manage the team's logistics, and serve as the liaison with MiHSEF. If you're reading this, you might be that new coach! Don't worry – you don't need to be a gaming expert. What's important is the ability to organize, encourage students, and uphold school values. It helps to connect with any existing gaming or technology clubs in your school; they can be a great starting point for recruiting players.

Set up your team as an official school activity. Decide if esports will be a club or a varsity sport (some schools award varsity letters for esports). Work with your athletic director or club coordinator to ensure you follow any required procedures (permission slips, grade checks, codes of conduct, etc.). Plan where the team will meet for practices – for example, a computer lab or library that can be reserved after school. Also involve your IT department early: you'll need their help to ensure gaming computers, school networks, and internet connections are ready for online play. (They may need to adjust firewalls or provide wired connections for stable, low-latency gaming.)

Finally, establish a routine and structure similar to other school teams. Determine practice days (e.g. two afternoons a week) and make a schedule. Outline roles like team captain or co-captains, who can help lead warm-ups or strategy sessions. Create a student code of conduct emphasizing respect, inclusivity, and sportsmanship – both in-game and in-person. By laying this groundwork, you set the tone that the esports program is a serious, positive activity within the school community.

Recruiting Students and Building Teams

With a framework in place, the next step is getting students on board. Start by spreading the word: announce the new esports program through school newsletters, morning announcements, social media, and flyers in hallways. Emphasize that all skill levels are welcome – you might be surprised how many students have been hoping for an esports team. Consider holding an informational meeting or a casual gaming night to gauge interest.

If interest is high, you can hold tryouts or evaluations to form your initial team. Make this process fun and inclusive: the goal is to identify committed players for competition while engaging as many students as possible. For example, you might set up friendly matches in a popular game like Rocket League during tryouts and see which students work well together. Students who aren't yet ready for the competitive team could still join as club members, helping with roles like team streaming, managing social media, or just practicing to improve. Many successful programs have a varsity team and a junior varsity or club squad to involve more students.

Be mindful of game selection during recruitment (more on choosing games in the next section). Some students may be interested in certain titles. Try to gather input – you can use a simple survey to ask, "Which games would you like to compete in?" This helps ensure you pick games that excite your student body. It's usually best to start with one or two game titles in the first season, then expand as you get more experience.

Also, promote the inclusive nature of esports: it's co-ed and can involve students from diverse backgrounds and skill sets. Emphasize teamwork and learning. You can attract not only players, but also students interested in related areas like graphic design (to make team logos or stream overlays), IT (to help manage hardware), or content creation (to stream matches or make highlight videos). Building a culture where everyone's contribution is valued will make your program more sustainable.

Choosing Games for Your Program

Choosing which games to compete in is a crucial early decision. MiHSEF supports a broad game list at the high school level – including team-based games like Rocket League, Valorant, Overwatch 2, Apex Legends, League of Legends, and Rainbow Six Siege, as well as sports and fighting games like NBA2K, Madden, FIFA, Super Smash Bros., Mario Kart, and more. Don't feel pressured to offer every title; focus on a few that make sense for your school's interest, budget, and age group.

Consider age appropriateness and school policy when picking games. Some games are teen-rated or mature-rated, which might be fine for high schoolers but not acceptable for younger students. Generally, middle schools stick to games rated E (Everyone) or E10+; for example, MiHSEF's middle school league features Rocket League, Mario Kart, Super Smash Bros., and Brawlhalla – titles that are exciting yet age-appropriate. Elementary programs (if you introduce one) should focus on very family-friendly games – think Minecraft, Rocket League, Mario Kart, etc., rather than shooters. High school teams, meanwhile, can include more competitive teen-rated games like Fortnite, Overwatch 2, or Valorant, assuming your school administration approves. Always check the ESRB ratings and get parental buy-in if needed.

It's also wise to factor in team size and logistics for each game. If you only have a handful of interested students, a game like Rocket League (3 players per team) or Smash Bros. (individual or small squad format) might be easier to start with than a 5v5 game. On the other hand, if you have a large group, games like Valorant or League of Legends (5 players plus substitutes) can involve more students, and you could field multiple squads. Knowing the roster size required is important for planning.

Another consideration is platform and hardware requirements. Some games are cross-platform (PC/console), while others are exclusive to certain platforms. For instance, Super Smash Bros. and Mario Kart require Nintendo Switch consoles, whereas League of Legends only runs on PC. Rocket League and Fortnite can run on almost anything (PC or console), which makes them versatile choices. When starting out, it's perfectly fine to start with the equipment you have. If your school has a computer lab with moderately powered PCs, choose games that those PCs can handle (perhaps League of Legends or Rocket League, which have low to moderate

requirements). If you have access to consoles (or students can bring their own consoles from home under supervision), you could leverage those for titles like Smash. It's often best to start small with available resources before investing big in new hardware.

Tip: It can be helpful to select a mix of game genres to appeal to different students. For example, you might run one team in a "sports" game like Rocket League or NBA2K and another in a "strategy" game like League of Legends. That said, don't overextend in Year 1 – it's better to do one or two games well than five games chaotically. You can always add more titles in future seasons as your program grows.

Equipment and Facilities

One of the biggest questions new esports programs face is: What equipment do we need, and how much will it cost? The good news is that you can start small and upgrade over time. Below we outline the essential equipment, from gaming PCs and consoles to peripherals, along with minimum vs. recommended specs and budget tiers to fit different budgets.

Gaming PCs – Minimum and Recommended Specs {#gaming-pcs}

For PC-based esports games, you'll want computers that can run popular titles smoothly. Here are some baseline guidelines for minimum and recommended PC specs:

Minimum Esports PC Specs: At least a quad-core Intel i5 or AMD Ryzen 5 processor, around 8–16 GB of RAM, and a dedicated graphics card equivalent to an NVIDIA GTX 1050 Ti or better. These specs should run less demanding esports titles (like League of Legends, Rocket League) at low to medium settings and acceptable frame rates. For storage, a small SSD (solid state drive) is strongly recommended for faster load times (even a 256 GB SSD paired with a larger HDD for storage can work, though a 1TB SSD is ideal).

Recommended Esports PC Specs: For competitive play and to handle newer games at high frame rates, aim for an 8-core Intel i7 or AMD Ryzen 7, 16 GB (or 32 GB) of RAM, and a modern GPU like an NVIDIA RTX 3060 Ti (or AMD equivalent). This level of hardware can run most popular esports games on medium-high settings at 1080p with high FPS. It also provides some future-proofing as games evolve. Storage should be a fast SSD (NVMe if possible) for the operating system and games – ~1TB SSD is a good standard.

Of course, not every school can afford high-end PCs right away. Many programs start by using what they have and upgrading gradually. If your school already has lab PCs, check their specs – it might only take a cheap GPU upgrade or more RAM to make them game-ready. (MiHSEF and other leagues often publish minimum system requirements for each game; for example, League of Legends can run on very low-end PCs, whereas a game like Valorant needs a bit more horsepower.)

Specific PC Recommendations by Budget

Note: Prices are approximate as of early 2025 and may vary. Always check current pricing and availability.

Budget Tier ($500-800)

Prebuilt Options:

- **HP Pavilion Gaming Desktop TG01** (~$599-699)
  - AMD Ryzen 5 5600G, 8GB RAM, GTX 1650/RTX 3050
  - Available at: HP Education Store, Best Buy Education
- **Dell Inspiron Gaming Desktop** (~$649-749)
  - Intel i5-12400F, 8GB RAM, GTX 1650 Super
  - Available at: Dell for Education, Amazon

Custom Build Option (~$650-750):

- CPU: AMD Ryzen 5 5600 (~$130)
- GPU: NVIDIA GTX 1660 Super (~$180-220)
- RAM: 16GB DDR4 (~$45)
- Motherboard: B450/B550 (~$70)
- Storage: 500GB NVMe SSD (~$35)
- Case + PSU: (~$80-100)
- Available at: Newegg, Amazon, Micro Center

Mid-Range Tier ($800-1,200)

Prebuilt Options:

- **ASUS ROG Strix GT15** (~$899-999)
  - Intel i5-12400F, 16GB RAM, RTX 3060
  - Available at: Best Buy, Amazon, Newegg
- **CyberPowerPC Gamer Xtreme** (~$849-949)
  - Intel i7-12700F, 16GB RAM, RTX 3060
  - Available at: Amazon, Best Buy

Custom Build Option (~$950-1150):

- CPU: AMD Ryzen 5 7600 (~$200)

- GPU: NVIDIA RTX 3060 Ti (~$350-400)
- RAM: 16GB DDR5 (~$70)
- Motherboard: B650 (~$130)
- Storage: 1TB NVMe SSD (~$60)
- Case + PSU: (~$120-150)

High-End Tier ($1,200-2,000)

Prebuilt Options:

- **Alienware Aurora R15** (~$1,399-1,699) *Education pricing available*
    - Intel i7-13700F, 16GB RAM, RTX 4060 Ti
    - Available at: Dell Education
- **Origin PC Neuron** (~$1,499-1,799)
    - AMD Ryzen 7 7700X, 32GB RAM, RTX 4070
    - Available at: Origin PC

Custom Build Option (~$1,400-1,700):

- CPU: Intel i7-13700K or AMD Ryzen 7 7700X (~$350)
- GPU: NVIDIA RTX 4070 (~$550-600)
- RAM: 32GB DDR5 (~$120)
- Motherboard: Z790/X670 (~$200)
- Storage: 1TB NVMe SSD (~$70)
- Case + PSU: (~$150-200)

Monitor Recommendations

For competitive esports, monitors are crucial for performance and player comfort.

Budget Monitors ($100-200)

- **ASUS VA24EHE 24" 1080p 75Hz** (~$89-109)
    - Good for casual gaming, budget-friendly
    - Available at: Amazon, Best Buy
- **AOC 24G2 24" 1080p 144Hz** (~$149-179)
    - Excellent budget gaming monitor with high refresh rate

    - Available at: Newegg, Amazon

Mid-Range Monitors ($200-350)

- **ASUS VG248QE 24" 1080p 144Hz** (~$199-249)
    - Popular esports monitor, widely used in competitions
    - Available at: Best Buy, Amazon
- **BenQ ZOWIE XL2411K 24" 1080p 144Hz** (~$249-299)
    - Designed specifically for esports, excellent for competitive play
    - Available at: Amazon, Newegg

High-End Monitors ($350-600)

- **ASUS ROG Swift PG259QN 25" 1080p 360Hz** (~$449-549)
    - Professional-grade esports monitor
    - Available at: Amazon, Best Buy
- **BenQ ZOWIE XL2566K 25" 1080p 360Hz** (~$499-599)
    - Tournament-standard monitor used in professional esports
    - Available at: Amazon, BenQ Direct

Console Alternatives

Consoles can be cost-effective alternatives or supplements to PC setups, especially for certain games.

Nintendo Switch ($299-349)

Perfect for Super Smash Bros., Mario Kart, and other Nintendo exclusives.

- **Nintendo Switch OLED** (~$349)
- **Nintendo Switch (Standard)** (~$299)
- **Additional Controllers:** Pro Controllers ($69 each), GameCube Controllers ($29 each)
- Available at: Nintendo Store, Best Buy, Amazon, Target

PlayStation 5 ($499-549)

Great for sports games (FIFA, NBA2K, Madden) and some competitive titles.

- **PlayStation 5 Standard** (~$499)
- **PlayStation 5 Digital** (~$399)
- **Additional Controllers:** DualSense (~$69 each)
- **PlayStation Plus subscription** required for online play (~$80/year)
- Available at: PlayStation Direct, Best Buy, Amazon, GameStop

Xbox Series X/S ($299-499)

Excellent for sports games, Fortnite, Rocket League, and cross-platform titles.

- **Xbox Series X** (~$499)
- **Xbox Series S** (~$299)
- **Additional Controllers:** Xbox Wireless Controllers (~$59 each)
- **Xbox Game Pass Ultimate** recommended (~$17/month, includes online play)
- Available at: Microsoft Store, Best Buy, Amazon, Target

Additional Equipment Needed

Peripherals for PC Gaming:

- **Gaming Keyboards:** Corsair K70 ($99-149), Logitech G Pro X ($129)
- **Gaming Mice:** Logitech G Pro X Superlight ($149), Razer DeathAdder V3 ($89)
- **Gaming Headsets:** HyperX Cloud II ($99), SteelSeries Arctis 7 ($149)

Furniture and Setup:

- **Gaming Desks:** IKEA Bekant ($80-120), Flexispot E7 Standing Desk ($299-399)
- **Gaming Chairs:** Secretlab Titan Evo ($439), Herman Miller Sayl ($295)

Networking:

- **Wired Ethernet connections recommended** for stable, low-latency gaming
- **Unmanaged Gigabit Switch** if more ports needed (~$25-50)

Budget Planning Guide

Starter Setup (1-4 Gaming Stations): $2,000-5,000

- 2-4 budget PCs or consoles
- Basic monitors and peripherals
- Minimal furniture/setup

Established Program (6-10 Gaming Stations): $8,000-15,000

- Mix of mid-range PCs and consoles
- Quality monitors and peripherals
- Proper gaming furniture
- Network infrastructure

Premium Program (10+ Gaming Stations): $20,000-40,000

- High-end gaming PCs
- Professional monitors
- Premium peripherals and furniture
- Dedicated esports lab/arena setup

Money-Saving Tips:

- Start with existing school computers and upgrade gradually
- Look for education discounts (Dell, HP, Lenovo often offer 10-15% off)
- Consider refurbished equipment for monitors and peripherals
- Partner with local businesses for sponsorship or equipment donations
- Apply for technology grants and STEM education funding

Joining MiHSEF and Competition Structure

Once you have a team and equipment, you'll want to register and compete in the MiHSEF league (and/or other leagues if you choose). Joining MiHSEF is straightforward and free – simply sign up on the MiHSEF website (a school staff member will create an account and register your school). MiHSEF has no fees for schools or students; it's run by volunteers and passionate educators statewide. You can even participate in multiple leagues concurrently – MiHSEF places no restrictions on schools also joining other scholastic esports leagues or tournaments. However, many Michigan schools find that MiHSEF offers all they need: regular season matches, well-organized brackets, and statewide championships.

Season Structure

Fall Season (Sep–Dec): Teams register in early fall. Matches are usually played weekly online after school. MiHSEF may use a platform (like LeagueOS) to schedule matches and report scores – coaches will need to familiarize themselves with posting results and communicating with opposing schools (usually via the platform or Discord). Top teams from the regular season qualify for Fall State Championships, which MiHSEF often holds as an in-person event in late fall. For example, in Fall 2024 the state finals were held at UM–Flint with over 400 players competing!

Spring Season (Jan–May): Similar structure with weekly matches. Spring seasons may include some different game titles or new tournaments. The Spring Championships conclude the season, again often in person (MiHSEF's spring finals are a big draw).

Middle School League: MiHSEF runs a parallel middle school league with its own seasonal schedule, usually featuring fewer titles and a shorter season. The middle school competitions are typically more low-key, focusing on learning and fun, but they often get their own playoff brackets or festival-style events.

Special Events: MiHSEF partners with colleges and organizations to host invitational tournaments and live events throughout the year (for example, invitational tournaments at local colleges, or exhibition matches at sports events). Keep an eye on MiHSEF's announcements –

these events are great opportunities for students to experience LAN tournaments and meet the broader community.

Community Resources

When you've joined MiHSEF, you gain access to their community resources. There are often coach meetings, webinars or summits (e.g. coaching workshops), and active Discord or Slack channels where coaches help each other. Don't hesitate to ask questions – Michigan's scholastic esports scene is known for being welcoming and collaborative. As one coach's testimonial puts it, MiHSEF feels like a "closely knit... community" despite its growth.

Competition Format

Most MiHSEF matches are played online from your school. Games have set start times and days, those are given before the season starts, then teams join a custom lobby or game match online. Rescheduling is optional and encouraged as early as possible. As a coach, you'll supervise to ensure competitive integrity and sportsmanship. After the games, results are reported to the league platform. If issues like forfeits or technical problems arise, MiHSEF staff assist. For playoffs or finals, be prepared to potentially travel to a live venue if your team qualifies – these events are highlights for students (often held at a college or arena with spectators, live broadcasts, etc.).

Finally, ensure your players understand the values of the league: MiHSEF emphasizes preparation, communication, and the ability to handle success and failure gracefully. Reinforce that even though they're playing video games, they represent your school and are expected to show respect to opponents and follow rules. This is where your role as coach is crucial.

Coaching Tips and Team Management

Coaching an esports team combines elements of traditional sports coaching with some unique twists. Here are some tips for new esports coaches in a school setting:

Learn the Games (but Lean on Student Expertise)

Familiarize yourself with the basics of the games your team plays – know the objectives, the lingo, and watch a few YouTube tutorials or live matches to understand strategies. That said, your student players may have years of experience and deep game knowledge. Embrace a mindset of facilitator and mentor rather than "head strategist." Encourage students to lead film review sessions or teach each other advanced techniques. Your job is to guide them in teamwork, discipline, and learning from losses, much like a traditional coach.

Establish Practice Structure

Treat practice seriously. A typical 1.5–2 hour practice might include warm-ups (perhaps an aim trainer or quick reaction drills for FPS games, or casual matches to get focused), followed by scrimmages or drills, and then a wrap-up discussion. Set clear objectives for practice – e.g. "today we will work on communication and callouts," or "we're practicing a specific strategy or play." After scrimmages or matches, do a debrief: what went well, what to improve. If possible, record matches or use replay features so the team can review critical moments later. This reflection process is where a lot of learning happens.

Foster Teamwork and Positive Culture

As a coach, insist on good sportsmanship and communication. Unsportsmanlike behavior (trash-talking, raging at teammates, etc.) should be addressed immediately. Many teams create a team charter or rules of conduct. Consider implementing things like a "GG rule" where after every match (win or lose) players must type or say "good game" to opponents. Encourage experienced players to help newbies. Some successful programs have a culture where varsity players mentor the JV or middle school players – this can be powerful for building community. Reinforce that the goal is constant improvement and fun, not just winning at all costs.

Time Management and Academics

Students might be willing to play games for 6 hours straight, but as a coach you should set boundaries. Limit formal practices to reasonable lengths (and perhaps number of days per week) so students don't burn out or neglect schoolwork. Emphasize that academics come first. You can require a certain GPA for participation (similar to athletics eligibility) or do grade check-ins. Many esports athletes find renewed motivation in school because they want to stay eligible to play – use that as positive leverage. Also, coordinate with parents, letting them know practice and match schedules and that you are monitoring students' well-being.

Utilize Student Leadership

Appointing a team captain or captains can help share responsibility. Captains can run portions of practice, lead team discussions, and be a bridge between players and coach. Rotate leadership roles to give more students the opportunity to build those skills. Likewise, if you have students interested in areas like broadcasting or social media, let them take charge of streaming your matches or managing a Twitter account for the team (with appropriate oversight). This makes your program more than just players sitting at screens – it becomes a holistic club where multiple talents shine.

Continue Learning (Coach Included)

The esports landscape changes quickly – new game patches, new titles, evolving strategies. Encourage your players to keep learning (watching Twitch or YouTube guides of top players, reading patch notes). And as a coach, plug into resources yourself: attend any coaching clinics or webinars (MiHSEF and other organizations often host these), join online forums or Discords for scholastic esports coaches, and share experiences. You'll find a community of educators who exchange practice drills, motivational tactics, and solutions to common problems (like how to deal with a toxic but talented player, or how to convince your school to fund more PCs!). Coaching esports is a learning journey for you as well – be open to adapting and trying new approaches.

Sustaining and Growing Your Program

Launching your esports program is a huge step – but how do you keep it running year after year, and even expand it? Sustainability comes down to resources, support, and continuous improvement.

Funding and Budget

After the initial excitement, you'll need to secure ongoing funding for equipment maintenance, game licenses, and possibly travel or event costs. Many programs tap into a variety of sources:

School Budget: Some schools allocate funds for esports under athletics or technology. If you can show strong student participation and benefits (increased engagement, etc.), administrators may justify an annual budget line.

Grants: Look for grants that target STEM, technology in education, or extracurricular engagement. For example, federal funding like Title IV grants or local tech initiative grants can sometimes be used for esports gear and curriculum. In Michigan, there have been small grant programs and initiatives (sometimes through regional educational service agencies or STEM organizations) to seed new esports clubs.

Sponsorships and Donations: Engage your community and local businesses. A local computer store might donate a PC or offer discounts. Parents and alumni may contribute through booster clubs or crowdfunding if they see the program's positive impact. MiHSEF itself is a non-profit and sometimes can connect schools with partner opportunities, but it's mainly up to schools to fund their teams. Even a simple fundraiser (like selling school esports t-shirts or running a gaming tournament fundraiser) can help cover costs.

Maintaining Equipment

Treat your PCs and consoles well to prolong their life. Teach students basic care: no eating/drinking over keyboards, how to properly shut down, and keeping the area clean. Work with your IT department on a plan for software updates and security (e.g. making sure games are updated and PCs have appropriate permissions to install them, but also keeping things

safe/secure on the school network). Plan for periodic upgrades – for example, maybe each year you add one new PC or upgrade one GPU, so you have a rotation rather than everything becoming obsolete at once.

Continuity of Leadership

A program can falter if the champion coach or initial student leaders leave without replacements ready. To avoid this, build a pipeline of leadership. If you're the only coach, try to recruit a co-advisor in the school (even a tech-savvy volunteer or an enthusiastic teacher) so more staff are familiar with the program. Among students, start a tradition of older players mentoring the younger. For example, if you have juniors and seniors on the team, have them train sophomores or freshmen to take over roles like team captain or stream coordinator in the future. Document your processes – keep a binder or digital folder with important info (accounts, league contacts, practice drills, etc.) that someone new could use to continue the program if personnel changes.

Integrating with School Culture

To really thrive long-term, esports should become an accepted part of your school's culture. Promote your team's achievements just like you would for other sports: morning announcements for big wins, players wearing team jerseys or shirts on match days, perhaps pep rally shout-outs. Invite teachers and administrators to watch a match or a recording – when they see the teamwork and skill involved, they often become strong supporters. You could also involve the esports team in community service or school events (e.g. helping with tech at school functions, or running a gaming station at the school carnival). The more visible and valued the program is, the easier it will be to sustain.

Expand Opportunities

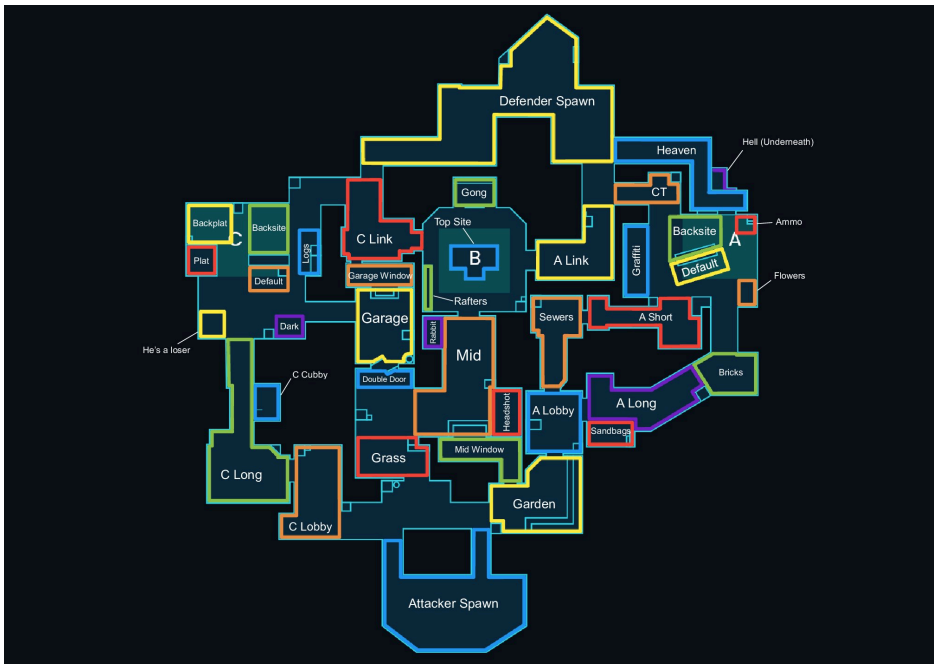
As your program grows, look for ways to offer more to students. This could mean adding new game titles to include different genres, or starting a middle school feeder program (perhaps an after-school esports club at the middle school that then flows into your high school team). You might partner with other departments – for example, the English department could involve esports in a journalism class (students writing match reports), or the computer science teacher might let esports students do a project on game design. Some schools even create an esports

elective class or use esports to spark learning in subjects like math and social-emotional learning.

Networking and External Opportunities

Leverage MiHSEF's connections and the wider scholastic esports network (like ISEA) to find opportunities for your students. These can include college recruiting showcases, scholarship information, and summer esports camps. Many colleges in Michigan and nearby now have esports teams; invite those college teams to scrim with your students or speak about college life. Keeping an eye on the horizon for your players (like college scholarships or careers in esports, IT, or media) will motivate you to keep the program thriving. MiHSEF notes that they partner with colleges and even national esports platforms to create pathways for students – plug your team into those pathways.

In summary, sustainability is about gradually building capacity – a little more funding, a few more supporters, incremental upgrades, and a strong culture. With that approach, your esports program won't be a short-lived experiment, but a lasting, positive fixture in your school.



Year-by-Year Roadmap: From Launch to Long-Term Success

Every esports program evolves over time. Here's a year-by-year roadmap with some goals and focus areas, to help you plan for growth from the first year through the fifth year and beyond:

Year 1: Laying the Foundation

Focus on **getting started small and strong**. Recruit a core group of students and maybe compete in one game title for a trial season (e.g. join MiHSEF's spring season with a Rocket League team). Acquire whatever basic equipment you can (even if it's just a couple of decent PCs or consoles) and run practices to establish routines. Priority this year is **building interest and proving concept** – show your school that students are excited and that matches run smoothly. Don't worry about win/loss record; success is measured by participation and learning. Use this year to identify student leaders and gauge what additional games or resources might be needed.

Year 2: Expanding Participation

After a successful pilot, aim to **grow the program's size and offerings**. You might add a second game title or a JV team. For instance, if you did Rocket League last year, maybe introduce a Smash Bros or Valorant team this year if interest and hardware allow. Increase your equipment if possible: perhaps you secured funds to buy a couple more PCs or another console. Work on formalizing support – maybe this is the year you convince the school to allocate a small budget or officially recognize esports as a school team. Also, start involving more stakeholders: a second teacher coach, parent volunteers (for event chaperoning or fundraising), etc. The goal of Year 2 is to **double down on engagement** – more students involved, more games, more support.

Year 3: Competitive and Program Development

By the third year, your program can transition from "new club" to an **established team**. This might be when you start seeing competitive results – with two years of experience, your players

have improved and you could make deeper playoff runs. It's a great time to **host a school esports event**: for example, organize a friendly tournament with a neighboring school or an intraschool competition (students vs. teachers charity match?). Hosting events raises your profile. In Year 3, also consider **academic integration**: perhaps propose an esports-related class or curriculum (e.g. an esports management or marketing project as part of a business class, or a tech class focusing on PC building using your lab). Solidify funding streams – maybe your school board is now convinced to fund a full lab upgrade given the program's success. Aim for consistency in coaching too; if you started as a volunteer, maybe now there's a stipend for coaching, or you have an assistant coach (ensuring the program isn't solely on one person's shoulders).

Year 4: Refinement and New Initiatives

By the fourth year, you likely have a cycle of students (the original members might be graduating seniors now). **Refine your program structure**: create a handbook for new members, establish a routine for tryouts every year, and maintain a stable practice schedule. It might be time to start a **middle school pipeline** if you haven't already – coordinate with the local middle school to start an esports club that feeds into your team (perhaps even coach or supervise it lightly). Year 4 could also be when you venture into additional leagues or competitions beyond MiHSEF for extra practice (some schools join national weeknight leagues or enter summer tourneys). Ensure that your team culture and academic balance are solidified, as you scale up. New initiatives like a dedicated streaming channel or an official school esports website can be launched to boost visibility.

Year 5: Established Program

Hitting the five-year mark, your esports program should be an **integral part of the school's offerings**. You'll have alumni now – celebrate their stories (e.g. did some go on to play in college? pursue tech careers?). Use those successes to further validate the program. By Year 5, you may be competing for championships regularly and known in the state esports community. It could be a good year to pursue something big, like building a **dedicated esports arena or lab** if not already done – perhaps repurposing a classroom with custom branding, better lighting, and more stations. Also, consider formalizing a **booster or parent support group** similar to other sports. By this point, the focus is on ensuring longevity: document everything that makes the program run (so it can easily continue with new people), and possibly start mentoring other

schools on how to start esports (giving back to the community and raising your program's prestige).

Year 10: A Decade of Esports

Reaching the ten-year milestone, your program can serve as a **model for others**. You'll have gone through multiple generations of students. Ideally, by Year 10, the esports team is as normal at your school as the basketball team. You might have a full esports facility, annual budget for top-tier equipment upgrades, and perhaps even offer esports as part of the curriculum (some schools have classes in game design or esports management that tie into the team). Your team's trophy case may include a few titles, and more importantly, dozens of alumni who benefited from the experience. Year 10 is a good time to **evaluate and innovate**: the games and scene will have changed, so what's next? Maybe VR esports or new game genres are emerging – your program should be poised to adapt. Celebrate the journey – host a 10-year anniversary event, invite back alumni for an exhibition match, and let the school and community see how far the program has come. This celebration can reinforce all the positives that esports brought to your students over the years, from teamwork and leadership to tech literacy and friendships.

Resources and Links

Official MiHSEF Resources

- **MiHSEF Website:** https://www.mihsef.org/
- **MiHSEF Registration:** Available through the main website
- **MiHSEF Discord:** Community channels for coaches and students
- **Coaching Resources:** MiHSEF Coaching Summit materials

Equipment and Purchasing

- **Educational Technology Discounts:**
  - HP Education Store
  - Dell for Education
  - Lenovo Education
- **General Retailers:**
  - Amazon (Wide selection, education purchasing available)
  - Best Buy Education
  - Newegg (PC components and systems)
  - Micro Center (Local stores in Michigan - Madison Heights, Detroit)
- **Console Purchasing:**
  - Nintendo Store
  - PlayStation Direct
  - Microsoft Store

Esports Industry Resources

- **National Organizations:**
  - NASEF (North America Scholastic Esports Federation)
  - HSEL (High School Esports League)
  - PlayVS
- **Professional Development:**
  - Esports Education Conference

- ISTE Gaming and Esports Network

Funding and Grant Opportunities

- **Federal Grants:**
  - Title IV Grants
  - STEM Education Grants
- **State and Local:**
  - Michigan STEM Partnership grants
  - Regional Educational Service Agency (RESA) technology initiatives
  - Local community foundation grants

Game-Specific Resources

- **System Requirements:**
  - Can You Run It? - Check if PCs can run specific games
  - PC Game Benchmark - Performance testing
- **Coaching and Strategy:**
  - Game-specific YouTube channels and tutorials
  - Twitch - Watch professional matches and strategies
  - Discord communities - Game-specific coaching and community groups

Additional Setup Guides

- **Technical Setup:**
  - Generation Esports Lab Setup Guide
  - ViewSonic Esports Setup Guide

Conclusion

Starting a scholastic esports program is an exciting challenge. By following this guide and tailoring it to your school's needs, you'll create an environment where students can game competitively in a positive, educational setting. Michigan's MiHSEF community is here to help you every step of the way. Good luck, have fun, and welcome to the world of school esports!

This handbook is maintained by the MiHSEF community. For questions, updates, or to contribute to future versions, please contact us through info@mihsef.org or Discord channels.

Equipment prices and links current as of early 2025 - always verify current pricing and availability before purchasing.