



GAMING CONCEPTS

BY PLAYVS



IMPROVING ATTENDANCE, BEHAVIOR, AND STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Through PlayVS' Gaming Concepts Curriculum &
Scholastic Esports Programs

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Schools across the United States are seeking effective strategies to address rising levels of chronic absenteeism, behavioral challenges, and student disengagement. A five-year independent study conducted by education researchers Dr. Robert J. Marzano and Dr. Sonny Magana examined the relationship between participation in PlayVS' Gaming Concepts curriculum and scholastic esports programs and key student outcomes.

Using student-level data from more than 118,000 middle and high school students, researchers compared outcomes for students participating in PlayVS' Gaming Concepts coursework, scholastic esports programs, both programs combined, and students not participating in either program.

The findings revealed three consistent outcomes:

HIGHER ATTENDANCE

Students participating in PlayVS' Gaming Concepts and esports programs attended school more often than non-participating peers. Students involved in both programs attended up to 7–10 additional days of school per year.

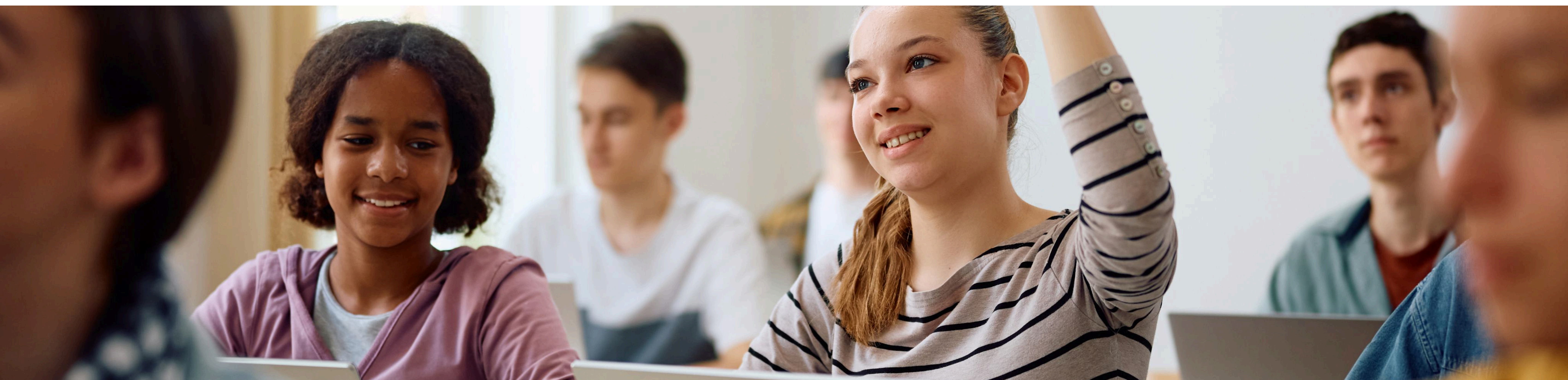
FEWER BEHAVIORAL INCIDENTS

Students participating in the programs experienced 10–50 percent fewer disciplinary incidents, with the largest reductions observed among students involved in both Gaming Concepts coursework and esports competition.

STRONGER STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Structured gaming curriculum and team-based esports participation create environments where students feel connected to their peers, motivated to participate, and invested in their learning experiences.

Together, these findings suggest that PlayVS' Gaming Concepts curriculum and scholastic esports programs can serve as effective strategies for improving student engagement, attendance, and school climate.



Across five school years, participation in Gaming Concepts and esports was consistently associated with higher attendance and fewer incidents of misbehavior (Marzano and Magana, 2026).

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INTRODUCTION

Across the United States, educators are facing a persistent and growing challenge: student disengagement.

Chronic absenteeism has increased dramatically in the years following the COVID-19 pandemic (Attendance Works, 2024). Schools across the country are working to reconnect students to learning while addressing declining attendance, rising behavioral incidents, and widening achievement gaps.

These challenges are deeply interconnected. When students feel disconnected from school, attendance declines. When attendance declines, learning opportunities shrink and behavioral challenges often increase. Over time, these patterns contribute to academic struggles and reduced graduation rates (Balfanz and Herzog, 2024).

Traditional interventions such as attendance campaigns or disciplinary policies often address the symptoms of disengagement but rarely the root cause. For many students, meaningful engagement depends on whether school feels relevant to their interests and connected to their future.

One emerging solution lies in an area where most students already invest significant time and attention: gaming and esports. When implemented within a structured educational framework, gaming can become more than entertainment. It can serve as a powerful catalyst for student engagement, collaboration, and real-world skill development.

A recent five-year independent study led by education researchers Dr. Robert J. Marzano and Dr. Sonny Magana examined the relationship between participation in the PlayVS' Gaming Concepts curriculum and structured scholastic esports programs and two critical indicators of student success: student attendance and incidents of misbehavior.

The results reveal a consistent and compelling pattern: students who participate in structured gaming curriculum and esports programs attend school more often, experience fewer disciplinary incidents, and demonstrate stronger engagement with school.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PLAYVS K-12 PROGRAMS, ATTENDANCE, AND MISBEHAVIOR.

To examine the relationship between structured gaming curriculum and scholastic esports participation and student outcomes, Marzano and Magana analyzed five years of student-level data from a large, urban public school district. The study included data from grades 6–12 spanning the 2020–21 through 2024–25 school years.

The researchers compared four student groups:

1. Students not participating in Gaming Concepts or esports
2. Students enrolled in the Gaming Concepts curriculum
3. Students participating in school-based esports programs
4. Students participating in both Gaming Concepts and esports

Across the study period, the dataset included more than 118,000 students, including:

- 108,000+ non-participants
- 7,000+ Gaming Concepts students
- 2,400+ esports participants

Students came from multiple schools across the district and represented a wide range of academic contexts. Researchers used several analytical approaches to examine outcomes, including: year-by-year comparisons, standardized effect size calculations, and multilevel modeling to account for differences between schools. This methodology allowed researchers to determine whether participation was associated with improved outcomes even after controlling for school-level variables.

Across all analytical approaches, participation in PlayVS' Gaming Concepts and esports programs was consistently associated with more favorable student outcomes.



KEY FINDING 1: STUDENTS PARTICIPATING IN GAMING PROGRAMS ATTEND SCHOOL MORE OFTEN

One of the most consistent findings across the five-year study was the relationship between gaming program participation and improved student attendance. Across every year of the study, students participating in Gaming Concepts, esports, or both demonstrated higher attendance than non-participating peers. When translated into practical terms, these attendance gains represent meaningful increases in instructional time.



Students participating in both the classroom curriculum and esports competitions attended up to a full additional week of school each year. Even after controlling for school differences through multilevel modeling, attendance gains remained significant.

These findings suggest that the increased attendance is not simply the result of strong schools implementing the program, but reflects a consistent engagement

effect associated with participation. For schools facing chronic absenteeism challenges, even modest attendance improvements can translate into meaningful gains in instructional access and academic opportunity.

WHY ATTENDANCE MATTERS

Attendance is one of the most powerful predictors of student success. Research consistently shows that missing instructional time leads to measurable declines in academic achievement, particularly in subjects that require continuous learning such as mathematics and literacy (Dewey, Diliberti, and Schwartz, 2025).

When students miss school frequently, they lose access to:

- direct instruction
- feedback from teachers
- collaborative learning experiences
- opportunities for skill development

As a result, chronic absenteeism has been linked to lower standardized test scores, decreased academic performance, and reduced graduation rates. Improving attendance increases the amount of time students spend engaged in learning and helps restore the instructional continuity that is essential for academic success.

GAMING CONCEPTS	+1.2% ADA	~2.2 DAYS
ESPORTS	+2.9% ADA	~4.2 DAYS
GAMING CONCEPTS & ESPORTS	+4.1% ADA	~7.4 DAYS

*ADA = Average Daily Attendance

Students participating in Gaming Concepts and esports attended approximately one additional week of school per year compared to non-participants (Marzano and Magana, 2026).

KEY FINDING 2: PARTICIPATION IS ASSOCIATED WITH FEWER BEHAVIORAL INCIDENTS

The study also examined the relationship between gaming program participation and incidents of student misbehavior. Across the five-year dataset, students participating in Gaming Concepts and esports experienced substantially fewer disciplinary incidents than non-participants.



Gaming Concepts	10-25% FEWER INCIDENTS
Esports Only	20-35% FEWER INCIDENTS
GC & Esports	35-50% FEWER INCIDENTS

Students participating in both programs experienced approximately half the number of disciplinary incidents compared to their peers. These reductions have important implications for school climate.

Fewer behavioral incidents mean:

- more instructional time in classrooms
- fewer disruptions to learning
- less administrative intervention
- improved teacher focus on instruction

Over time, these improvements contribute to a more positive and productive learning environment for both students and educators.





KEY FINDING 3: PARTICIPATION IS ASSOCIATED WITH FEWER BEHAVIORAL INCIDENTS

Beyond improvements in attendance and behavior, the research suggests that structured gaming programs help address a deeper challenge facing many schools today: student engagement. When students feel disconnected from school, attendance declines and behavioral incidents increase. Conversely, when students experience a sense of belonging, purpose, and identity within their school community, engagement improves and positive outcomes follow (Gray, Hope, and Matthews, 2025).

PlayVS' Gaming Concepts and scholastic esports programs create several conditions that support sustained student engagement.

- 1. They connect academic learning to an area of strong student interest.** Gaming is already a central part of youth culture, and when schools harness that interest within structured educational environments, students are more motivated to participate.
- 2. Esports programs create team-based environments that mirror traditional athletics.** Students are accountable to teammates, coaches, and shared goals. This sense of responsibility often motivates students to attend school consistently and contribute positively to the team (Campbell, Toth, and Gilleen, 2025).
- 3. Gaming Concepts courses connect gaming experiences to real-world skills and career pathways.** Students explore areas such as media production, data analysis, broadcasting, and emerging technologies. These experiences help students see how their interests connect to future opportunities.

Together, these elements create an environment where students feel:

- connected to their peers
- supported by adults
- invested in shared goals
- motivated to attend and participate

Rather than attempting to force engagement through external incentives, PlayVS' Gaming Concepts and esports programs build engagement by aligning learning with student interests and identity (Howard, Bureau, and Guay 2024).

FINANCIAL IMPACT FOR SCHOOLS AND DISTRICTS

For many school districts, student attendance is directly tied to funding through Average Daily Attendance (ADA) formulas. When attendance improves, districts often receive additional funding tied to the number of instructional days students attend school. Because Gaming Concepts and esports participation increased attendance by up to 7–10 additional days per student, these improvements can translate into meaningful financial impact for schools.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOLS AND DISTRICTS

The findings from the Marzano and Magana study offer several important insights for educators and school leaders.

- **Engagement Through PlayVS' Gaming Concepts and Scholastic Esports:** Students are more likely to attend school consistently when they feel connected to their learning experiences. PlayVS' Gaming Concepts curriculum and scholastic esports programs leverage students' natural interest in gaming to create structured environments where students feel a sense of belonging, responsibility to teammates, and motivation to show up and participate.
- **Structured Scholastic Esports Programs Matter:** The strongest outcomes occur when gaming is implemented through structured classroom instruction and organized scholastic esports competition. PlayVS' Gaming Concepts courses provide academic learning connected to gaming and technology, while PlayVS' scholastic esports programs create team-based environments that reinforce collaboration, accountability, and goal-setting.
- **Career-Relevant Learning Increases Motivation:** PlayVS' Gaming Concepts curriculum connects

EXAMPLE DISTRICT SCENARIO

Consider a district with:

- 500 students participating in Gaming Concepts and esports
- 7 additional days of attendance per student
- \$70 average funding per ADA day

$$500 \text{ STUDENTS} \times 7 \text{ DAYS} \times \$70 = \$245,000$$

IN PROTECTED OR RECOVERED FUNDING

Even smaller attendance improvements can generate substantial financial benefits for districts.

Improved attendance helps protect funding that supports:

- teachers and instructional staff
- academic programs
- student support services
- extracurricular opportunities

In addition to financial stability, higher attendance increases instructional time, which is directly connected to improved academic outcomes.



student interests in gaming to real-world skills and career pathways including media production, broadcasting, data analysis, and emerging technologies. When students see how classroom learning connects to industries they recognize and aspire to join, engagement and motivation increase.

- **Gaming Concepts as an Academic Engagement**

Strategy: PlayVS' Gaming Concepts curriculum demonstrates that gaming can function as a structured academic strategy, not simply an extracurricular activity. By integrating project-based learning, technology skills, and career exploration with esports participation, schools can create meaningful learning environments that improve engagement, attendance, and student participation.

- **A New Model for Student Engagement Through**

Gaming: Today's students live in a digital world where gaming, media, and interactive technology are central to daily life. PlayVS' Gaming Concepts curriculum and scholastic esports programs provide schools with a structured framework for connecting these interests to academic learning, helping educators transform gaming from a distraction into a powerful tool for engagement and skill development.

Structured gaming curriculum and scholastic esports programs offer a bridge between the digital world students inhabit and the academic environments in which they learn. The Marzano and Magana study provides growing evidence that these programs can deliver measurable outcomes in attendance, behavior, and engagement. For educators seeking innovative

strategies to address disengagement and chronic absenteeism, the message is clear:

WHEN SCHOOLS ALIGN LEARNING WITH STUDENT INTERESTS, STUDENTS SHOW UP.

FUTURE IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

Suggestions for future implementation:

Integrate Gaming Concepts into Academic

Coursework: Embedding Gaming Concepts within technology, media, or career exploration courses helps connect student interests in gaming to academic learning and real-world skill development.

Combine Curriculum and Esports Programs: Schools implementing both PlayVs' Gaming Concepts coursework and scholastic esports create stronger engagement environments where classroom learning reinforces team-based competition.

Connect Gaming to Career Pathways: Gaming Concepts helps students explore technology, media, and esports-related careers, allowing schools to connect student interests with future workforce opportunities.

Support Educator Training: Providing professional development helps educators effectively implement gaming curriculum and support scholastic esports programs.

CONCLUSION

Schools across the country are searching for effective ways to address student disengagement, chronic absenteeism, and behavioral challenges. The findings from the five-year Marzano and Magana study suggest that structured gaming curriculum and scholastic esports programs can play a meaningful role in addressing these issues.

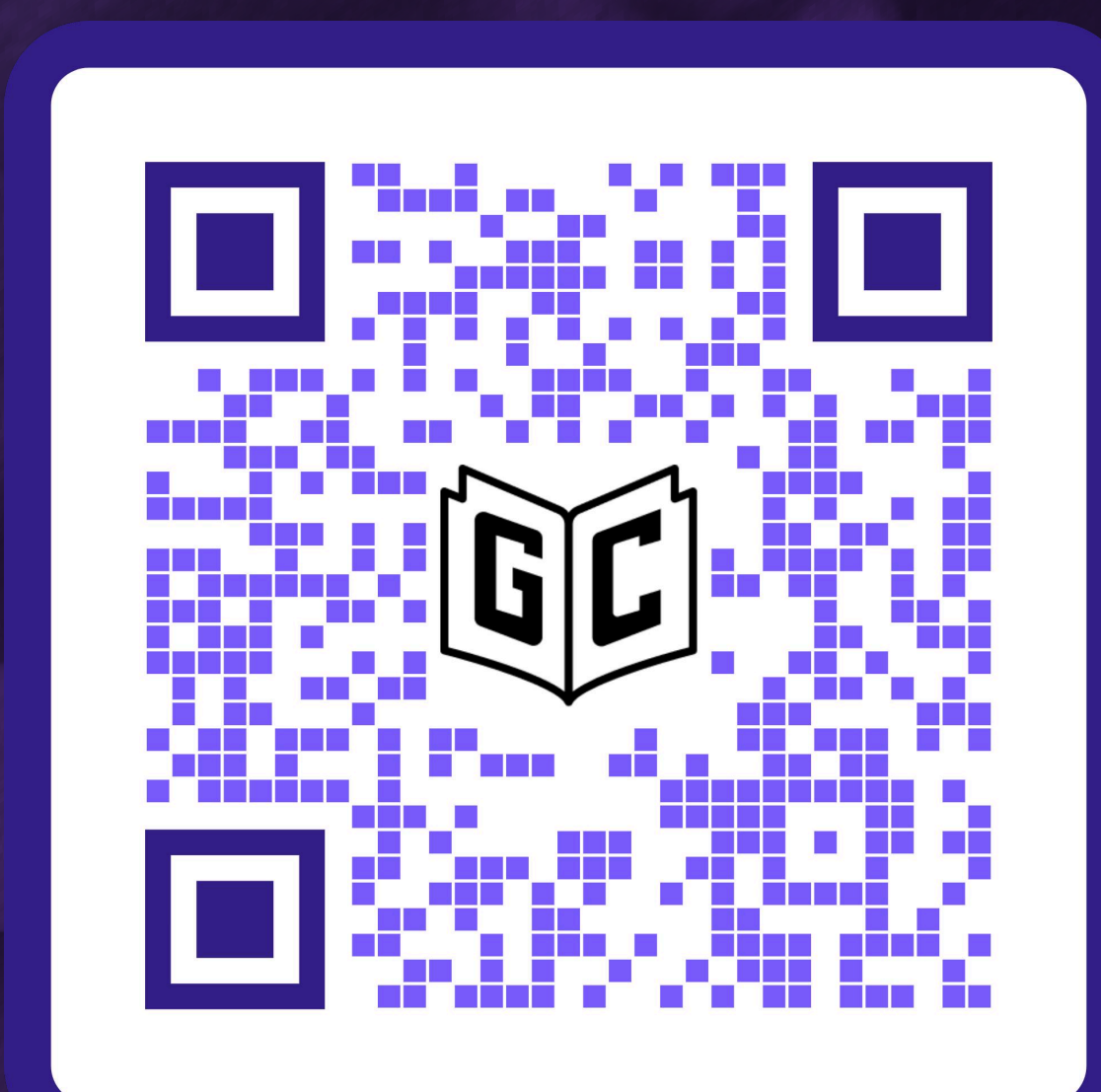
Students participating in PlayVS' Gaming Concepts curriculum and scholastic esports programs consistently demonstrated higher attendance and fewer disciplinary incidents than their peers. The strongest outcomes were observed among students participating in both classroom coursework and organized esports competition. These findings highlight the potential of structured gaming and esports learning environments to reconnect students to school by aligning academic experiences with their interests. By combining structured curriculum with team-based esports participation, schools can create engaging learning environments that support student participation, collaboration, and success.

ABOUT PLAYVS

PlayVS is North America's leading scholastic and collegiate gaming platform, helping students unlock the educational, social, and personal benefits of competitive gaming. Gaming Concepts' award-winning gaming curriculum is dedicated to building structured, community-driven pathways into competitive gaming and digital careers. Through its innovative curriculum and immersive programming, Gaming Concepts empowers students with the skills, teamwork, leadership, and strategic thinking required to succeed both in and outside the classroom. PlayVS is the official esports partner of the NFHS Network, the Special Olympics, and more than 40 state and regional organizations across the U.S. and Canada

CONTACT US

Want to put Gaming Concepts to work for your district or school? Get in touch with our team.



Schedule Call

