

COMPTON UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

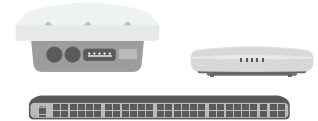
School district's esports program posts big wins in digital equity, inclusivity and STEM career paths



800+ players across high schools, middle schools and primary schools



200+ students participated remotely during lockdown



1800+ access points, **350+** ICX switches



New Compton High School opening in 2024–25 academic year



Customer
Compton Unified School District

Location
Los Angeles, California

Compton Unified has championed far-sighted programs that have dramatically improved student achievement. With a RUCKUS® wireless and wired network in place district-wide, the launch of an esports program is an example of another successful, transformative program. In just three years—including the pandemic lockdown—the number of gamers in high schools and middle schools has quadrupled. Almost half of the participants today are elementary school students. The impact of esports has been far reaching, contributing to digital equity, inclusivity, attendance, mental health, leadership and collaboration, and a new path to STEM careers.

Launch depends on a rock-solid network

Traditional sports programs (with expensive fields and courts) take years to plan and build. The Compton Unified esports program was proposed in 2018 and competitions began in 2019. The district won its first championship in

2020. There were three vital ingredients in the speed and success of the program:

1. Top-down support: The program has the full support of the school board, the district superintendent, principals and teachers. This top-down commitment—part of a larger commitment to technology—has ensured digital equity.

Which means Compton Unified students have a level playing field with esports programs in more affluent schools.

2. Tight collaboration between education services and IT: “Education Services and the Information Technology Department always touch base on projects,” says Brito. “With esports, we’ve formed a tight-knit team—operating



“Our district is strongly invested in 21st century learning and innovation. Our RUCKUS network gives us the 21st century foundation for any areas we choose to pursue. Esports is a great example of how quickly we were able to launch, expand, sustain and excel in an emerging program.”

Alvaro Brito
21st Century Learning Specialist,
Department of Educational Technology
& Innovation

almost as one department. This should be a best practice for any school district.”

3. A single rock-solid network: Esports requires a high-performance network, free from the slightest performance hiccups. The program was launched on the district’s existing RUCKUS wired and wireless network, which was designed and deployed by TechNet Partners, a RUCKUS partner. “Students are very savvy about performance. If the game is the slightest bit laggy, they complain loudly or lose interest entirely,” says Alvaro Brito, 21st century learning specialist, Department of Educational Technology & Innovation.

“The whole district runs on RUCKUS. The network supports 26,000 students, faculty, administration and other staff across 36 sites,” says Clifford Gray, systems specialist, Information Technology department. “We didn’t replace or add access points or switches, which was unexpected given the demands of esports on the network. We just made configuration changes to increase bandwidth or control access.”

Expansion requires consistent network performance across the district

With a consistent high-performance RUCKUS network, it’s “game on” for esports practices across the district. The first teams in 2019 were in the high schools. Even during the pandemic, students met and played remotely. In fact, the program expanded to the 12 middle schools during the pandemic. And the middle schools won the district’s first championship.

“Wherever we have RUCKUS coverage, we can support esports,” says Gray. “That’s why we’ve been able to keep pace with interest, expanding from high schools to middle schools and now primary schools.”

Sustainability hinges on high-performance Wi-Fi

Every classroom is equipped with a RUCKUS AP. The district uses existing classrooms for practices and even league games. “In some classrooms, the gaming consoles blew fuses in the classrooms, but the RUCKUS Wi-Fi performed flawlessly,” says Gray. “When the esports program first launched, RUCKUS Wi-Fi was the backbone of the program. That’s only going to increase in the future as more gaming consoles run wirelessly.”

In fact, the district has already held a two-week tournament that ran over two RUCKUS APs for two weeks. “If a network can deliver a championship performance, it’s our RUCKUS network,” says Gray.



“A few years ago, we replaced our old network with a RUCKUS wireless and wired network district-wide. Without question, our esports could not have come so far, so fast, and with such success with our old network. You absolutely need a reliable network—even a superior or more advanced network—to play and compete. That’s what RUCKUS brings to the game.”

Clifford Gray

Systems Specialist, Information Technology Department



Impact goes far beyond the game

Creating interest in new career pathways: What started as an extracurricular activity is now a STEM builder. “Esports can reinforce 21st century skills such as collaboration, digital literacy, critical thinking and problem solving,” says Brito. “It can get students interested in game design, programming and coding, computer engineering, graphic design, marketing, digital media production—and fields that haven’t been created yet.”

Attracting partners: The esports program has attracted a growing number of partners, including colleges and universities, private industry, and esports organizations like the North American Scholastic Esports Federation (NASEF) who’s mission is to provide opportunities for all students to use esports as a platform to develop STEM-based skills and social emotional attributes such as communication, collaboration, and problem-solving abilities needed to be successful. These partners are supporting Compton Unified with everything from curriculum development to student mentoring to teacher training.

Creating connections and safe spaces: Esports is a way to keep students engaged and socially connected. More than 200 students joined and participated on teams during lockdown. “We discovered that esports contributes to mental health and social and emotional support,” says Brito.

Inclusivity that leads to change: Esports truly levels the playing field: It’s open to anyone who wants to play. But some students have issues with sexism, racism or harassment in the games themselves, and sometimes by players. Brito formed the Compton Unified Esports League Student Council to listen to—and act on—student issues. One change is beta testing new, more inclusive games. Another is implementing the AnyKey organization’s “good luck, have fun” GLHF pledge. The pledge holds every student in esports to a higher level of conduct. “It’s not beyond imagining that the academic community can influence the future of gaming,” says Brito.

The RUCKUS network is being extended to 23 STEM Innovation Labs under construction. The labs—which will engage students in projects such as robotics, coding and 3D design—will also be esports hubs. “The Innovation Labs will create an even more tangible link between esports and career paths that many students never imagined for themselves,” says Brito.

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