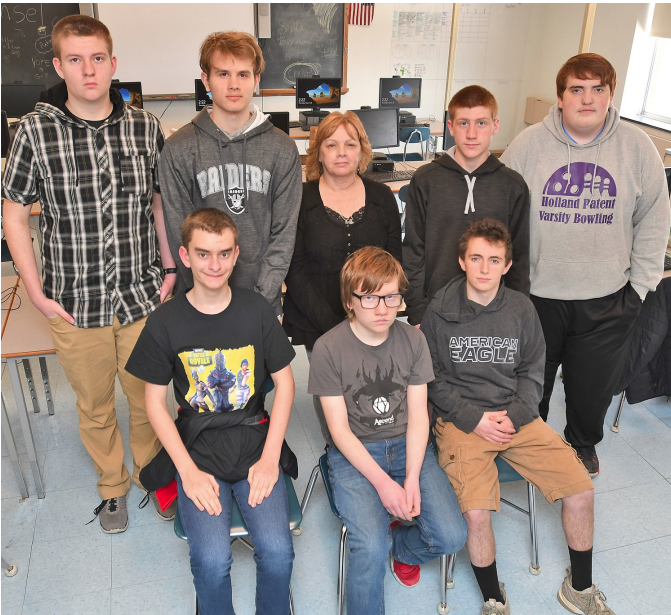


# Student gamers target success HP district first in area to form Esports team



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**HOLLAND PATENT ESPORTS PLAYERS** — Among some of the members of Holland Patent High School’s Esports Club for video gaming, which this month begins playing in the nationwide High School Esports League, in front from left: Wyatt Humpt, ninth grade; Gage Westcott, 10th grade; Aaron Tarbania, 11th grade. In back, from left: Logan Baker, 10th grade; Ryan McGahey, 11th grade; school district technology coordinator Margaret McNamara; Austin Smith, 10th grade; Brandon Partyka, 11th grade.

(SENTINEL PHOTO BY JOHN CLIFFORD)

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**Dave Gymburch**

Staff writer

email (mailto:dgymburch@rnymedia.com)

HOLLAND PATENT — “We’re doing something revolutionary in Holland Patent,” says Ryan McGahey, a junior at Holland Patent High School.

Aaron Tarbania, also a junior, says it seems “just crazy” that colleges which typically are for educations in categories like math and science could provide students with opportunities for “letting us do” what their dreams are in playing video games.

McGahey is the president and Tarbania is the secretary of the school’s new Esports Club, which this month is beginning competitive video gaming in the nationwide online High School Esports League. The

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club has 11 members so far for the school's Golden Knights team.

Holland Patent, which announced the program in late February, is believed to be the first local school district participating in the league. Holland Patent district technology coordinator Margaret McNamara, who organized Holland Patent's Esports initiative, said she is not aware of any other local district that has a club or is in the league. She added the Westmoreland school district is seeking to "put one together" and has contacted her. Among other central New York school districts registered for the High School Esports League, said McNamara, are Liverpool, Fayetteville-Manlius and Lafayette.

The league began in 2014, noted McGahey. In the past year, the number of schools represented by the league has grown from around 200 to more than 1,200, according to a January report in Edtechmagazine.com.

The popularity and growth of esports, plus academic benefits for students including college scholarship opportunities, were among points by McGahey, Tarbania and club treasurer Logan Baker in a presentation last week for the Oneida-Madison-Herkimer School Boards Institute; they were at the institute's annual spring meeting and educational fair at Oneida-Madison-Herkimer BOCES in New Hartford.

"My experience at the School Board Institute event was of hope and excitement," observed McGahey. "The amount of interest that our program garnered was amazing. It gives me great hope that we will be able to spark something revolutionary in our region."

Baker commented, "I'm very excited to see the program grow. I can't wait to compete in tournaments for this program."

Holland Patent school district Superintendent Jason Evangelist said the esports initiative is "exciting," citing its benefits for getting students involved in activities and providing opportunities.

Esports/competitive video gaming is recognized by the Eastern College Athletic Conference as a varsity sport. More than 475 colleges support esports, including nearly 50 schools providing over \$59 million in scholarships to gamers, the Holland Patent district has said.

For the High School Esports League, Holland Patent's club members initially will compete using the Fortnite video game, which can involve shooter-survival challenges in seeking to accumulate online "kills;" introduced in mid-2017, it is one of the more popular games currently, said McGahey. League competitions will be from 6-7 p.m. Thursday nights, and students can play from their homes using such systems as Xbox and PlayStation or through computer downloads.

The league's current spring season lasts three months and is one of four seasons year-round, observed McGahey, adding "we hope to compete in every season."

McNamara remarked of the club, "I think some students are waiting to see how it goes." Holland Patent's first informational meeting about the club drew 34 students, she said, adding that as the group grows and more games are offered, "I think some students will come back."

McNamara said she became interested in pursuing the benefits of esports after her son, who is through college, had played video games and "I saw the skills he built."

Among skills that students can develop through the games, McNamara commented, are hand-eye coordination, problem-solving, quick-thinking, and decision-making. She also cited hundreds of thousands of job openings relating to video gaming and associated industries such as creating games plus advertising and marketing them.

Longer-term possibilities for Holland Patent could include potentially establishing an esports lab with equipment at the school plus hosting a tournament, said McNamara. Fundraising could be part of such efforts.

"We hope to grow as a team" and get other students involved in the club as it develops, Tarbania said.

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