

Civic Engagement Capstone Project

Capstone for Master of Professional Studies in Civic Engagement

Sowing the Seeds of Peace in the Public-Schools via Esports Gaming with Gamers For Peace

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“War is a racket.”

- Brigadier General Smedley D. Butler (1935)

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Terminology

CDROM	Compact Disc Read Only Memory
CME	Committee on Militarism in Education
Esports	Competitive Online Gaming (also known as eSports, ESports, e-sports)
FPS	First Person Shooter
FREC	Facilitating Racial Equity Collaborative
GFP	Gamers For Peace
IEP	Individual Education Plan
JROTC	Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps
MFT	Minneapolis Federation of Teachers
MPS	Minneapolis Public School District
MNVL	Minnesota Varsity League
NCDOS	National Campaign to Demilitarize Our Schools
NNOMY	National Network Opposing the Militarization of Youth
ROTC	Reserve Officers' Training Corps
VFP	Veterans For Peace
WAMM	Women Against Military Madness

1. Executive Summary

Background

American culture is saturated in images of violence. The glorification of war manifest in video and on-line games, TV and movie entertainment, and graphic fiction of all kinds has helped create and maintain a culture of violence among young people amidst which multiple social problems have arisen. Mass shootings, hate crimes, gun fights in the streets, war fervor, and a reliance on violence to solve even the simplest problem evidence the crises the nation faces today. Even worse, the US military is using the attraction of young people to violence in a rising trend called Esports online gaming to recruit high school students for military service right out of their classrooms (Price, 2020). In response, Veterans For Peace (VFP), an organization comprised of US military veterans, and their associates, pledged to end wars and fight for peace, has launched Gamers For Peace (GFP), a social networking movement to restore the wonder, adventure, and problem-solving to modern gaming and redirect interest of youth toward peace. It is also positioning itself to counter the most recent influx of military recruiters that is currently sweeping the nation's public schools, particularly at the high school level, through electronic gaming programs. According to their literature, the one-year-old organization is pledged to work on helping reduce the violence and the depredations of war through responsible gaming and to offset the incursion of the military and war making into the classroom (See APPENDIX).

Capstone Objective

The overall objective of this Capstone project is to contribute toward building a sustainable movement for peace within the gaming community and counter the influence of military recruiters in public schools and the trend toward war and violence as a way of resolving problems in our society and world. The immediate goals include assistance in helping schools in

the Minneapolis Public School District (MPS) develop their High School Esports programs by building out interest in high schools and boosting membership in GFP and embedding its values in the DNA of the program from the beginning. This will enable utilization of GFP’s basic “Four Channels for Change”, a program designed to offer gamers resources, structure, guidance, and alternative opportunities to military service, while developing new sustainable methods for carrying this message into the future (See APPENDIX). The project also involves helping participating schools amass the resources needed to sustain and grow this program throughout MPS, with or without official district support. Medium-term goals, just beyond the scope of the project, include helping students learn how to better safeguard their privacy. The entry point for the proposed solution path is to introduce the GFP ethic, within the gaming community, at the start-up phase of high school Esport adoption, promote it effectively, and make it internally sustainable by playing a role in its initial formation. If it does not inoculate the schools from incursion by violence seekers, commercial poachers, hatred promoters, or narrow political interests outright, it will act as an offset, if not challenge, to the intrusion of military recruiters in the classroom by providing a competitive example.

2. Group, organization, or community project application

The project is being applied to high school students in MPS, engaged in Esports gaming, with the support of Veterans For Peace, National Headquarters, and its local affiliate, Veterans for Peace, Chapter 27, the Minneapolis Federation of Teachers, Local 59, and Wisdom Gaming, the platform provider for the Minnesota Varsity League (MNVL). Because some of the games being played are known as “first-person shooters,” MPS is not supporting the program at this time, for fear that they will encourage violence or may lead to increased screen time causing

diminished academic performance, poor attendance and/or behavioral problems, leaving each school to implement an Esports program independently.

3. Prior Work/Literature Review

Though the first organized pushback against the violence in video and computer games occurred in the mid-nineties when Tipper Gore, wife of Vice President Al Gore, led a campaign to scourge the industry of video game violence (Robb, 2014, p. 1-2), it was not related to the question of war or the morality of violence; hence it failed. Though she did not win in eradicating them, it did result in a ratings system which did not make it through the next real war. It is interesting to note that her voice is being echoed now by the conservative Russian Communist Workers' Party that proclaims, "Video games are the most widespread destroyer of free time of left youth from 14 to 30 years old" (RCWP, 2022, p.1). It is no wonder then that political forces in America planning for dissent would greet such developments as possible venues for channeling the dissenting voices of youth into forms that are compatible with our political system (Pokharel, Atul, Milz, Dan & Gervich, Curt D. 2021, p. 1).

Since that time, technology has progressed in such a way that violent games have become ubiquitous and have pushed the limits of interactive violence beyond fantasy. Online gaming leagues on both the flat screen and in virtual spaces are opening new frontiers for gaming fun and professional training (Flannery, 2021, p. 1). There is even speculation on whether video games are addictive (Jabr, 2019, pp. 38-41). Now horrific acts of violence are taking place all over the nation daily, both on screen, and off. We also see the emergence of a military entertainment complex taking an interest in these games, and who plays them, as a way of both cultivating recruits and training aspiring warriors (Jenkins & Secker, 2022, pp. 9-12).

At the same time, Esports have proven to be of value to students in that they provide structure and guidance to a commercial influence and have even proven to have helped boost Grade Point Averages (GPA) up 1.7 points and improve attendance in schools by 10% (High School Esports League, 2022). This same organization also cited claims that 82% of players attracted to Esports have never played in organized competition before, and their engagement has created a sense of belonging never experienced by these students.

Despite this, or perhaps in recognition of this power, a variety of interests are making a concerted effort to utilize the Internet for BOTH push- and pull-through marketing. This means that not only is data about user activity being collected, analyzed, and applied in ways the public may not be aware of (Zuboff, 2020, p. 6) but data is being pushed out subliminally to users that are designed to influence behavior in a form which permits the tracking of targeted behavior to achieve desired market or messaging results (Stoffers, 2017, pp. 10-11). Sometimes, children recognize what is happening to them. A student at Sanford Middle School in Minneapolis wrote an article entitled “Subliminal Messaging: Is it happening to you?” in her school’s newspaper, providing an example of how marketers make kids want candy without them ever knowing why (Morris, 2020, p. 2). This makes Esports the perfect recruiting tool (Mills, 2020).

This process helps facilitate the manipulation of people’s emotions as well, opening the door for widespread social engineering (Calvo, Peters, & D’Mello, 2015, pp. 41-42). According to Bruce Levine, Americans have become extremely easy to manipulate using behavioral sciences (Levine, 2012, pp. 1-4) by marketers of products, services, as well as by propagators of political messages. Hence, the explosion of violence in our society is not the result of random outbursts, bad behavior, or coincidences; it is the consequence of calculated marketing efforts to

secure revenue, loyalty, or participation whatever the cost for the brands so promoted. This applies to war and the war-making process as much if not more than other domains.

At the same time, proponents of war and militarization have seized this chance to further infiltrate the classrooms of America. This effort is not new. Such efforts commenced in 1916 when the first Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) was established through the National Defense Act and propagated on college campuses across the nation (Kershner, Harding & Howlett, 2022, p. 18-19). Such motives were revealed as early as 1926 when a striking editorial appeared in *Army Navy Register* endorsing the push into schools, saying, "You must admit that the ROTC must keep pushing hard to keep the naturally pacific mind of America from becoming pacifist." (Kershner, et al. 2022, p. 1). This plan to inflame young Americans into military service blossomed across 1,700 institutions across the nation, prompting the formation of a group in response, the Committee on Militarism in Education (CME). Formed by pacifists and proponents of peace, it became a lobby group by the early 1930s (Kershner, et al. 2022, p. 38).

But the CME appeared to be insufficient to stem the rising tide of militarization. By the middle of the decade, the US War Department (as Defense Department was known at that time) began to widen its targets to include the nation's high schools in the form of a Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (JROTC) (Kershner, et al. 2022, p. 66). Of all people, it was Franklin Delano Roosevelt who killed the peace initiative with passage of the Burke-Wadsworth Act of 1940 establishing the first peacetime conscription in American history (Kershner, et al. 2022, p.71). This pushed JROTC into a role of being an option for young people to what is called 'the draft'. Nowadays, "the Pentagon commits nearly \$400 million annually to sustain a high school version of the ROTC program. Since the early 1970s, more cadets have enrolled in JROTC than in the college-level programs. JROTC currently has a presence in nearly thirty-three hundred

high schools in the United States, enrolling more the 550,000 students (known as “cadets”) who are as young as fourteen” (Kershner, et al. 2022, p. 3).

Currently, the military is quite brazen about their practices. An editorial in the *Minnesota Spokesman-Recorder* the week of September 29, 2022, began with the headline, “The military to American youth: ‘You belong to me,’” (Koehler, 2022, p. 9). The article goes on to examine the military’s program to capture youth “while they were still children: introducing them to real world militarism via videogames and high school gun fun, officially known as JROTC with even children as young as fifth grade in the Starbase program. Grooming” (Koehler, 2022, p. 9). STARBASE is a program intended to make the military fun and interesting to fifth graders by sponsoring field trips to military bases and receives \$20 million annually from the Pentagon for its execution by school districts (Kershner, et al. 2022, p. 136). By targeting impoverished neighborhoods, non-compulsory “poverty draft” (Koehler, p. 9), also called an “economic draft” by veterans in the VFP, has developed. The exploitation of economic need is a major technique by the military to recruit young people before they graduate high school (Miralao, 2020, p. 1). The arrogance and incitement were so great, a National Network Opposing the Militarization of Youth was set up to disrupt this process in a “military counter-recruitment network” (Mennonite Church USA, 2022).

The coalescence of online gaming, along with push-pull data collection and messaging, has resulted in operationalization of a new marketing model for business and industry as well as political parties and the military. “To reach Gen Z, brands back e-sports,” touts the front-page headline of the August 25, 2022, *Star-Tribune* business section (Johnson, 2022, p. 1, 10). The article goes on to say, “Long the domain of energy drinks, snacks, and fast food, e-sports have started attracting a wider range of food companies and categories in recent years” (Johnson,

2022, p. 1). The fact is the military was among the first on the scene. Proponents are proud of this fact as a statement of their patriotism and concern for national security (Howe, LoRusso & Moore, 2021, p. 1) and laid out in detail by the Center for a New American Security.

While some of these plans are debated by journalists who ponder, “The Pros and Cons of Military Recruitment in High Schools,” (Liu, 2022, p. 1) these plans are exposed in detail by an organization called WAMM, short for Women Against Military Madness, a nationwide organization of women and mothers dedicated to the pursuit of peace. In their Summer 2022 newsletter, this plan is detailed by a retired military judge advocate, entitled, “U. S. Cognitive Warfare: the Battle to Capture Our Minds” (Pierce, 2022, pp. 6-7).

Despite the rhetoric of peace often used by politicians, these plans are being developed and implemented by BOTH major political parties; to be sure, it is one of the few things the two parties seem to agree on. In the 1990s, after the first Gulf War, a group arose called National Campaign to Demilitarize Our Schools (NCDOS) which enjoyed a few victories stopping military incursion into classrooms, notably on the West Coast, but was promptly squashed by the Democrats in the run-up to the NATO action in the Balkans. The most recent reversal came in 2010, when Gavin Newsom, then Mayor of San Francisco, reversed San Francisco School District policy and granted the military re-entry back into the schools (Kershner, et al. 2022, p. 134). This is not new; after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, Republicans gained unprecedented support in the remilitarization of America and the groundwork for a new kind of militarization was laid. Shortly after the invasion of Iraq, military recruiters began appearing in game and hobby shops in fatigues to play card and role-playing games with neighborhood youth in a recruiting drive. After the attacks, Americans were so afraid of terrorists, they lauded the move as a way of keeping children safe. Patriotic game shop owners readily opened their doors

to recruiters to hang out during game nights and talk up military service, especially since war fervor led to increased sales. Twenty years later, it appears that everything has been touched by the military. “Today, U. S. Senator Bernie Sanders, a self-described democratic socialist, touts the benefits of the STARBASE program” (Kershner, 2022, p. 136).

Militarization of youth, then, is a bi-partisan affair, unlikely to ever change electorally. Hence it is up to us to protect children and the world they are growing up in. “Keep the army out of gaming!” declared Robert Evans on his February 23, 2022, *It Could Happen Here* daily podcast. This project is a good place to continue a long and historic tradition of fighting back.

4. Positionality

Where I fit in this universe, depends on which galaxy I come from. As a teacher with Minneapolis Public Schools who is perceived as a white male, I fit in with most teachers of my demographic. I am also a union member classifying me as working class. I have mixed children and grandchildren of every color distinguishing me from other people who may look like me that also provides additional insight. As a technology innovator, I started, built, turned around, and operated award-winning technology companies for thirty-five years which puts me in the innovator sector. I also have experience launching non-profits such as homeless shelters for married couples and literacy action programs, rendering me familiar to the grant writing and non-profit community. Most recently, I developed a series of professional development courses for educators during 2016 entitled *Defusing the Race Bomb: Our Role as Educators*, (Shain, 2019, pp 1-45) anticipating the rise in racism during the past six years which I taught for MFT, MPS, Education Minnesota, and for the Facilitating Racial Equity Collaborative (FREC) at Metro State in St. Paul up until the pandemic, thrusting me into the Professional Development camp. As a descendent of concentration camp survivors and possessing the blood of three

continents, makes me kindred with those who simply feel their humanity. I also speak several languages, including some of those spoken by our students in MPS, including Spanish and some Somali. Hence, I'm known throughout MPS as a unique personality and identity to my students.

Though I am not a veteran, having not been selected in the Vietnam-era draft, I have been accepted as member of the veterans' community having served as a civilian contractor to the US Defense Mapping Agency during the first Gulf War. Representing my first start-up at the time, GEOVISION, Inc., I was commissioned to prepare CDROM versions of Digital Elevation Models (DEM) and Tactical Terrain Data (TTD) maps of Iraq for field deployment in programming terrain-following cruise missiles on the battlefield. This qualification enabled my membership in VFP as well as my inclusion in the online gaming geeks club. Herewith is a chart delineating some advantages and disadvantages of relevant positioning:

Status	Advantage	Disadvantage
<u>Insider – Group Engagement</u>		
Peace Advocate	Shared values; easy solidarity; march together against war, nuclear weapon proliferation	Challenged by people who think war is necessary and face challenges to the actual need for peace
Vietnam Era Boomer	Shared references; easy communications; similar music, language, and culture	Dated references; may be perceived as out-of-touch by younger members who may be unresponsive
<u>Insider – Community Engaged</u>		
Public School Teacher	Only public-school teacher in the group; brings fresh perspective; advocate for public education	Respect not always granted to teachers, facing wrath of charter school promoters and haters of public education
Antiracist	Embraced by students for strident differentiating position embracing blood connection between different colors rather than simply practicing tolerance and merely fighting hate	Derided by racists and those seeking platform dependent on reinforcing race for political gain; considered an enemy of those seeking to suppress discussion of ideological foundation of race and racism

Status	Advantage	Disadvantage
<u>Outsider – Group Engaged</u>		
Not a veteran	Brings a fresh perspective as a one-time civilian contractor; may be more readily accepted by anti-militarists	May not be accepted by hard-core militarists who would seek to void contribution or opinion due to lack of direct experience
Not a native of Minnesota	Brings a fresh perspective to local residents	May be rejected by those seeking lifelong Minnesota residency credentials
<u>Outsider – Community Engaged</u>		
Perceived as White Male	Fits within the dominant demographic with all lights, rights, and benefits as well as social baggage; both an advantage and a disadvantage depending on my usefulness	Potential to face stereotyping by placing identity above voice and neutralizing contribution
Promoting Peace in a Time of War	Perceived as a champion and true humanitarian by receptive people	Decried as a traitor, stooge, or promoter of a foreign power by those seeking to promote acceptance of war among the general population

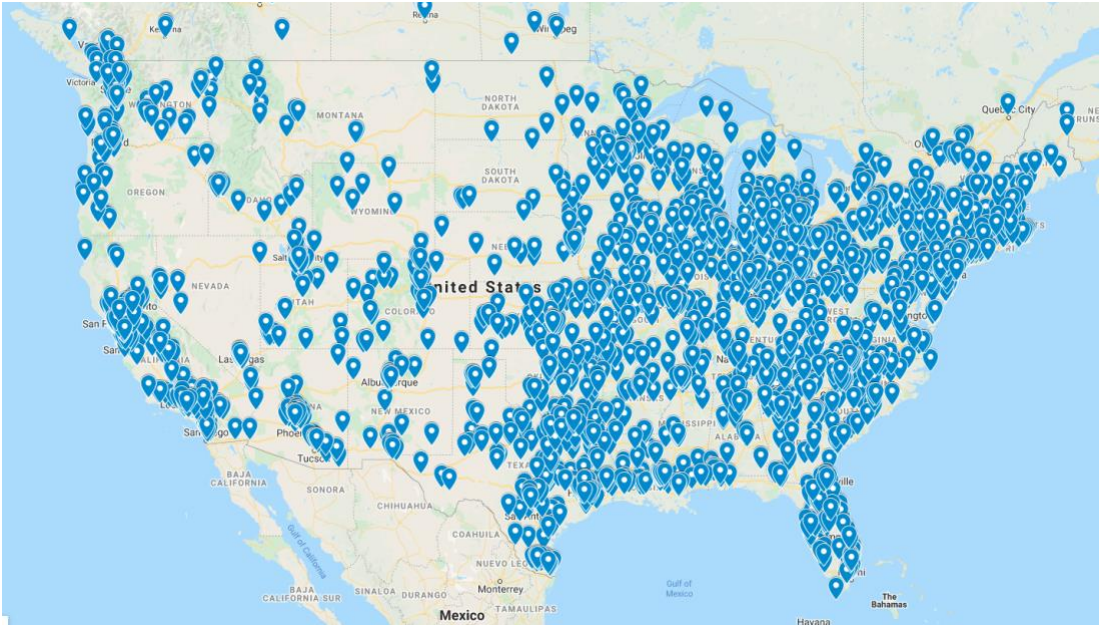
5. Methodology and Approach

When designing a public participation process, it is important to understand the fundamentals of how they are designed. In this case, we rely on *evidence-based practice* for guidance (Bryson & Quick, 2013, p. 23) by offering a systematic and accessible review of the challenges to be addressed. In addition to addressing contexts and problems, purposes, and the designs needed to achieve them, and analyzing and appropriately involving stakeholders, it is important to establish the legitimacy of the process itself by rooting it in a historical context (Bryson & Quick, 2013, pp. 24-27). However, moving from the plan to practice, fostering effective leadership, accumulating resources, rules, and structures, can all be developed through participation in inclusive processes to engage diversity productively, coordinated by managing power dynamics within the initiative (Bryson & Quick, 2013, pp. 28-29). In process, information

and communication technologies are used to achieve requisite levels of engagement while evaluation measures and metrics supporting the desired outcomes are developed. All these steps must be aligned, techniques with goals, purposes with approaches, with all the promises, methods, techniques, technologies, steps, and resources all linked and resonant with the mission (Bryson & Quick, 2013, pp. 29 -31).

It is also important to distinguish participation from inclusion, independent dimensions of public, or civic, engagement (Quick & Feldman, 2011, p. 272). In this case, although the students are participating in games, they are merely being included in the process. It is their teachers and, in some cases, the parents, who are participating in the design and implementation of the process itself. Though students may be queried about their favorite games, this input is within the design of the program itself, that being designed by active participants in bringing the program to students.

To put the project into context, at the time this project was undertaken, over 5,000 High Schools in the US had Esports teams (High School Esports League, 2022), shown below, yet only three high schools in Minneapolis currently have teams that compete in electronic gaming.



Many of these schools nationally are basing their decisions to host teams based on research demonstrating that online gamers' aggression during game play is linked to frustration, not violent content (Lopes, 2014) or further studies showing that Esports improves mental health (Nelson, 2021). Nonetheless, MPS has taken a very cautious approach to Esport gaming.

In Minneapolis, high schools compete without MPS support in a statewide Esport scholastic gaming league called the Minnesota Varsity League, (MNVL), playing games in past seasons as diverse as Chess, Minecraft, Rocket League, Super Smash Brothers, Halo, and Valorant. The selections of which games to play is carefully researched across numerous demographic categories and social media platforms (Baker & Pizzo, 2021). The thoughtfulness of this research cannot be overstated.

6. Work Plan

Due to the multiple goals and complexities of execution, the plan will commence in a series of seven steps. These steps correspond to and are referenced in the Project Timeline (See APPENDIX).

Step One is articulating the plan helping organize Esports teams in high schools in accordance with an already existing and rapidly growing body of research on the subject and a few existing schools already building teams. Because this plan is developed in real time as the team is assembled, **Step Two** is identifying those team members needed for this execution and pursued concurrently. Schools in Minneapolis that already have Esports teams include:

- North High School
- South High School
- Washburn High School

These schools are already playing and amassing resources, coaching, developing, and sharing game expertise. Each one solved their organizational and resources problems differently

and it may be helpful to review each. Since MPS has not funded any program that involves games that are called “first-person shooters,” (games that involve players shooting at each other in virtual space, also called FPS), including the internet connection needed, each school is left to their own designs and devices because the MNVL lineup has included two games of this type: Halo and Valorant. At this writing, Halo is being dropped for lack of following, but Fortnite, another FPS will be added, along with Smite and League of Legends, in the Spring semester.

Wisely, MNVL eschews platforming games such as Call Of Duty, a super-realistic FPS that follows military protocol, utilizes standard issue ordnance, and hunts identifiable ethnicities on its kill list. Nonetheless there are other games that use surreal environments and symbolic violence for players armed with fantastic futuristic weapons to hunt monsters and the like that could easily catch this interest and redirect away from the pathologies of actual war.

South High School’s program was set up during the pandemic and students willingly used their own gear and internet connections and set up teams for all six games. Participation was so great that the school team rose to become state champion in Minecraft, three seasons in a row. Enthusiasm for the team gained momentum so that when students returned to school for in-person learning, they did not miss a beat maintaining the program as-is.

Students at North High School, on the other hand, did not even have the resources to acquire the gear and pay for the internet connection needed to play, so the faculty advisor applied for a grant from the Phyllis Wheatley Foundation to fund the program. Now the students have state of the art computers (called “rigs”) and high-speed internet connections to play. They even built their own web server with which to connect to the MNVL. This season, North High will be sending a student to the State Super Smash Brothers Finals, a big honor for the school’s nascent program.

Washburn High School gestated their program under its afterschool program, where it was discovered that 50% of participating students had an Individual Educational Plan (IEP) indicating the need for special assistance. Apparent funders of the program saw to it that the team had the resources needed to help this sector of the school population. Further investigation revealed that Esports has a high degree of appeal to students that lack the physical mobility or the necessary social skills to play athletic team sports, much of which is documented in a Wisdom Gaming video about the benefit Esports offers students with IEPs. (Utities, 2021).

Experiences at the start of the school year have shown that achieving sustainability is key; the faculty advisor for Washburn High School's Esports program left the position to attend graduate school and left no plan for succession or continuity. Hence the burden of reconstructing the program has fallen to this project. GFP can be of great help to these teams augmenting their resources through its Four Channels of Change program. Fortunately for this project, a veteran at Washburn helped identify suitable advisor candidates with the team now being readied for play.

Step Three is introducing Esports to the other eight sites that have no teams, with several having already failed at initial attempts to start one, due to problems endemic to that school. It is likely that several of these schools will be unable to mount a program for reasons that are beyond the scope of this civic engagement effort. Schools that have not shown interest or produced a Faculty Advisor thus far include FAIR, Henry, Heritage, and Wellstone. Excluded from consideration are those punitive or transitional institutions for which the engagement of students is temporary such as Stadium View or Harrison where an Esports program would be completely unsustainable in a transient population.

As a result, **Step Four** is helping as many schools initiate a sustainable Esports program as possible in the Fall of 2022 with the help of GFP and build an organization at each of the

schools consisting of Faculty Advisors, Coaches, and their teams. Hence, the schools that have responded affirmatively to the opportunity thus far include:

- Transition Plus
- Roosevelt High School
- Southwest High School
- Edison High School

It is important to take inventory of the possibilities at each school and focus on those that offer the most promise. Because MPS currently does not fund activities that involve FPS games, solving the resources problem is also a task within this step. Each of these schools has different demands regarding the program.

In the case of Transition Plus, a school for high school graduates with disabilities who attend to gain life and job skills, the students are only interested in playing Super Smash Brothers. They are seeking ways to participate in the MNVL playing this one game only, using MPS resources as part of the special education plan.

Roosevelt High School on the other hand presents us with a different story. As the school that has the highest rate of military recruitment in MPS, the Principal is in no position to bar their entry. But due to a 2008 school board resolution (See APPENDIX), opposition to recruiters are also allowed in the school. Hence the principal would like to offer to his students all games offered by the MNVL but also offer the GFP orientation by way of this initiative to play a key role in its establishment and operation of the program. This requires outside funding, something the school is investigating.

Furthermore, as the principal wisely notes, young people attracted to FPS games are the most at-risk students and whether or not the school system supports such programs that utilize them, they will still be manufactured, promoted, and heavily advertised to young people; banning

them will only make them more desirable and drive students away from the schools. Given the stakes, the better approach being studied is to structure their use and provide guidance to students who do play them, thus keeping them in the schools. For many, such games are the attraction that bring them into the program, and for many, back into the classroom, in the first place.

Thus far, the Principal at the school has helped and advised in planning the work and laid the groundwork for the program at his school. The biggest demand on the effort came from the Athletic Department Coach who implored me not to cannibalize the school's athletic program. This is not a possibility because none of the games being played are sports games. Furthermore, as mentioned previously, students with disabilities and IEPs are disproportionately represented in the schools that do have programs as they typically are not capable of participating in traditional team sports, or adaptive sports, and find a unique opportunity with Esports.

Similarly, Southwest High School is also committed to organizing a team, but the Faculty Advisor has thrown the question of which games will be played and who will fund them to the parents of the players. After hosting a GFP table at the school's annual Activity Day, 21 students signed up to play, noting their games preferences, and an online meeting with parents was promptly scheduled. It was relieving to learn of each of their commitments to peace and concurrence with the goals of this project.

Plans are shaping up differently at Edison High School. It has an afterschool program run by the YMCA and has recently set up a game club and has many active players. But the students only play local standalone version of their games and would like to part of inter-scholastic league competition. Its two Advisors are active promoters of all forms of inclusion and are decidedly for peace but lack the resources and wherewithal to bring it to the next level. One outcome of this

project was connecting the schools' Advisors with each other so that information and experience can be shared.

Anticipating the possible shortfall in funding, effort was made to recruit the local game and hobby shops and other stores where game playing students congregate after school to see if any would be interested in sponsoring the program. Rather than fund specific teams, it has been proposed that each enterprise contribute to a fund that will sponsor all 6 teams (if necessary) and more (if possible) and receive mention and visibility as program sponsors to the GFP initiative. Thus far, Level Up Games, Heroic Games and Dreamer's Vault have offered help. Electric Fetus, a music store, and Camden Cycles, a bicycle shop, have also offered assistance.

These civic engagement activities have presented us with a ready, willing, and able student population within which to recruit players, the requisite schools to coordinate, interested and activated parents to oversee, coaches and faculty advisors to organize, and local merchants willing to help. Since MPS is not directly involved and has left each school up to their own ability to mount a program, this Capstone will act as the planning and organizational vehicle for this project braiding these threads together serving as organizer and project manager. Nevertheless, a meeting requested in September with the MPS Superintendent finally took place in early December to determine what level of support such school Esports may receive with encouraging results. It was apparent at this meeting that MPS has been interested in these developments and is in the midst of determining what kind of role it might play.

Step Five is ascertaining the value that GFP can be to each team and calibrate expectations. Since the mission is to augment each team with the extended services and expert guidance that the staff of seasoned gamer/veterans can provide through the GFP Four Channels of Change program, their interest is key. Offering these services is an organized effort by

veterans and their associates to improve students' performance in Esports, in academics, and in their lives by offering alternatives to the economic draft. These Four Channels include:

- **Streaming Content** - Content streaming anti-war and gaming content throughout the week
- **Esports Teams** - Building Esports teams to compete against the military gaming industry
- **Mentorship** - Supporting youth facing economic draft and providing alternatives to enlistment
- **Direct Actions** - Countering the military agenda through direct action campaigns

Step Six explores sustainability strategies for assuring succession of the program.

Though this work is outside the scope of the project, it is essential that these possibilities, 'hooks and handles', are introduced so that nothing is done to preclude their emergence. After all, civic engagement is a process, and the task is to create one that is both sustainable as well as scalable. To accomplish this, we must digest experience and document the process for creating a template for further student recruitment. Since this is the first year of GFP, this plan will contribute toward filling the need for a national marketing and membership campaign to further the mission.

7. Major Deliverables, Metrics, and Measurements of Success

Step Seven, the final step, is delivery. Major deliverables can be enumerated thus:

- 1) We will increase the participation rate in Esports gaming among both Minneapolis high schools and high school students by establishing programs in at least three additional schools.
- 2) We will initiate activity in the Four Channels of Change already served by GFP to protect the program against abuse by interests that promote war or violence by providing a better example and providing structure and guidance to the experience.

- 3) We will articulate sustainability strategies as well as initiate additional channels of activity as needed.
- 4) We will recruit at least three military veterans in process, both to the effort and VFP.
- 5) Lastly, a Final Capstone Report will be delivered summarizing the project including Slides for Capstone Defense, a plan for use in applying this program in other school districts as well as for use by GFP in the future, and a summary of lessons learned in the process of plan execution.

8. Technology Used

The major technology issue is the cost of the gear and the availability of appropriate internet bandwidth connections at speeds suitable for game play. Unless MPS plays an active role, most schools in Minneapolis are or will be applying for grants to provide this technology, like the one North High School, received from the Phyllis Wheatley Foundation, until MPS can allocate resources.

9. Dependencies and Limitations

There are no known dependencies, other than the participation of partners and stakeholders, or limitations that may impede this project, besides MPS's reluctance to fund the program, save one: Government suppression of the effort because its agenda of peace may run counter to an administration's plans to mount a war effort, draft or recruit our nation's high school students, or generally create the climate needed to wage war. Such a program runs counter to the goals and aims of GFP and may not be allowed to exist by a political administration bent on war. Despite a resolution passed by the Minneapolis School Board in 2008 that stipulates every time a recruiter comes to set up a table, hand out pamphlets, or peruse the lunchrooms of high schools, activists will be notified and can set up counter-recruitment

tables next to them, granting GFP an opening, such a resolution can be reversed under pressure from the Defense Department.

10. Ethical/Privacy Concerns

Similarly, there are no known ethical concerns about the content of the project. It may be argued that its orientation toward peace makes it extraordinarily ethical. Regarding privacy issues, since the project is not going to collect any personal data or study any of the students, there should be no Institutional Review Board concerns. In fact, part of the project is to show how private data is collected, manipulated, and exploited by military recruiters. Setting a national example, Chicago Public Schools has taken steps to protect student data from military recruiters with an opt-out form (see APPENDIX). For the record, however, the GFP Discord server does provide all information about privacy rights to all those who sign up. Full disclosure is made of all possible impacts on an individual's rights to privacy. Here is the organization's mission statement captured from its website:

“Gamers For Peace (GFP) is a community-led initiative of Veterans for Peace (VFP). We are dedicated to confronting military recruitment in gaming and hobby spaces such as video gaming, Esports, and social media. We are organizing to take back our hobby spaces and to create inclusive, demilitarized gaming spaces. We hope to use these spaces as an opportunity to talk about the intersections of peace and social justice activism within gaming communities.”

11. Conclusion

It is fair to say that the ultimate objective of this Capstone Project has not been met; that it did not bring peace to the world, nor did it result in a vibrant rebirth of a peace movement that swept the nation. It did however succeed in helping four new schools launch their Esports

programs, surpassing initial goals, and helped save the program at another. It also resulted in the targeted number of recruits to VFP and its causes.

And it also succeeded in stimulating a sustainable civic engagement process throughout the Minneapolis Public Schools, from student engagement in afterschool programs, clubs, and activities to the new young leaders rising up to help them, to the many parents who oversee the process and live with its results. Raising awareness in MPS among all stakeholders about the value of Esports and the need to structure and guide the time students spend playing computer games was a key goal of this project. The technological inevitability of this is upon us; how children fare in this onslaught for their hearts and minds is up to how we respond to this historic challenge.

Project Timeline

(Summary timeline illustrates staging and duration of steps in process with personnel required.)

CIVE 6002 Civic Engagement Capstone		Sowing the Seeds of Peace in the Public Schools via Esports Gaming with Gamers for Peace																			
Task	WBS Action Steps <i>What will be Done?</i> <small>(Schools in red below failed to respond to initial solicitations or produce an advisor)</small>	Responsibilities <i>Who will Do It?</i>	Start <i>From When?</i>	Finish <i>By When? (Date/Month)</i>	Time Allocated <i>Total Hours</i>	7-Nov-22	16	23	30	7	14	21	28	4	11	18	25	2	9	16	
1	1.0																				
2	1.1.1	Project Manager (PM)	6-Sep-22	9-Sep-22	2.00																
3	1.1.2	VFP, UMNIL	6-Sep-22	9-Sep-22	2.00																
4	1.1.3	UMN	6-Sep-22	9-Sep-22	2.00																
5	1.1.4	MFT, MHS, PM	6-Sep-22	9-Sep-22	2.00																
6	1.1.5	PM	6-Sep-22	9-Sep-22	2.00																
7	1.1.6	Graphic Artist (GA)	6-Sep-22	9-Sep-22	2.00																
8	1.2																				
9	1.2.1	PM	12-Sep-22	23-Sep-22	1.00																
10	1.2.2	PM	12-Sep-22	23-Sep-22	1.00																
11	1.2.3	PM	12-Sep-22	23-Sep-22	1.00																
12	1.2.4	PM	23-Sep-22	30-Sep-22	1.00																
13	1.2.5	PM	23-Sep-22	30-Sep-22	1.00																
14	1.3																				
15	1.3.1	PM, GFP	23-Sep-22	30-Sep-22	2.00																
16	1.3.2	PM, GFP	23-Sep-22	30-Sep-22	2.00																
17	1.3.3	PM, GFP	23-Sep-22	30-Sep-22	2.00																
18	1.4																				
19	1.4.1	PM	3-Oct-22	28-Oct-22	2.00																
20	1.4.2	PM	3-Oct-22	28-Oct-22	2.00																
21	1.4.3	PM	3-Oct-22	28-Oct-22	2.00																
22	1.4.4	PM	3-Oct-22	28-Oct-22	2.00																
23	1.4.5	PM	3-Oct-22	28-Oct-22	2.00																
24	1.4.6	PM	3-Oct-22	28-Oct-22	2.00																
25	1.4.7	PM	3-Oct-22	28-Oct-22	2.00																
26	1.4.8	PM	3-Oct-22	28-Oct-22	2.00																
27	1.5																				
28	1.5.1	GFP	3-Oct-22	28-Oct-22	2.00																
29	1.5.2	GFP, PM	3-Oct-22	28-Oct-22	3.00																
30	1.5.3	GFP	3-Oct-22	28-Oct-22	2.00																
31	1.5.4	GFP	3-Oct-22	28-Oct-22	2.00																
32	1.5.5	PM & GFP	10-Oct-22	28-Oct-22	2.00																
33	1.6																				
34	1.6.1	PM, VFP & GA	31-Oct-22	22-Nov-22	2.00																
35	1.6.2	PM	31-Oct-22	22-Nov-22	2.00																
36	1.6.3	PM	31-Oct-22	22-Nov-22	2.00																
37	1.6.4	PM	31-Oct-22	22-Nov-22	2.00																
38	1.6.5	PM & GA	31-Oct-22	7-Dec-22	2.00																
39	1.7																				
40	1.7.1	PM	12/7/22	12/7/22	1.00																
41	1.7.2	PM	12/7/22	12/7/22	1.00																
42	1.7.3	UMN, PM	12/8/22	12/8/22	2.00																
43	1.7.4	PM	12/12/22	12/12/22	1.00																

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I would also like to extend very special thanks to Jason Morzenti, Social Studies Teacher at Washburn High School, veteran, and recent VFP recruit, who helped me find new Advisors.

Lastly, I would also like to thank MPS Acting Superintendent Rochelle Cox, Assistant to the Superintendent Ryan Trask, and Chief Academic Officer Aimee Fearing for meeting with me and sharing ideas on the subject.

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WHO ARE **GAMERS FOR PEACE**

WE ARE A GROUP OF ANTI-WAR VETERANS, ALLIES, AND GAMERS STANDING AGAINST THE MILITARY ENTERTAINMENT COMPLEX AND MILITARY RECRUITMENT IN GAMING SPACES.

4 CHANNELS OF CHANGE

 Streaming Content	 Esports Teams	 Mentorship Program	 Direct Actions
Streaming anti-war and gaming content throughout the week	Building Esports teams to compete against the military gaming industry	Supporting youth facing economic draft and providing alternatives to enlistment	Countering the military agenda through direct action campaigns

GET INVOLVED

FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA
WATCH LIVE ON TWITCH
JOIN US ON DISCORD
SUPPORT OUR DIRECT ACTIONS
GAME WITH US!



FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA   @VETERANSFORPEACE  @VFPNATIONAL

VFP PROJECTS & WORKING GROUPS



VFP member Chris Velazquez (right) and XR accomplice Frank (left) are hands on Stopping the War Machine with a 1:20-scale model of a Reaper Drone created and constructed by VFP Board member Nick Mottern. Drones: the latest technology used by the MIC to prop up a War Economy while failing to meet the needs of the people. The model joined VFP members and the anti-militarism contingent of the Poor People's Campaign Moral March in Washington, D.C., on June 18, to highlight the links between poverty and the War Economy.* Photo: Ray Bailey

by Chris Velazquez

The livestream comes to life as I open a Twitch channel featuring live gameplay of Apex Legends, one of the most popular competitive first-person-shooter video games currently being played. A smiling face, eyes focused on the action going on in their virtual environment, greets me. Narrating their gameplay for their audience, they describe in detail the firefight they are engaged in and talk to their teammates about the tactics needed to survive this in-game moment. I look toward the bottom edge of their video and see over 2,000 current viewers, the number slowly ticking upwards. I sit back and enjoy the show with the rest of the spectators for a moment, heartbeat increasing as if the streamer's

adrenaline spike is contagious, as if I'm the one controlling the on-screen avatar, firing and maneuvering under pressure. The game drains of color. The word "Eliminated" animates in red across the center of the screen. The streamer leans forward to press a button and the scene changes from the game to a wide-angle view of their gaming studio, centering the smile that has returned to the player's face. All around the dark, neon LED-lit room are stylized gold-and-black stars with the subtext U.S. ARMY. The streamer is wearing an Esports jersey proudly displaying the army marketing logo. I wait for the inevitable questions to start from the audience only to be met by the practiced responses of someone trained as a recruiter to paint a perfect day in the life of a soldier.

THE U.S. ARMY

is not alone in this newish approach to reaching an audience full of youth and children as young as 13 years old with their message of patriotism, service, honor, and nationalism. After the Army's failure to reach its 2018 recruiting goal, a concerted effort was made to shift its priorities and recruiters' presence in gaming and gaming-adjacent spaces. Gaming-adjacent spaces like Twitch, YouTube, Discord, and Reddit are social media or digital platforms that foster communities of fans, gamers, and content creators with shared gaming or hobby interests. Along with a new doctrine placing its more traditional recruiting efforts in 22 of the most

continued on next page...

STOP THE WAR MACHINE ...from page 6

impoverished cities in the country where the realities of the poverty draft are most harshly felt—predominantly in vastly underserved Black and Latinx schools and communities—the military as a whole has honed in on the best strategy for supplying bodies to fuel the war machine: Meeting children outside of school in their hobby and community spaces. Military recruiters now inhabit digital spaces—largely unsupervised or regulated—where those trained in predatory and manipulative practices and techniques have uninterrupted time to provide the answers and solutions for the collapsing labor market, lack of education opportunities, unaffordable healthcare system and other economic conditions that children are growing up under. All of those solutions point toward enlistment in the military; in other words, the solutions reside in an acceptance of participating in state violence as a means to address the material conditions of each child.

According to 2017 U.S. Army Recruiting Command (USAREC) statistics, of 33.4 million kids aged 17 to 24, 9.7 million are qualified for military service. Reasons for disqualification are largely caused by socio-economic factors: fitness and weight standards, medical issues, misconduct, substance use, and mental health. Of the 9.7 million, about 5.7 million are available to enlist—i.e., not already enrolled in college. Of the 5.7 million, the Army only actually deems 1.7 million children as being desirable to fulfill the needs of the war machine. And finally, of those 1.7 million children..., only 136,000 showed interest in joining the Army in 2017.

Those are stunning statistics that when scrutinized with critical

thought leave many questions currently unanswered. With the military entertainment complex having a controlling interest in almost all entertainment platforms from Hollywood to the NFL to video games like the military-simulation first-person-shooter (fps) game: Call of Duty, the dedicated and extremely well-funded propaganda campaign doesn't only reach the eyes and ears of the 0.407% of children qualified for, desired by, and interested in Army service.

What is happening to the children whose answers to lack of healthcare, lack of college options, lack of jobs in their community, and desire to escape abuse at home was found in the practiced speech of a military recruiter in a gaming adjacent space?

Evidence and current events point to a gruesome conclusion. The spaces in which military recruiters are grooming children to accept and participate in violence in the name of the state are also the spaces where a culture of generalized violence, oppression, and authoritative hierarchy is encouraged. A culture in which disenfranchised youth subjected to but ultimately rejected by the poverty draft are left seeking solutions to their conditions; a culture that gives cover to a pipeline of escalating communal rhetoric arriving at the final destination of violent extremism.

There is a direct relationship on full display between military exceptionalism, military glorification, and the war economy affecting American society at large—propped up by military recruitment propaganda and practices—and the instances of 17-year-old boys being radicalized in digital communities to the point of opening fire with an AR-15 on a crowd of innocents as a means to answer the ways they perceive society has failed

them.

For those that do not grab a rifle and take what they believe is justified and sanctioned vigilante justice into their own hands, these radicalized youth are pulled into a war economy where the law enforcement and technology industries are further militarized and rooted in the application of systemic violence, giving alternative outlets subversively acceptable for those extremist ideals.

This established pipeline to violent extremism arises from a disenfranchised white hyper-masculine dominator culture creating internet based counter-culture movements like GamerGate, the MANOSPHERE, and Involuntary Celibacy Culture while finding societal acceptance and justification through military culture; the military's involvement in game development; the gamification of war; and the future of 4th generational warfare. It can be demonstrated that recent violent, right-wing extremist actions, including Kyle Rittenhouse's race motivated "vigilante" murders and the Buffalo and Uvalde mass homicides, had evidence of radicalization to the point of violent action within these counter-culture communities—communities that flourish under the emphasis on recruiting children and youth into the violent enforcement wing of capitalism through digital and gaming-adjacent spaces that encourage a male-centric warrior culture.

Addressing the poverty draft and military recruiting practices through active engagement in counter-recruitment projects such as VFP's Gamers For Peace program and a strong GI Resistance movement are required to divert global society from a violent end. Peace is Possible, when we collectively decide and work towards there never being another generation of veterans.

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-
- LISTEN "Keep the Army Out of Gaming" on *It Could Happen Here* daily podcast with Robert Evans • Feb. 23, 2022 • 40 mins. <https://www.iheart.com/podcast/1119-it-could-happen-here-30717896/episode/keep-the-army-out-of-gaming-93326106/>
 - READ "The Unseen Scars of Those Who Kill Via Remote Control" by Dave Philipps, *The New York Times*, April 15, 2022 <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/15/us/drones-airstrikes-ptsd.html>



MNVL Schools



North
Minneapolis



South
Minneapolis



Stillwater



The Blake School



Saint Thomas



Robbinsdale
Cooper



Washburn



Mahtomedi



Totino-Grace



Foley



Orono



Mora

Plus, Another 38 Schools Statewide

MNVL Season Champions

Spring 2022

- Rocket League:** Spring Lake Park
- SSBU:** Phantom/South Minneapolis
- Valorant:** Apple Valley
- Halo:** St Thomas Academy
- Minecraft:** South Minneapolis
- Chess:** AP/Apple Valley

Fall 2021

- Rocket League:** Rogers
- SSBU:** Phantom/South Minneapolis
- Valorant:** Apple Valley
- Call of Duty:** Inver Grove
- Minecraft:** South Minneapolis
- Chess:** SJP Peter/St Johns Prep
- League of Legends Invitational:** Minnetonka

Spring 2021

- Rocket League:** Minnetonka
- SSBU:** Pixel/Wayzata
- Overwatch:** Wayzata
- Call of Duty:** Inver Grove
- Minecraft:** South Minneapolis
- Chess:** NOA/South Minneapolis
- League of Legends Invitational:** Zimmerman

**Minneapolis Public Schools
Board of Education**

February 26, 2008

RESOLUTION ON RECRUITER ACCESS TO STUDENTS

WHEREAS, the U.S. Military expends approximately \$1.4 billion annually (FY 2006) in recruiting efforts; and

WHEREAS, the military has access to student directory information unless the student's parent has chosen to opt out as mandated by Section 9528 of the "No Child Left Behind Act" (NCLB) which access is provided by the District under threat of loss of federal funding for schools; and

WHEREAS, to continue its core mission of providing a free and effective education for local youth, Minneapolis Special District No. 1 cannot sustain itself without adequate federal funds; and

WHEREAS, questions about the extent of access by military recruiters to students during the school day on school premises can be addressed through the standards in the District's visitors policy; and

WHEREAS, the Minneapolis School Board is charged with giving guidance as to policy implementation; and

WHEREAS, it is in the best interests of Minneapolis Public School students to receive information about all post-secondary options available to them; and

WHEREAS, it is in the best interests of Minneapolis Public Schools students to be exposed to a variety of viewpoints on controversial issues which may affect their education or welfare; and

WHEREAS, community based organizations may be valuable sources for information on military service;

BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED: That the Minneapolis Special District No. 1 Board of Education directs the Superintendent and staff to allow access to high school students by organizations which provide information about all aspects of military service if approved as a community partner organization through the District approval process.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that military and other recruiters may interact with students only in school approved locations such as high school College & Career Centers.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, to establish a standard procedure for campus access, all recruiters requesting campus access shall submit a request in writing on official letterhead at least 2 weeks in advance and that notice of their presence will be available to students and the public at least 1 week in advance on either a school web site or designated location for such announcements in the school.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED: When high schools permit military recruiters to speak with students regarding military career opportunities, the school must provide equal access for organizations that wish to counsel alternatives to, or provide additional information about, military service. If literature encouraging military service is displayed for students to read or pick up, groups counseling alternatives to military service may similarly display their literature.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED: That to assure privacy protection for students, entities receiving private student directory information will sign a statement identifying the specific use of the information and certifying that use of the information conforms with all city, state and federal laws regarding privacy and is non-discriminatory.

Signed by:

Lydia Lee
Board of Education Chairperson

Date

Sharon Henry-Blythe
Board of Education Clerk

Date



Directory and Recruiter Opt-Out Information Sheet

August 2022 | Department of Policy and Procedures



This Information Sheet for Students and Parents provides instructions on how you can use the "Directory and Recruiter Information Opt-Out Form" to prevent the release of your child's student directory information. An Opt-Out Form is enclosed for your convenience.

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), Illinois School Student Records (ISSRA), and Chicago Board of Education Policy 706.3 Parent and Student Rights of Access to and Confidentiality of Student Records require that Chicago Public Schools (CPS) obtain your written consent before disclosing personally identifiable information from your child's education records, with certain exceptions. The Chicago Public Schools may disclose "directory information" without written consent, unless you have advised the District that you do not want the information shared by using the form attached. This form is to be turned in at time of enrollment.

Who will have access to this information?

CPS may share directory information with third parties (such as city agencies or educational service providers) who have an educational interest in the information and request it. All requests from external parties related to research are reviewed by the CPS School Quality Measurement & Research or the CPS Office of College and Career Success to ensure the request is in the interest of students.

What is directory information?

Directory information is information that is generally not considered harmful or an invasion of privacy if released. CPS has designated the following as directory information: student's name; home address; home telephone number.

How do I complete the CPS Directory Information Opt-Out Program Process?

A parent/guardian or student age 18 or older must complete this form and return it to the school clerk annually at time of enrollment/registration. If you have more than one child attending CPS, you must submit a separate request for each child. The Opt-Out Form requires a student identification number. Please make sure you record the 8-digit ID number on the form accurately.

For parents/guardians of JUNIORS and SENIORS ONLY:

By law, if military recruiters request contact information (name, address, phone number) for 11th- or 12th-grade students, CPS is required to provide that information unless you choose to block it. Colleges and universities also may request student information. Using the Chicago Public Schools Opt-Out form, you may block the release of your contact information to military recruiters, or to colleges and universities, or to both.

Having your name placed on the Opt-Out list does not in any way limit your ability to request your school to send a transcript or any other material on your behalf to a college or university, a military recruiter, or others, upon request.

Questions or Concerns?

If you have questions about CPS policy related to the release of student information to third parties, recruiters, or universities please contact policy@cps.edu.



Directory and Recruiter Information Opt-Out Form

August 2022 | Department of Policy and Procedures



Dear Student, Parent or Guardian:

You have the right to inspect and copy your student's records, challenge the contents of such records, and limit your consent to the designated records or designated portions of information within the records.

If you DO NOT want directory information disclosed, complete this form and return it to the school clerk at time of enrollment/registration. If you do not submit a completed Opt-Out Form, your child's directory information may be provided to recruiters and external parties by CPS upon their request. If you submit this form but do not check at least one box, your child's directory information may be provided to recruiters and external parties upon their request. If you have more than one child attending CPS, you must submit a separate request for each child.

please print or type:

Student Name

Student ID Number (8-digits): This is required

School

Date

DO NOT disclose my child's directory information to any external party without my prior consent.

FOR HIGH SCHOOL JUNIOR AND SENIOR STUDENTS ONLY

You may block the release of your contact information specifically to military recruiters, colleges and universities, or both by checking the boxes below.

DO NOT disclose my child's directory information to military recruiters without my prior consent.

DO NOT disclose my child's directory information to colleges and universities without my prior consent.

Name

Signature

Relationship to Student - Select one

SELF PARENT/GUARDIAN

Must have an original signature; an electronic signature is not acceptable.