

Cannon School leads esports boom with Spectrum Enterprise fiber

North Carolina high school encourages healthy collaboration and college success

At Cannon School in Concord, North Carolina, esports has become a tool for raising spirits and building collaboration among its high school students. To encourage participation and better compete with other schools, the school increased its available bandwidth with the installation of Spectrum Enterprise fiber solutions.

Founded in 1969, Cannon School has blossomed into one of the top preparatory schools in its region, drawing over 1,000 students in grades K-12. For over a generation, students have worn its bold red color and rallied around its cougar mascot. As its website notes: "Cannon is more than a school; it's a community." That spirit of inclusion is reflected in an esports program that makes sure no one who wants to play is left out.

Cannon School Gaming (CSG) was formed to develop esports excellence at the high school level. CSG serves both as a recreational club and a springboard for competitive units. These varsity players focus on duo and team play in five popular esports games against other top programs in and around the greater Charlotte area. High finishers in these league events will go on to compete in regional and national tournaments.

"For us, esports is a place of belongingness," says Tram Tran, Manager of Information Technology, Cannon School. "It's about students having fun, doing something they enjoy. And for those students who say: 'I want to do more. I want to compete,' we have a program for them, too."

Winning with connectivity

Especially for the most serious esports gamers, having connectivity that doesn't lag or jitter matters a lot. Tran describes the need as "absolutely dire."

"Just ten milliseconds can make the difference between a player winning or being taken out," he explains. "Whenever you lose a big game, you want it to be because of your skills, not your internet service."

In just two years, the esports program is at 60 students and growing, half of whom play on the school's varsity program. "The goal here is to always have fun," Tram notes. "But the moment you're labeled varsity, your expectation is to win."

Tran, who is also director of the esports program at Cannon School, said the school selected Spectrum Enterprise because it needed internet connectivity that was consistent, secure and reliable.



At Cannon School in Concord, North Carolina, esports is promoted with a designated gaming space and a growing student organization, Cannon School Gaming (CSG).

Client profile



Company
Cannon School

Industry
K-12 Education

Services
Dedicated Fiber Internet (DFI)
Managed Network Edge

Overview

- In 2021, Cannon School in Concord, North Carolina expanded its esports program for students in grades 9-12 by deploying a Spectrum Enterprise fiber circuit.
- Using Dedicated Fiber Internet (DFI), members of the school's esports team are equipped to compete in events set up with other schools in North Carolina and elsewhere around the country.
- The addition of Managed Network Edge allows Cannon School administrators to filter content available to students and also guards against cyberattacks.

Outcomes

- Since 2021, esports has become one of the most competitive and popular campus activities at Cannon School.
- As colleges build up their esports activities, some Cannon School students have found themselves to be more attractive admissions candidates.
- The esports program is also an outlet for less competitive student gamers to connect with classmates while honing their collaboration and social skills.

Why it matters

- Cannon School has a technology partner in Spectrum Enterprise with scalable services suited to manage the anticipated growth of esports programming in the near future.
- Cannon School is seizing on the rise of esports nationally as a way to distinguish itself in the region, by setting a recognized standard of excellence for competition and participation.
- Cannon School is developing young entrepreneurship with student activities designed to promote esports tournaments on behalf of other schools and organizations.



At esports tournaments, reliable Spectrum Enterprise fiber helps Cannon School players stay in the game. “You don’t want the internet to lose the game for you,” Manager of Information Technology Tram Tran notes.

With [Dedicated Fiber Internet \(DFI\)](#), Spectrum Enterprise installed a service that was all those things. It is also scalable, ready to expand in capacity to meet what Tran expects to be a continued surge of participation over the next few years.

“To get the optimal esports experience, you need to have a certain amount of bandwidth available,” says Bill Davidson, Major Account Executive, Spectrum Enterprise. “There are several schools in the Charlotte area which have formed a league, and are similarly investing in internet. Among other things, they see it as a way of getting the name of their schools out there to a broader audience.”

“A big part of our relationship with Spectrum Enterprise is that communication we have. Not just consistent communication, but accurate communication, too.”

– Tram Tran, Manager of Information Technology, Cannon School

Tran notes that having Dedicated Fiber Internet allows his school to not only maintain an equal footing with competing schools, but also host league tournaments, further boosting Cannon School’s profile. Players across the Charlotte-Concord area know Cannon School well and look forward to putting their skills to the test whenever they visit the campus for an esports event or face off against CSG opponents.

A smooth installation

As Tran explains it, the first positive experience Cannon School enjoyed with Spectrum Enterprise occurred when the circuit was installed. With another fiber provider, there had been several delays during the installation period, complicated by an overall failure to communicate. Davidson and the Spectrum Enterprise team made sure to raise Tran’s level of service expectations, then exceed them.

“I had the notification email, I had the line, I had everything tested within two weeks,” Tran recalls. “I’ve never had a better installation than the one I had with Spectrum Enterprise.”



The esports program at Cannon School includes many types of games played at different levels. "If you can get enough players, I will always create a team for you," IT Manager Tram Tran says.

Cannon School has also partnered with Spectrum Enterprise in securing its network with unified threat management that includes a Layer-7 firewall, advanced malware protection, intrusion prevention and content filtering. This protects the school's IT infrastructure from unwanted intrusions such as data theft and ransomware attacks, and at the same time allows for content filtering on campus. The unified threat management package is a central feature of [Managed Network Edge](#).

"With our esports program, we are building this pathway from high school to college and then from college to the pros."

- Tram Tran, Manager of Information Technology, Cannon School

Content filtering is important as the high school shares its internet services with the lower grades at Cannon School. Tran needs to be able to block those websites deemed to have harmful content and limit access

to other sites to age-appropriate students. Having simple and intuitive content filtering makes this easy.

"It's a managed solution, which means Spectrum Enterprise manages the security aspect while we control the content filtering," he explains. "Combined with our own endpoint detection and response system, I have confidence in the firewall and the people working behind it."

A club for everyone

In the short time it has been around, CSG has become one of the most popular student organizations on campus. Tran says its popularity stems from the simple, well-understood fact that young people love computer gaming. Because of this, CSG draws many different types of students.

Some are already active in other varsity programs. Some are eager to test their skills against friends and classmates. Some are relatively introverted and unaccustomed to the nuances of team competition. What brings them together is a love of computer gaming, and a place at

the school where that is encouraged and they are welcome.

For many high school students, esports offers a ticket to wider appreciation and acceptance from their peers. It is a way to transform an activity young people already enjoy into a compelling school-wide event. CSG rallies the Cannon student body to cheer on their fellow Cougars at big events. Top players form mentoring relationships with younger club members. All the time, Tran and his fellow coaches track everyone's progress and find opportunities to build better players by stressing the importance of sportsmanship and etiquette, as well as by developing useful gaming skills.

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- Tram Tran, Manager of Information Technology, Cannon School

"You see them share this common ground when they play multiple games together," Tran notes. "We have these five main video games we play against other teams, but they also play fun games you wouldn't think of as competitive. It gives everyone something in common to talk about and gets people to really open up."

Introducing an additional layer of competitiveness with other schools offers team members an outlet for their gaming talents, tapping an inner confidence some might not know they possess. It also gives gamers who may only ever play at home in



Cannon School enrolls over 1,000 students a year in grades pre-kindergarten to 12th. IT Manager Tram Tran notes their esports program often makes a strong impression on visiting prospective students. “When they see our gaming room, they tell their parents: ‘I have to come here!’”

relative isolation a chance to know what winning and competing as part of a team is like.

Varsity esports is something CSG takes very seriously: Events against other school teams are carefully strategized in advance and closely watched on game day by fellow Cannon School students. Top player scores are rigorously tracked. At the same time, there are multiple non-varsity teams where the spirit is still competitive but the focus is on fun.

Planning for a bigger future

As more secondary schools and colleges engage in esports, expectations for its continued success are high. Tran says: “Right now, maybe 40% of our community is playing esports in some form, and I wouldn’t be surprised if in thirty years that number is 100%.”

Colleges are riding the wave, too. Some recruit top esports players out of high school, offering scholarships. Others offer chances to become part of their own premier egaming programs.

Tran describes another kind of success story when students manage or run esports tournaments on their own, using skills they gained from being in CSG.

“We built a small, grassroots consulting company around esports,” he says. “These kids will get hired by other schools trying to develop their own programs or events. I ended up teaching an entrepreneur class where our kids work on organizing esports events, getting tournament sponsors, enlisting other schools and vendors, building a room and finally running a tournament. That’s an experience that will get noticed on a college application.”

Tran anticipates the program will continue to grow as more colleges and universities invest in esports. To that end, he is focused on ensuring he remains forward-thinking and always has ample bandwidth at hand. “At Cannon School, we’re always about staying ahead of the curve,” he says.

“Right now we are running esports tournaments for other schools. We run them because behind us we have Spectrum Enterprise, which is dependable and reliable.”

– Tram Tran, Manager of Information Technology, Cannon School

About Spectrum Enterprise

Spectrum Enterprise, a part of Charter Communications, Inc., is a national provider of scalable, fiber technology solutions serving many of America’s largest businesses and communications service providers. The broad Spectrum Enterprise portfolio includes [networking and managed services solutions](#), [Internet access](#), [Ethernet access and networks](#), [Voice](#) and [TV solutions](#). The Spectrum Enterprise team of experts works closely with clients to achieve greater business success by providing solutions designed to meet their evolving needs. For more information, visit enterprise.spectrum.com.

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