



BATTLE OF THE COUNTIES

COMPETITION GUIDE & FAQ

2026–27 Pilot

EXPLORE ► LISTEN ► INVESTIGATE ► IMAGINE ► DESIGN ► SHARE



THE BIG IDEA

Students investigate a real community challenge, listen to different perspectives, research what matters, and use Minecraft Education to design and communicate a proposal for what could happen next.

Battle of the Counties is the optional competition pathway connected to Schools Reinventing Counties. The competition gives students an opportunity to take the civic learning they develop in the Minecraft Education experience and share a thoughtful proposal with a wider audience.

This guide explains the common competition structure for the 2026–27 pilot. Participating County Offices of Education may provide additional local schedules, procedures, or event information.



1. WHAT IS BATTLE OF THE COUNTIES?

Battle of the Counties is a student civic design competition organized by The Level Up Civics Foundation (Level Up Civics). Students work in teams to investigate authentic challenges affecting California communities and use Minecraft Education as a design and communication tool.

The goal is not simply to build something impressive in Minecraft. Students are asked to understand a challenge, consider the people and perspectives connected to it, investigate possible responses, and create a proposal with a clear purpose.



START WITH THE COMMUNITY

Students should not arrive assuming they already know the answer. Strong proposals begin by exploring, listening, investigating, and understanding the community before designing a solution.

Schools Reinventing Counties vs. Battle of the Counties

Schools Reinventing Counties is the broader Minecraft Education learning experience. Battle of the Counties is an optional competition pathway. Schools and educators may use Schools Reinventing Counties without entering the competition.



2. WHO CAN PARTICIPATE?

- Students in grades 3–12 may participate.
- Each official Battle of the Counties team consists of four students.
- Each school may submit one official team to the competition.
- Schools may involve many students or teams locally and use a school showcase, judging process, student voting, or another appropriate method to select the official team.
- Mixed-grade teams are allowed as long as all four students are within the same competition division.

Competition Divisions

Division	Grade Levels
Elementary	Grades 3–5
Middle School	Grades 6–8
High School	Grades 9–12

Public, charter, private, alternative, independent, homeschool, and microschool programs may participate when eligible through a participating competition pathway and able to meet the applicable registration requirements.



3. HOW THE COMPETITION WORKS

1. Explore the Schools Reinventing Counties experience and investigate a community challenge.
2. Complete the four required parts in the Battle Prompt for your challenge and grade band: Build, Board, NPC, and Virtual Tour.
3. If multiple teams participate at a school, select one official four-student team to represent the school.
4. The adult team advisor submits the team's project information and Virtual Tour (MP4) through the Official Team Submission form on the Level Up Civics website.
5. Judges score the Virtual Tour using the Battle Prompt & Rubric for the team's challenge and grade band.
6. Teams selected to advance receive next-round information through their team advisor and participating County Office of Education.

Later-round formats may vary by participating county. Local event details, dates, and procedures will be communicated separately rather than treated as universal competition requirements.



4. WHAT STUDENTS CREATE

Each team completes four required parts, described in the Battle Prompt & Rubric for its challenge and grade band.

- Build: a Minecraft build with purposeful features that work together (2+ for grades 3–5, 3+ for grades 6–8, 4+ for grades 9–12).
- Board: at least one Board near the build, with the fields the prompt lists (such as Project Name and Why It Matters).
- NPC: at least one character with a name, a job tied to the build, dialogue that explains the idea, and 1+ external link that supports it.
- Virtual Tour: a video walkthrough of the build, Board, and NPC, 3 minutes or less, with every team member's voice, submitted as an MP4.
- Throughout: what the team learned in the community, and in grades 9–12 a credible external source, should shape every part.

Minecraft building skill is not the objective of the competition. Minecraft is the medium students use to make their civic thinking visible.



5. ROUND ONE: VIRTUAL QUALIFIER SUBMISSION

The official school team does not submit its Minecraft world file. The adult team advisor submits the following through the Official Team Submission form on the Level Up Civics website:

- Project Title
- Challenge (one of the seven challenge titles)
- Brief Project Summary (for context only; it is not scored)
- Virtual Tour (MP4, 3 minutes or less)



NO MINECRAFT WORLD FILE IS SUBMITTED

The Virtual Tour should take judges into the team's Minecraft world and clearly show the build, Board, and NPC.



6. THE VIRTUAL TOUR

The Virtual Tour is how judges experience and understand the project. It must be 3 minutes or less and submitted as an MP4. Each Battle Prompt links to free screen-recording directions; other recorders are fine with teacher approval as long as the final file is an MP4.

The tour should:

- Show your build, Board, and NPC
- Name the need, strength, or opportunity your team addressed
- Explain what you learned and how it shaped your design
- Tell who your idea serves and why it matters
- In grades 9–12, use your external source to justify key choices
- Include every team member's voice
- Cover anything else your challenge's Battle Prompt asks for

Every team member's voice must be heard in the Virtual Tour. With teacher approval, a student may contribute through captions or on-screen text instead of speaking. Teams should use the tour to guide judges through the important parts of the proposal and show how the different elements work together.



7. HOW PROPOSALS ARE REVIEWED

Each challenge and grade band has its own Battle Prompt & Rubric. Every rubric uses the same four criteria, each scored 1–4, for a total of 16 points. Level 3 (Progressing) means the team met every requirement in its prompt; Level 4 (Excelling) means it went beyond.

Judging Area	What Judges Look For
Challenge	Does the proposal respond to a meaningful need, strength, or opportunity in the community and show who it serves and its intended impact?
Learning & Evidence	Is the design grounded in specific learning from the community and, in grades 9–12, a credible external source?
Design & Creativity	Does the build include the required number of purposeful features, working together as a clear, creative solution?
Communication & Team Voice	Do the Board, NPC, and Virtual Tour explain the proposal, with a relevant source and every team member's voice?

Each rubric names its criteria for the community (for example, “Fullerton Challenge”). Judges use the rubric that matches the team's challenge and grade band. Technical building skill and video production quality are not scored on their own.



8. EVERY SUBMISSION MATTERS

Battle of the Counties is a competition, but the purpose is bigger than advancing. Students investigate real challenges affecting real communities and use creativity, research, collaboration, and civic voice to propose what could happen next.

Every completed proposal represents meaningful civic participation. Teams are encouraged to share their ideas beyond the competition with school leaders, community organizations, local government, families, and others who may benefit from hearing student perspectives.



A PROPOSAL FOR A REAL COMMUNITY

If students listened, investigated, worked together, and developed a thoughtful idea for strengthening a community, they created something worth sharing and celebrating.



9. STUDENT PERMISSIONS & PRIVACY

Level Up Civics does not require schools to upload parent/guardian permission or media release forms with the Virtual Qualifier submission. Required student permissions should be maintained by the appropriate school, district, and/or participating County Office of Education according to local procedures.

The adult team advisor is responsible for confirming that required permissions are on file before submitting the team's competition materials. Level Up Civics collects the school- and team-level information necessary to administer the competition and review submitted projects.

Competition videos may contain student names, voices, images, or student-created work. Public sharing or promotion of identifiable student content should occur only in accordance with the permissions maintained by the appropriate educational agency.

Schools Reinventing Counties and Battle of the Counties are designed to support learning aligned with authentic civic engagement: identifying real-world community needs or problems, investigating them, considering different responses and perspectives, taking informed action through a proposal, and reflecting on possible impact.

For California high school programs, this type of work can support learning aligned with the California State Seal of Civic Engagement. Participation in Battle of the Counties does not automatically satisfy State Seal requirements. Local educational agencies establish their own procedures and determine whether students meet the statewide and locally adopted criteria.

California Department of Education references: State Seal of Civic Engagement criteria and implementation guidance.



10. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Is Battle of the Counties required to use Schools Reinventing Counties?

No. Schools Reinventing Counties is the learning experience. Battle of the Counties is an optional competition pathway.

Is there a competition entry fee?

There is no Battle of the Counties competition entry fee for the 2026–27 pilot. Schools may still have local technology, transportation, staffing, or participation costs that are outside the competition entry process.

How many students are on an official team?

Four students.

How many official teams may a school submit?

One official team per school. A school may involve many students and teams locally before selecting its official team.

Can students from different grades be on the same team?

Yes, as long as all four students are within the same division: grades 3–5, grades 6–8, or grades 9–12.

Do teams submit their Minecraft world?

No. The Virtual Qualifier submission includes the project information and the team's Virtual Tour (MP4). The tour should show judges the build, Board, and NPC clearly.

How long can the Virtual Tour be?

3 minutes or less.

Does every student have to be heard in the Virtual Tour?

Yes. Every team member's voice must be heard. With teacher approval, a student may contribute through captions or on-screen text instead of speaking.

Do schools send parent permission forms to Level Up Civics?

No. Required parent/guardian permissions and media releases should remain on file with the appropriate school, district, and/or participating County Office of Education. The team advisor verifies that required permissions are in place.

Is Minecraft building ability a separate judging category?

No. Judges score four criteria: the challenge, learning and evidence, design and creativity, and communication and team voice. Design & Creativity looks at whether features are purposeful, not at technical building skill.

Can students share their proposals outside the competition?

Yes. Teams are encouraged to share thoughtful proposals with school leaders, community organizations, local government, families, and other relevant audiences when appropriate and consistent with local student privacy and media permissions.

Does participating automatically qualify a student for California's State Seal of Civic Engagement?

No. The experience can support learning aligned with civic engagement criteria, but each local educational agency determines whether a student satisfies the statewide and locally adopted requirements.

How will teams know whether they advance?

Competition and advancement information will be sent through the adult team advisor and participating County Office of Education.

How do schools access the Minecraft Education experience?

World access, technical directions, and local implementation information will be communicated through participating County Offices of Education and official Schools Reinventing Counties materials. Schools should follow the access instructions provided for their pathway.

Battle of the Counties is organized by The Level Up Civics Foundation. Minecraft Education is the software platform used by students to explore, design, build, and communicate their proposals.

IMPORTANT MINECRAFT / MICROSOFT DISCLAIMER

Not an official Minecraft or Minecraft Education program or event. Not approved by or associated with Mojang or Microsoft. Participating organizations should follow applicable Minecraft Education usage and scholastic esports guidelines and should not imply sponsorship, endorsement, approval, or official association with Microsoft or Mojang.