



SCHOOLS REINVENTING COUNTIES

PLAYER & EDUCATOR GUIDE

2026–27

EXPLORE ► LISTEN ► INVESTIGATE ► IMAGINE ► DESIGN ► SHARE



YOUR ROLE: COMMUNITY DESIGNER

Explore California communities, listen to the people connected to them, investigate real challenges, and use what you learn to imagine and design what could happen next.

Schools Reinventing Counties is a Minecraft Education civic and community-based learning experience. Students begin at the California State Capitol, enter county pathways, explore communities, meet people through NPC dialogue, investigate local strengths and challenges, and develop proposals for strengthening communities.

The experience can be used in classrooms, electives, clubs, Community Schools programs, interdisciplinary projects, career-connected learning, or other educational settings. Participation in the separate Battle of the Counties competition is optional.



1. START WITH THE COMMUNITY

The most important idea in Schools Reinventing Counties is simple: do not arrive assuming you already know the answer. Explore first.

Communities are more than problems to solve. They are people, histories, cultures, places, institutions, resources, strengths, needs, and relationships. Before students design anything, they are asked to notice what is already there, listen to different perspectives, investigate the challenge, and consider who may be affected by a proposed solution.



2. THE LEARNING JOURNEY

Stage	What Students Do
Explore	Enter communities, observe the environment, discover local assets, and learn what makes each place unique.
Listen	Meet NPCs and consider the experiences, priorities, concerns, and ideas of people connected to the community.
Investigate	Gather information, examine the challenge, use credible sources, and look for connections between causes, impacts, and possible responses.
Imagine	Generate possibilities. Ask what could improve, who a solution might serve, and what tradeoffs or unintended effects should be considered.
Design	Use Minecraft Education to create a purposeful proposal that responds to what was learned.
Share	Explain the proposal, the reasoning behind it, and the impact students believe it could have. Whenever appropriate, share ideas with authentic community audiences.



3. BEGIN AT THE CALIFORNIA STATE CAPITOL

The experience begins at the California State Capitol, where students receive their statewide mission and are introduced to the idea that California's communities face different challenges and hold different strengths.

From the Capitol, students choose an available county pathway and begin exploring. Each participating county offers its own communities, stories, perspectives, and design challenges while following the same overall learning journey.

Catalina Island: An Open Pathway

Catalina Island provides an open pathway for students whose county is not represented in the current experience or for educators who want a standalone community challenge. Catalina Island is presented as an island community, not as a fictional county and not as representation of a participating County Office of Education.



4. EXPLORE BEFORE YOU BUILD

Students should resist the urge to immediately begin construction. The exploration is part of the learning.

- Move through the community and observe places, environments, landmarks, and existing assets.
- Read boards and signs for quick context and directions.
- Talk with NPCs. Their dialogue carries much of the community story and introduces perspectives students should consider.
- Follow credible links or resources when they are provided and appropriate for the learning task.
- Take notes, screenshots, or guided notes as directed by the educator.
- Identify questions that still need investigation before choosing a response.

Boards are designed as quick visual prompts. NPCs provide deeper storytelling and perspective. The Minecraft environment allows students to see, explore, and experience the context in which the challenge exists.



5. CHOOSE A CIVIC DESIGN CHALLENGE

After exploring, students select or are assigned a community challenge. The challenge is intentionally open enough to support different grade levels, subjects, perspectives, and solutions.

Students are not looking for one predetermined correct answer. They are developing a reasoned proposal based on what they discovered.



A STRONG DESIGN QUESTION

How might we use what we learned about this community to design something that responds to the challenge, serves people thoughtfully, and strengthens the community?

Questions to Ask Before Designing

- What is happening, and why does it matter?
- Who is affected by the challenge?
- What strengths or resources already exist in the community?
- Whose perspectives have we heard? Whose perspectives might still be missing?
- What evidence or credible information should inform our decisions?
- Who is our proposal intended to serve?
- What could improve if our idea worked?

- What tradeoffs, limitations, or unintended impacts should we consider?



6. USE MINECRAFT AS A CIVIC DESIGN TOOL

Minecraft Education is the design environment students use to make their thinking visible. The goal is not to reward the most complicated build. A successful proposal communicates purpose, reasoning, community understanding, and a thoughtful response to the challenge.

A Complete Proposal May Include

- A Minecraft build that represents the team's proposed response.
- Boards or signs that explain important features, choices, or impacts.
- Student-created NPCs whose dialogue communicates reasoning, stakeholder perspectives, or supporting information.
- Connections to credible research, public agencies, community organizations, or other relevant resources where appropriate.
- Design choices that make it clear who the proposal is intended to serve and how it responds to the challenge.

Students should be able to explain not only what they built, but why they built it that way and how their decisions connect to what they learned.



7. COMMUNITY SCHOOLS: THE FOUNDATION

Schools Reinventing Counties is grounded in a Community Schools mindset: students, families, educators, and community partners working together to understand local strengths, identify needs, listen to different perspectives, and imagine possibilities.

This means community engagement is not an extra step added at the end. It shapes the way students investigate and design from the beginning. Educators are encouraged to connect the Minecraft experience to local voices, community organizations, families, public agencies, school partners, and authentic audiences whenever appropriate.



FROM VIRTUAL EXPLORATION TO REAL COMMUNITY VOICE

The Minecraft world can start the inquiry. Local conversations, research, interviews, observations, and partnerships can deepen it.



8. LOCAL CHALLENGES, GLOBAL CONNECTIONS

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals can provide a secondary global lens for the experience. Students may discover that a challenge affecting one California community connects to broader issues communities around the world are also addressing.

The purpose is not to memorize all of the goals. Educators can use relevant SDGs to help students recognize connections among local decisions, sustainability, health, equity, infrastructure, environment, community well-being, and other global concerns.

Any SDG connection in Schools Reinventing Counties is an educational alignment only and does not imply United Nations sponsorship, partnership, or endorsement.



9. LEARNING CONNECTIONS

Because students investigate, read, discuss, research, design, collaborate, create, and communicate, Schools Reinventing Counties can support learning across multiple disciplines.

Learning Area	Possible Connections
Civic Learning	Community inquiry, civic needs and assets, stakeholder perspectives, informed action, reflection, and civic voice.
ELA & Literacy	Reading informational text, evidence, research, speaking and listening, explanatory writing, argument, presentation, and media literacy.
STEAM	Design thinking, systems thinking, spatial reasoning, prototyping, iteration, sustainability, technology, and creative problem solving.
CTE & Career Readiness	Collaboration, project management, communication, digital design, problem solving, community-facing work, and exploration of careers connected to local challenges.
Digital Citizenship	Responsible collaboration, credible sources, ethical use of digital spaces, audience awareness, and thoughtful communication.



10. CALIFORNIA STATE SEAL OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

For California high school programs, Schools Reinventing Counties can support learning aligned with the California State Seal of Civic Engagement (SSCE), particularly when students extend the experience through authentic inquiry, informed action, reflection, and engagement with their own communities.

California's statewide criteria include participation in informed civic engagement projects that address real-world problems and require students to identify and inquire into civic needs or problems, consider varied responses, take action, and reflect on their efforts.

Participation in Schools Reinventing Counties or Battle of the Counties does not automatically earn or satisfy the SSCE. Local educational agencies establish local requirements and determine whether individual students meet the statewide and locally adopted criteria.



11. FOR EDUCATORS

There is no single required classroom model. Educators can scale the experience to fit their students, instructional goals, schedule, and local context.

- Whole-class civic or interdisciplinary unit
- Small-group project or performance task
- Community Schools inquiry
- History-social science or civics experience
- ELA research, speaking, writing, or argument unit
- STEAM or design-thinking challenge
- CTE or career-connected learning project
- Game-based learning or Minecraft Education elective
- Esports, technology, or after-school club
- School showcase or local design competition

Suggested Educator Flow

1. Introduce the purpose and the role of community designer.
2. Allow students time to learn basic Minecraft Education navigation if needed.
3. Begin at the California State Capitol and establish the statewide mission.
4. Enter a county pathway and explore before assigning or selecting a challenge.
5. Use guided notes, discussion, research, or local community connections to deepen investigation.
6. Give students time to imagine, plan, build, test, and revise.
7. Require students to explain the reasoning behind their design choices.
8. Create an authentic opportunity to share, reflect, and receive feedback.



12. SHARING BEYOND THE BUILD

The strongest ending is not simply 'we finished the Minecraft world.' Students should have an opportunity to communicate what they learned and what they are proposing.

Depending on the project, students might present to classmates, families, school leaders, community partners, city staff, elected officials, local organizations, or other authentic audiences. The goal is to help students see that their ideas can contribute to real conversations about the places where people live, learn, work, and gather.



13. WANT TO COMPETE?

Battle of the Counties is the optional competition pathway connected to Schools Reinventing Counties. Schools may use the learning experience without competing.

Schools that choose to participate should use the separate Battle of the Counties Competition Guide & FAQ for official team rules, divisions, Virtual Qualifier submission requirements, student permission procedures, and advancement information, and the Battle Prompt & Rubric for each challenge's requirements and scoring.



THE LEARNING COMES FIRST

Battle of the Counties creates an additional audience and celebration for student work. The purpose of Schools Reinventing Counties remains meaningful community inquiry, design, communication, and civic voice.



14. GETTING STARTED & TECHNICAL READINESS

Minecraft Education access is managed through each participating educational organization. Before implementation, educators should work with their local technology team to confirm licensing, student and educator sign-in, application installation, device readiness, and any network requirements.

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



15. PROGRAM INFORMATION

Schools Reinventing Counties is developed and organized by The Level Up Civics Foundation. Minecraft Education is the software platform used for the learning experience.



NOT AN OFFICIAL MINECRAFT OR MINECRAFT EDUCATION PROGRAM OR EVENT

Not approved by or associated with Mojang or Microsoft. Schools Reinventing Counties should not be represented as sponsored, endorsed, approved, or officially affiliated with Minecraft Education, Mojang, or Microsoft.

Reference & Alignment Notes

Civic-learning language in this guide is informed by the California Department of Education State Seal of Civic Engagement criteria and implementation guidance. Brand and program language is informed by current Minecraft Education Usage Guidelines and Scholastic Esports Guidelines.