

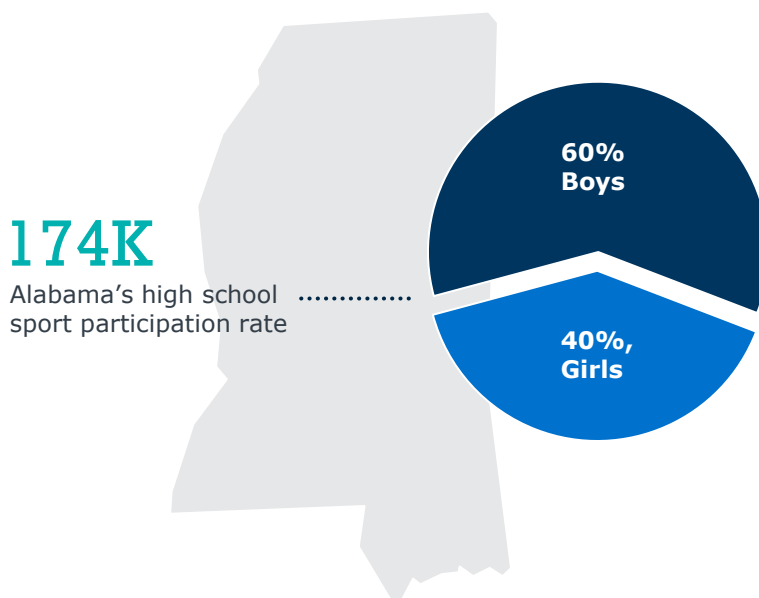
High School Sports Participation State Profile

State Profile: Alabama

Boys Account for Most High School Sport Participation

As of 2022-2023, the high school sports participation rate was just over 174,000 in Alabama. Mirroring the national trend, boys accounted for more than half of participation.

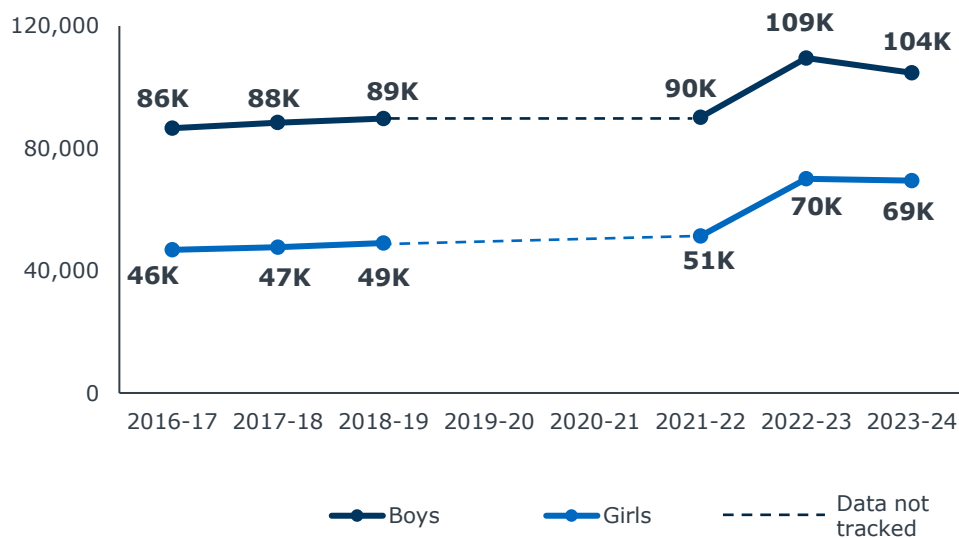
High School Sport Participation, Share of Girls v. Boys, 2023-24
n=174,127 participation rate



Gap Between Boys, Girls Shrinking Slightly

Participation in high school sports is growing among boys and girls over the last eight years and up dramatically from the first year after pandemic closures.

Change in Participation Rates, 2016-17 to 2023-24



Source: EAB analysis of National Federation of State High School Association data.

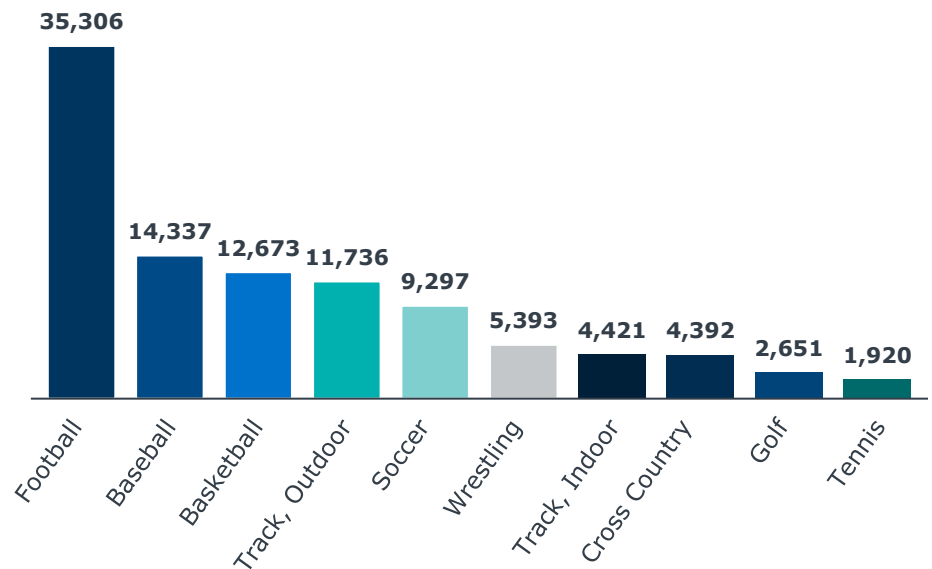
Top Boys' and Girls' Sports

Top Boys Sports Mostly Mirror National Trends

Like most states, football was the biggest boys sport as of 2023-2024. The biggest deviation from national trends is indoor track, which is the seventh largest sport in Alabama and not in the top 10 nationally. However, there typically is a lot of overlap among indoor and outdoor track athletes.

Top 10 Boys' Sports by Participation Rate, 2022-2023

n=117,500 participation rate across 15 sports

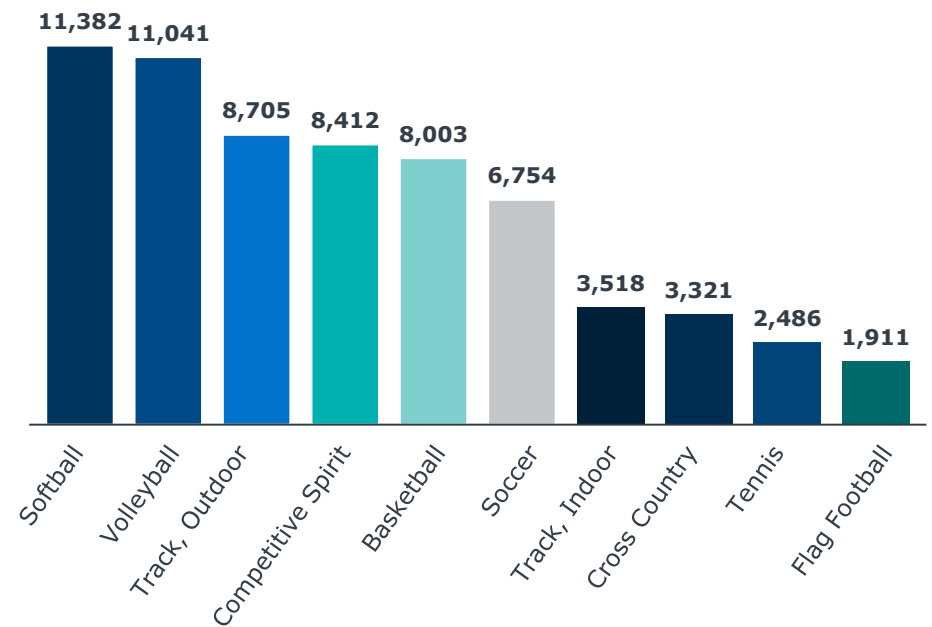


Flag Football Emerging as a Popular Sport among Girls

The top girls' sports in Alabama vary more from national trends. For example, softball, which is the fifth largest sport nationally, is the top sport by participation in the state. Otherwise, the biggest deviation is flag football. While lacrosse is the 10th largest sport among girls nationally, it did not make the top 10 in Alabama. Nor did swimming. Instead, Flag Football and indoor track were in the top 10 for Alabama.

Top 10 Girls' Sports by Participation Rate, 2023-2024

n=80,897 participation rate across 25 sports



Source: EAB analysis of National Federation of State High School Association data.

Short- and Long-Term Changes in Participation

Boys

Areas of Consistent Growth

Seven sports grew both in the last year and across the last eight years. This trend may signal emerging and/or sustainable recruitment areas. They included:

- Soccer
- Wrestling
- Cross Country
- Golf
- Bowling
- Swimming & Diving
- Decathlon

Areas of Steady Decline

In comparison, participation fell in the last year and across the last eight years among two sports. Because the participation rate double counts multi-sport athletes, it is possible some of these declines may be attributed to growing specialization.

- Baseball
- Basketball

Sport	2022-2023 Participation	Change, 2022-23 to 2023-24	Change, 2016-17 to 2023-24
Football—11-Player	35,306	-6%	16%
Baseball	14,337	-5%	-8%
Basketball	12,673	-11%	-3%
Track and Field — Outdoor	11,736	-1%	47%
Soccer	9,297	5%	49%
Wrestling	5,393	2%	111%
Track and Field — Outdoor	4,448	-4%	77%
Cross Country	4,421	3%	23%
Golf	2,651	7%	54%
Tennis	1,920	-5%	25%
Bowling	1,218	8%	69%
Swimming & Diving	806	3%	26%
Esport	412	-63%	N/A
Decathlon	100	144%	14%

Source: EAB analysis of National Federation of State High School Association data.

Biggest, Fastest Growth, Largest Decline

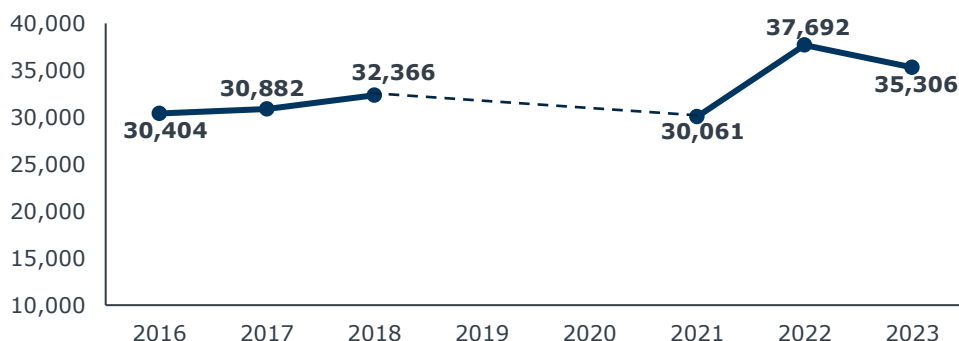
Boys

Biggest Sport

Modest Growth in Football Participation

Participation in football increased 16% between 2016 and 2022, from 30,404 to 37,692. However, it is showing recent signs of decline. Participation fell 6% from 2022 to 2023.

Change in Boys' Football Participation, 2016-17 to 2023-24

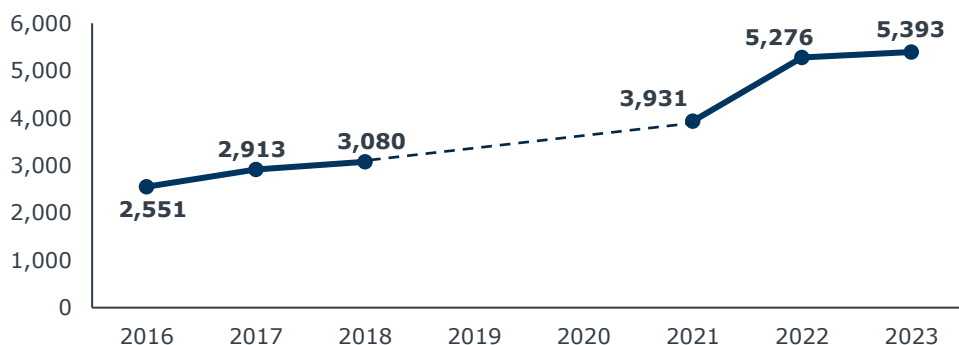


Fastest Growth

Wrestling Surges After the Pandemic

Participation in wrestling increased every year between 2016 and 2023, for total growth of 111%.

Change in Boys Wrestling Participation, 2016-17 to 2023-24

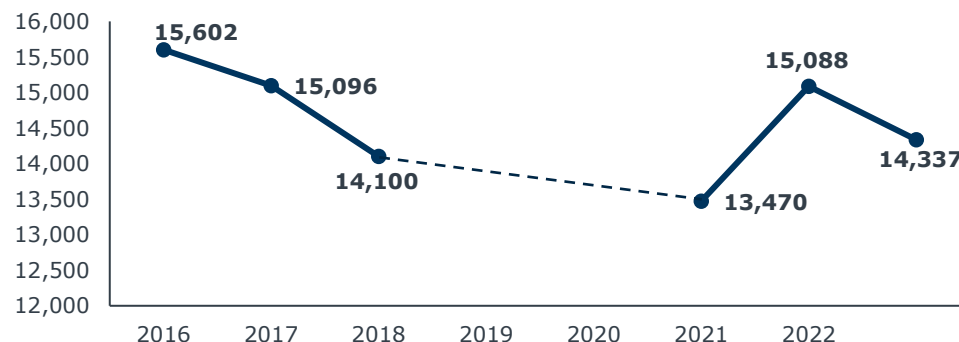


Largest Decline

Baseball Up Slightly After Post-Pandemic Hit

Baseball participation steadily declined up to and through the pandemic (-14%). Participation has rebounded slightly, but it is still down from 2016 levels.

Change in Boys Baseball Participation, 2016-17 to 2023-24



Source: EAB analysis of National Federation of State High School Association data.

Short- and Long-Term Changes in Participation

Girls

Areas of Consistent Growth

There are four sports that grew both in the last year and across the last eight years. This trend may signal emerging and/or sustainable recruitment areas. They included:

- Soccer
- Golf
- Bowling
- Heptathlon

Areas of Steady Decline

In comparison, participation fell in the last year and across the last eight years among one sports. Because the participation rate double counts multi-sport athletes, it is possible some of these declines may be attributed to growing specialization.

- Basketball

Sport	2022-2023 Participation	Change, 2022-23 to 2023-24	Change, 2016-17 to 2023-24
Softball—Fast Pitch	11,382	-3%	+20%
Volleyball	11,041	-10%	+12%
Track and Field — Outdoor	8,705	-3%	+57%
Competitive Spirit	8,412	-6%	N/A
Basketball	8,003	-5%	-8%
Soccer	6,754	+17%	+41%
Track and Field — Indoor	3,518	-4%	+92%
Cross Country	3,321	-2%	+29%
Tennis	2,486	-6%	+36%
Flag Football	1,911	+112%	N/A
Golf	1,180	+8%	+69%
Bowling	956	+8%	+73%
Swimming & Diving	942	-1%	+12%
Wrestling	636	+55%	N/A
Heptathlon	108	+260%	+64%
eSports	42	N/A	N/A
Football	5	N/A	N/A

Source: EAB analysis of National Federation of State High School Association data.

Biggest, Fastest Growth, Largest Decline

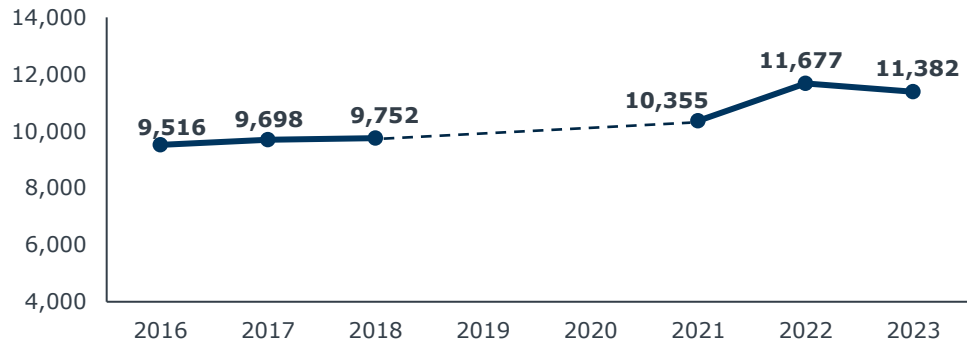
Girls

Biggest Sport

Slow but Steady Growth for Softball in Alabama

Participation in fast pitch softball is up nearly 20% since 2016. However, it fell slightly from 2022 to 2023.

Change in Girls' Softball-Fast Pitch Participation, 2016-17 to 2023-24

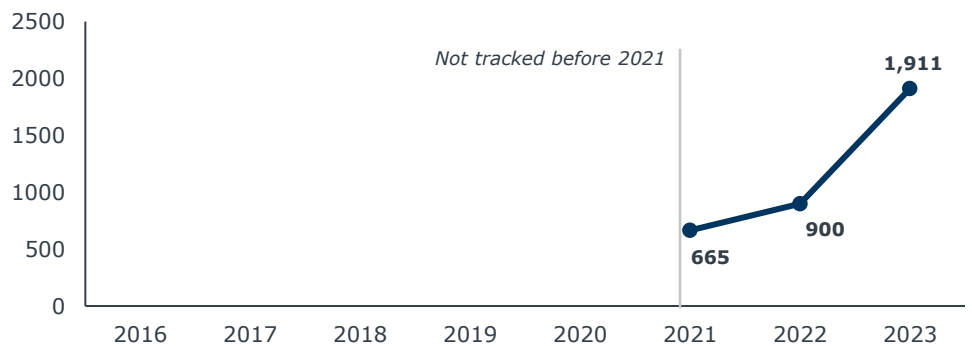


Fastest Growth

Flag Football Shows Quick Growth Among Girls

While participation in flag football was not tracked before 2021, it shows signs of quick growth. Specifically, participation among girls increased 112% between 2021 and 2023, with nearly 2,000 participants.

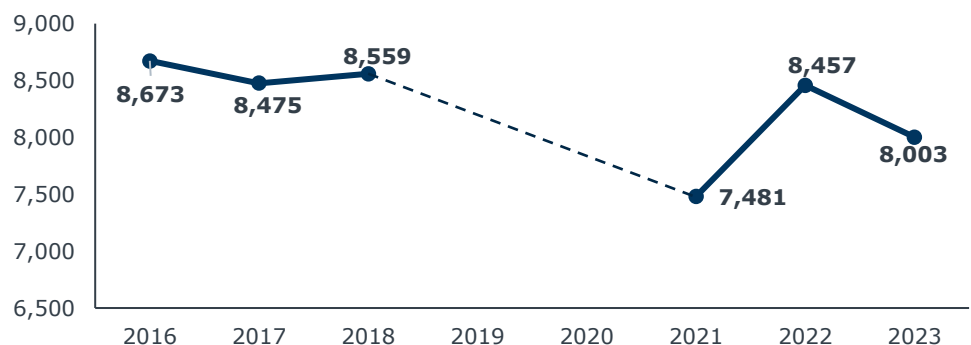
Change in Girls Flag Football Participation, 2016-17 to 2023-24



Basketball Down, But Showing Signs of Rebound

Participation in basketball, the sixth largest sport among girls, is down 8% since 2016. Participation dropped more sharply after the pandemic (-13%) but has since recovered slightly.

Change in Girls Basketball Participation, 2016-17 to 2023-24



Source: EAB analysis of National Federation of State High School Association data.

Appendix: About the Data

Data in this report come from the National Federation of State High School Association's "[High School Athletics Participation Survey](#)."

Limitations of the Data

- The numbers cited in this report reflect the "participation rate." An individual who participated in two sports is counted twice, three sports – three times, etc.
- Participation rates are not adjusted for population changes.
- Most states exclude data from independent schools, unless they are part of the state league, which varies by state and sport.
- Data do not include club sport participation.
- Some states did not report data for all years included in the report. Meanwhile, others appear to have reported duplicate data in a few cases. These cases are called out in the report when applicable.

Definitions

"Adapted" refers to sports that are modified (e.g., rules, equipment) for special-needs students.

"Unified" refers to sports that are open to special-needs students but aren't adapted to meet their needs.

Appendix: National High School Sports Participation

2023-2024 Top 10 Sports in USA by Participation

Top Boys' Sports

1. Football – 11-Player	1,031,508
2. Track and Field – Outdoor	625,333
3. Basketball	536,668
4. Baseball	471,701
5. Soccer	467,483
6. Wrestling	291,874
7. Cross Country	239,874
8. Tennis	157,835
9. Golf	155,174
10. Swimming and Diving	116,799
Total Boys' Participation	4,638,785

Top Girls' Sports

1. Track and Field – Outdoor	506,015
2. Volleyball	479,125
3. Soccer	383,895
4. Basketball	367,284
5. Softball – Fast Pitch	345,451
6. Tennis	195,766
7. Cross Country	192,969
8. Competitive Spirit	181,023
9. Swimming and Diving	138,174
10. Lacrosse	101,204
Total Girls' Participation	3,423,517

Source: EAB analysis of National Federation of State High School Association data.