

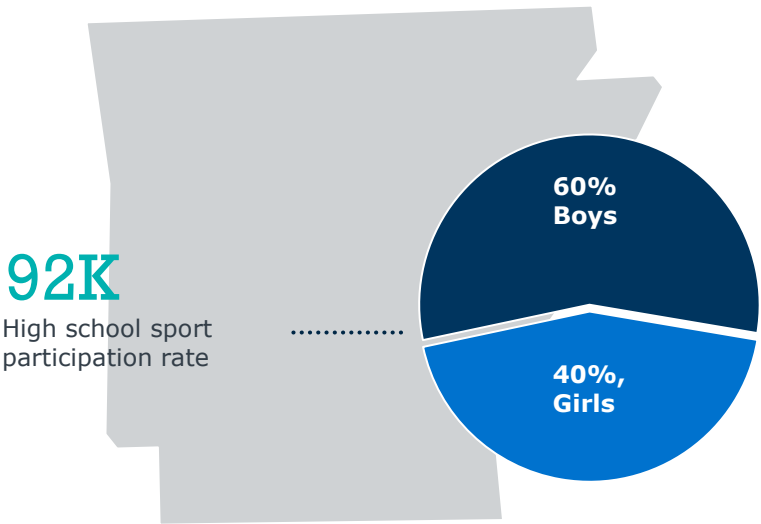
High School Sports Participation State Profile

State Profile: Arkansas

Boys Account for Most High School Sport Participation

As of 2023-2024, the high school sports participation rate was just over 92,678 in Arkansas. Mirroring the national trend, boys accounted for more than half of participation.

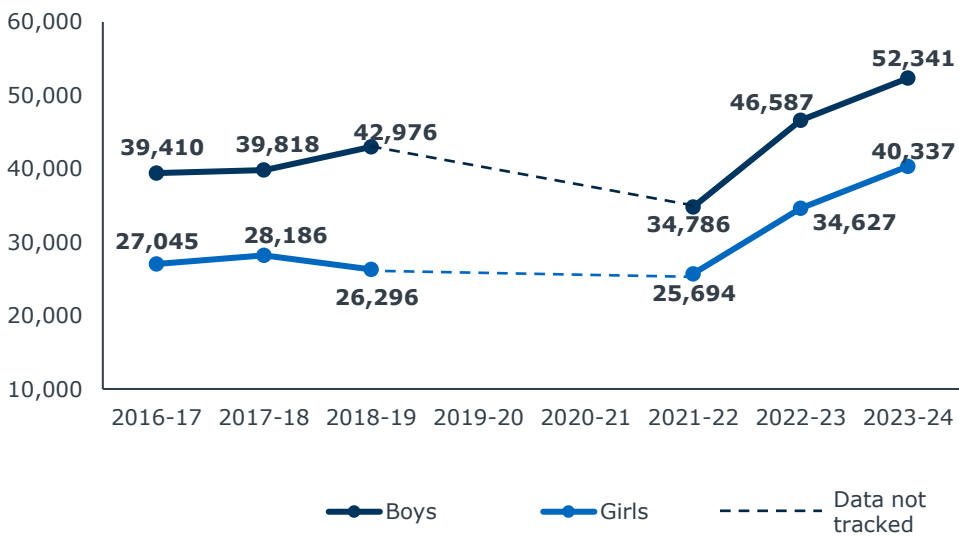
High School Sport Participation, Share of Girls v. Boys, 2023-24
n=92,678 total participation rate



Gap Between Boys, Girls Shrinking After Pandemic

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



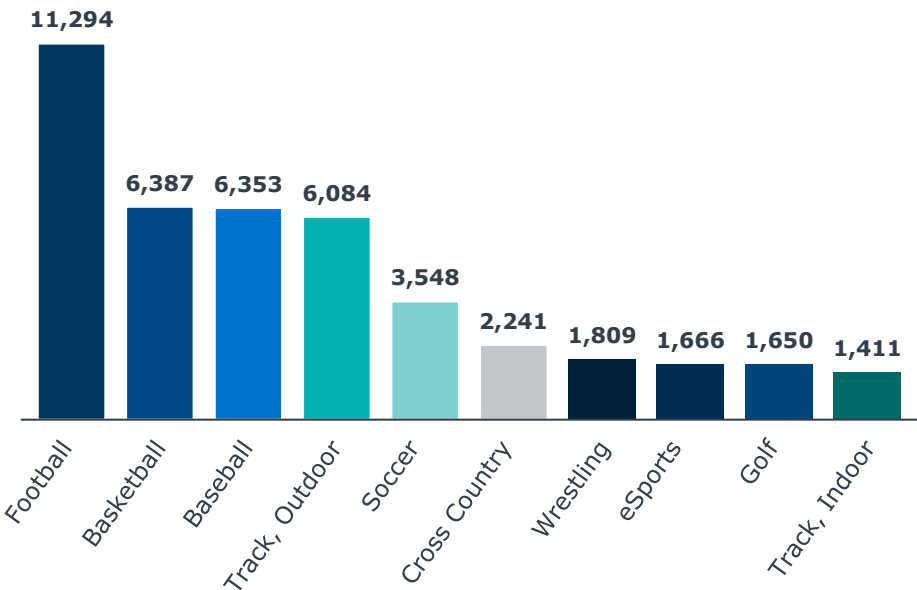
Source: EAB analysis of National Federation of State High School Association data.

Top Boys' and Girls' Sports

eSports Emerges as Top 10 Sport Among Boys

Like many other states, football was the biggest boys sport as of 2023-2024. The biggest deviation from national trends was eSports, which was eighth largest sport in the state and not in the top 10 nationally.

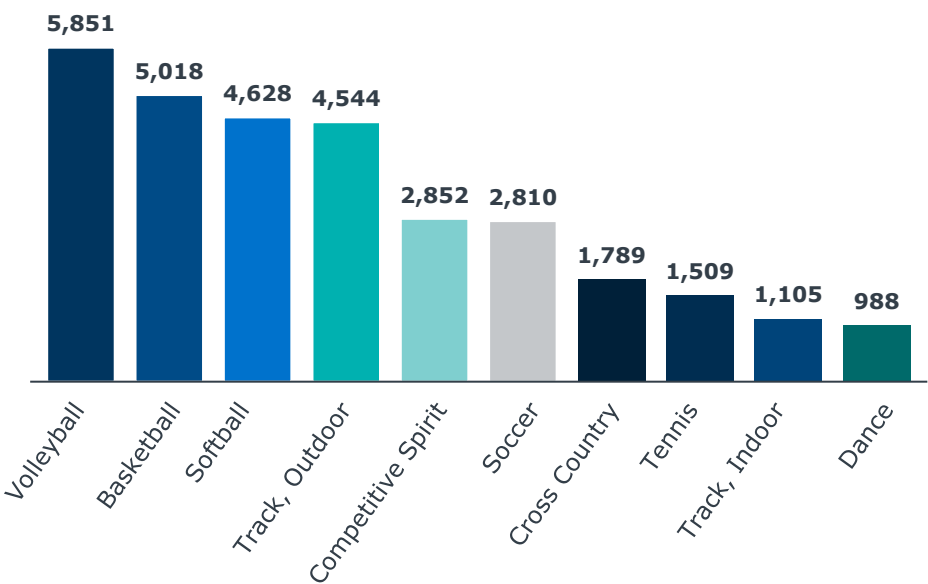
Top 10 Boys' Sports by Participation Rate, 2023-2024
n=52,341 participation rate across 14 sports



Track Takes Two Spots in Top 10

The top girls' sports in Arkansas mostly reflect national trends. The biggest deviation was indoor track. The ninth largest sport in Arkansas is not in the top 10 nationally.

Top 10 Girls' Sports by Participation Rate, 2023-2024
n=40,337 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

Seventeen 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:

- Football, 11-Player
- Basketball
- Baseball
- Track & Field, Outdoor
- Soccer
- Cross Country
- Wrestling
- Golf
- Track & Field, Indoor
- Tennis
- Weightlifting
- Archery
- Swimming & Diving
- Riflery
- Competitive Spirit
- Decathlon
- Rodeo

Areas of Steady Decline

In comparison, participation did not fall in the last year and across the last eight among any sports.

Sport	2023-2024 Participation	Change, 2022-23 to 2023-24	Change, 2016-17 to 2023-24
Football, 11-Player	11,294	11%	5%
Basketball	6,387	4%	17%
Baseball	6,353	11%	12%
Track and Field, Outdoor	6,084	20%	31%
Soccer	3,548	14%	21%
Cross Country	2,241	19%	36%
Wrestling	1,809	38%	125%
Esport	1,666	-7%	N/A
Golf	1,650	16%	23%
Track and Field, Indoor	1,411	6%	35%
Tennis	1,291	9%	31%
Trap Shooting	1,143	-5%	N/A
Unified Basketball	1,131	58%	N/A
Unified Track and Field, Outdoor	954	63%	N/A
Weightlifting	928	17%	10%
Bowling	885	-16%	38%
Football, 8-player	839	47%	N/A
Archery	833	10%	18%
Swimming & Diving	504	4%	12%

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

Short- and Long-Term Changes in Participation

Boys, Continued

Sport	2023-2024 Participation	Change, 2022-23 to 2023-24	Change, 2016-17 to 2023-24
Unified Bowling	112	48%	N/A
Air Riflery	105	71%	N/A
Riflery	90	56%	620%
Competitive Spirit	51	47%	196%
Mt. Biking	61	80%	N/A
Decathlon	4	6%	66%
Lacrosse	23	51%	N/A
Rodeo	18	82%	111%
Heptathlon	7	50%	N/A
Dance	1	10%	-39%
Dance Team, High Kick	1	10%	N/A
Dance Team, Jazz	1	10%	N/A
Dance/Drill	1	10%	N/A

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

Biggest, Fastest-Growing Sports

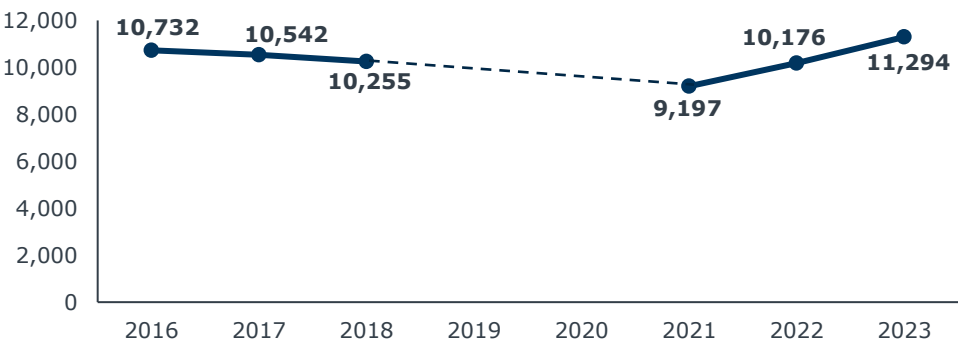
Boys

Biggest Sport

Modest Growth in Football Participation

Participation in football increased 5% between 2016 and 2023, despite declining each year through 2021.

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

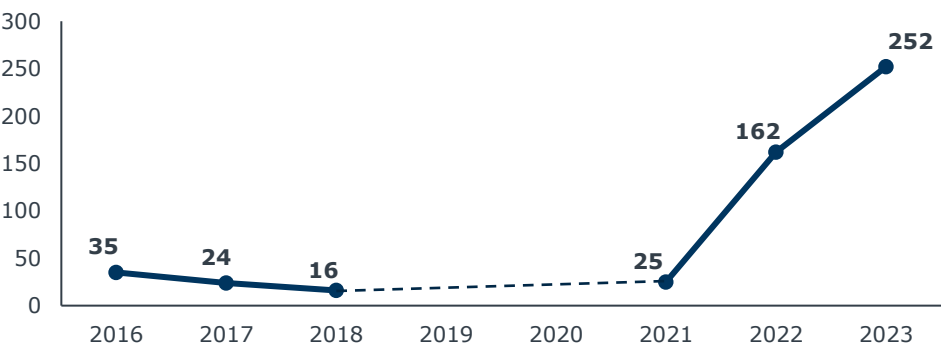


Fastest Growth

Riflery Small But Growing Fast Among Boys

Participation in riflery is up 620% since 2016. Despite growing so fast since 2021, it is still the 22nd largest sport in the state.

Change in Boys' Riflery 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

Seventeen 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:

- Volleyball
- Basketball
- Softball
- Track & Field, Outdoor
- Competitive Spirit
- Cross Country
- Tennis
- Track & Field, Indoor
- Dance
- Golf
- Bowling
- Archery
- Wrestling
- Riflery
- Heptathlon
- Rodeo

Areas of Steady Decline

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

- Swimming & Diving
- Gymnastics
- Weightlifting

Sport	2023-2024 Participation	Change, 2022-23 to 2023-24	Change, 2016-17 to 2023-24
Volleyball	5,851	58%	102%
Basketball	5,018	11%	21%
Softball, Fast Pitch	4,628	6%	3%
Track and Field, Outdoor	4,544	15%	23%
Competitive Spirit	2,852	21%	98%
Soccer	2,810	9%	20%
Cross Country	1,789	19%	35%
Tennis	1,509	9%	34%
Track and Field, Indoor	1,105	5%	24%
Dance	988	4%	38%
Dance Team, High Kick	988	4%	N/A
Dance Team, Jazz	988	4%	N/A
Dance/Drill	988	4%	-7%
Golf	931	2%	37%
Bowling	713	4%	33%
Unified Basketball	705	54%	N/A
Unified Track and Field, Outdoor	665	55%	N/A
Archery	584	32%	34%
Wrestling	583	37%	980%

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

Short- and Long-Term Changes in Participation

Girls, Continued

Sport	2023-2024 Participation	Change, 2022-23 to 2023-24	Change, 2016-17 to 2023-24
Swimming & Diving	518	-20%	-11%
eSports	429	3%	N/A
Trap Shooting	361	-10%	N/A
Unified Bowling	271	69%	N/A
Air Riflery	96	113%	N/A
Riflery	96	113%	357%
Lacrosse	65	59%	N/A
Mt. Biking	64	78%	N/A
Heptathlon	54	13%	46%
Baseball	31	82%	N/A
Gymnastics	31	-31%	-42%
Decathlon	29	61%	N/A
Rodeo	24	20%	118%
Weightlifting	23	-58%	-88%
Football, 11-Player	5	0%	-77%
Football, 8-Player	1	N/A	N/A

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

Biggest, Fastest Growth, Largest Decline

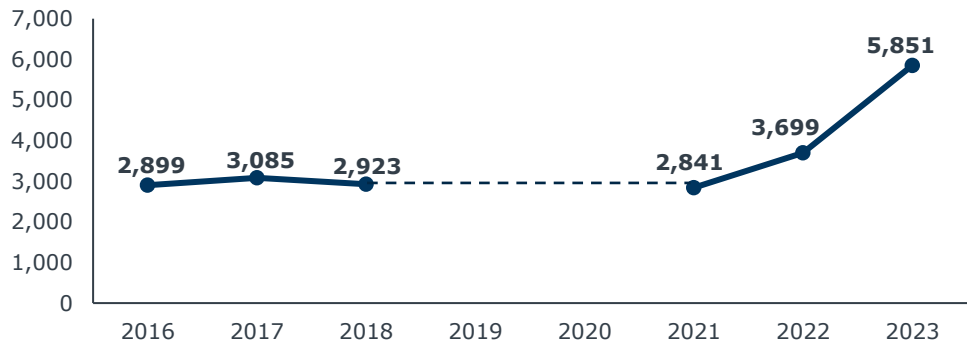
Girls

Biggest Sport

Growth in Volleyball Picking Up Pace

Participation volleyball, the state's largest girls' sport, increased 102% between 2016 and 2023, with particularly fast growth starting after 2021.

Change in Girls' Volleyball Participation, 2016-17 to 2023-24

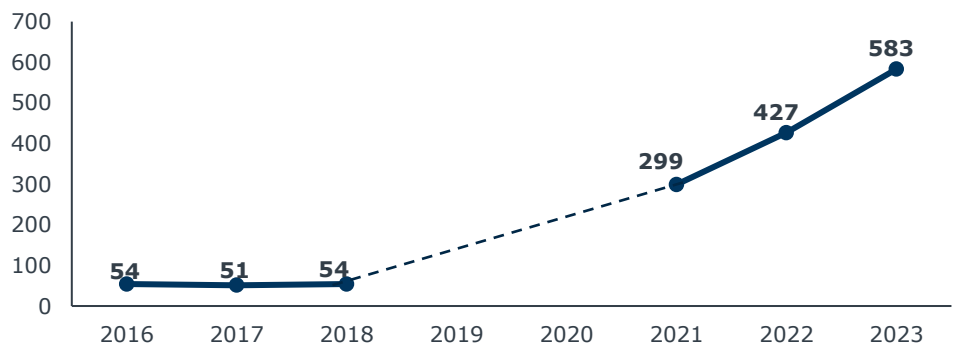


Fastest Growth

Wrestling Small but Growing Fast Among Girls

Participation in wrestling increased 980% between 2016 and 2023. Wrestling is now the 19th largest sport in the state.

Change in Girls' Wrestling Participation, 2016-17 to 2023-24

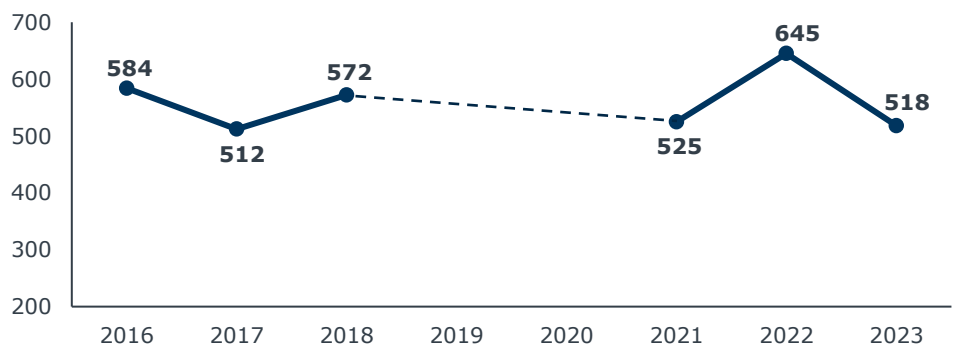


Largest Decline¹

Swimming Participation Volatile, Down Overall

Participation in swimming & diving decreased 11% between 2016 and 2023.

Change in Girls Swimming & Diving Participation, 2016-17 to 2023-24



1) Excludes sports with fewer than 100 participants

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.