

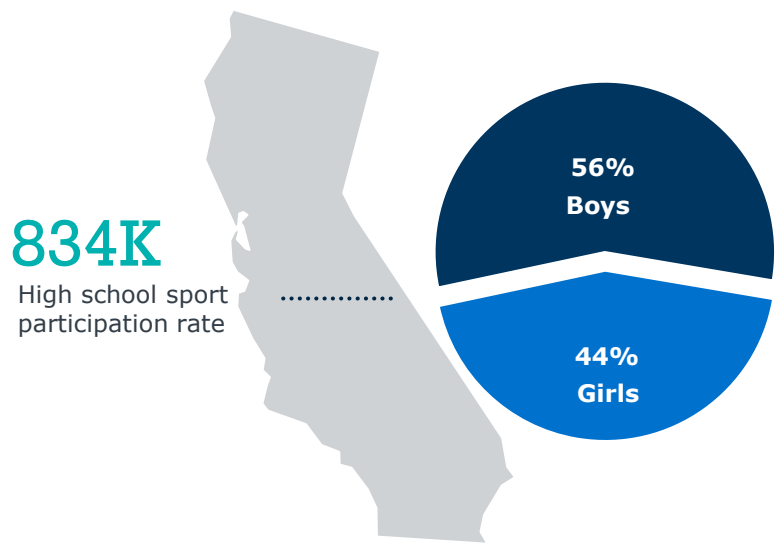
High School Sports Participation State Profile

State Profile: California

Boys Account for Most High School Sport Participation

As of 2022-2023, the high school sports participation rate was just over 834,000 in California. Mirroring the national trend, boys accounted for more than half of participation.

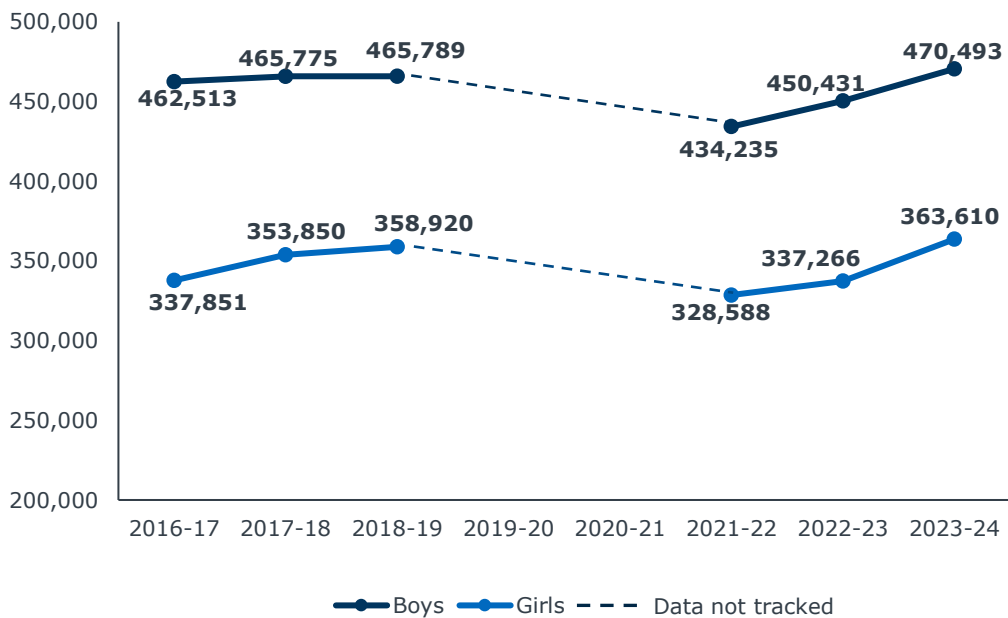
High School Sport Participation, Share of Girls v. Boys, 2023-24
n=834,103 (total participation)



Gap Between Boys, Girls Persists After Pandemic

Participation in high school sports is growing among boys and girls over the last eight years. The gap in participation persists, with only slight changes since 2016.

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



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

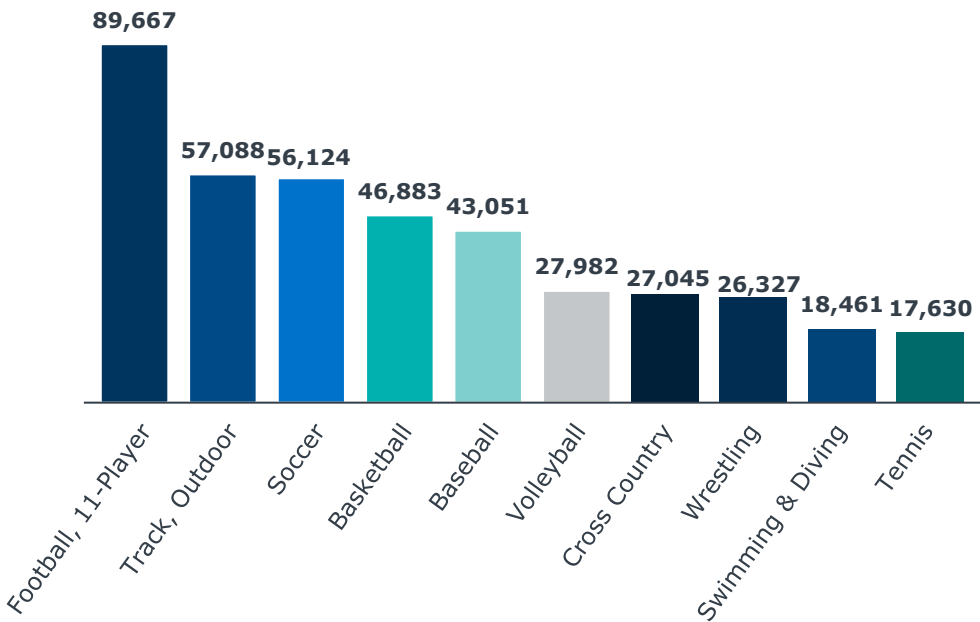
Top Boys' and Girls' Sports

Football Takes Top Spot

Like most states, 11-player football was the biggest boys' sport as of 2023-2024. The biggest deviation from national trends was volleyball, the sixth largest sport in the state.

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

n =470,493 (boys' participation rate)

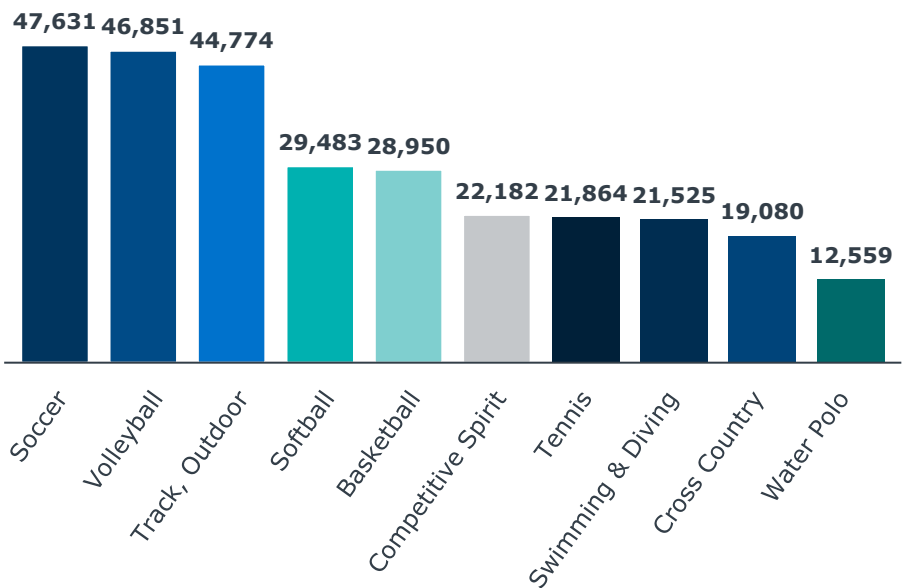


Softball Takes Two Spots in Girls' Top 10

The top girls' sport in California is soccer, which is the third largest nationally. Otherwise, the biggest deviation from national trends is water polo, the 10th largest sport in the state.

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

n =363,610 (girls' participation rate)



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

Short- and Long-Term Changes in Participation

Boys

Areas of Consistent Growth

Ten 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:

- Track & Field, Outdoor
- Soccer
- Basketball
- Volleyball
- Wrestling
- Golf
- Lacrosse
- Badminton
- Ice Hockey
- Gymnastics

Areas of Steady Decline

In comparison, participation fell in the last year and across the last eight years among 10 sports. Because the participation rate double counts multi-sport athletes, it is possible some of these declines may be attributed to growing specialization.

- Baseball
- Flag Football
- Crew
- Decathlon
- Fencing
- Archery
- Adapted Track
- Bowling
- Adapted Soccer
- Equestrian

Sport	2023-2024 Participation	Change, 2022-23 to 2023-24	Change, 2016-17 to 2023-24
Football, 11-player	89,667	1%	-8%
Track & Field, Outdoor	57,088	9%	2%
Soccer	56,124	5%	6%
Basketball	46,883	2%	2%
Baseball	43,051	-1%	-2%
Volleyball	27,982	5%	42%
Cross Country	27,045	7%	-15%
Wrestling	26,327	20%	18%
Swimming & Diving	18,461	3%	-14%
Tennis	17,630	4%	-6%
Water Polo	14,834	1%	-12%
Golf	11,755	8%	12%
Lacrosse	10,259	3%	7%
Badminton	4,268	9%	12%
eSports	3,713	21%	N/A
Football, 8 player	2,539	-3%	20%
Competitive Spirit	1,422	-13%	N/A
Surfing	1,027	17%	-13%
Rugby	1,019	1%	-22%
Beach Volleyball	987	25%	N/A
Unified Basketball	942	12%	N/A
Flag Football	760	-31%	-10%

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 Track & Field	669	1%	N/A
Unified Soccer	617	20%	N/A
Ice Hockey	604	24%	31%
Mt. Biking	559	-19%	16%
Dance	461	17%	N/A
Weightlifting	446	69%	-56%
Skiing Alpine	300	-5%	42%
Snowboarding	277	-8%	25%
Sailing	217	27%	-5%
Ultimate Frisbee	208	3%	N/A
Drill Team	204	25%	N/A
Crew	179	-14%	-32%
Decathlon	145	-24%	-25%
Unified Flag Football	143	-2%	N/A
Unified Bowling	128	100%	N/A
Fencing	123	-35%	-51%
Roller Hockey	119	-17%	N/A
Riflery	105	169%	-15%
Archery	91	-2%	-53%
Adapted Track	90	-10%	-27%
Softball, Fast Pitch	88	-50%	144%
Adapted Basketball	70	N/A	N/A

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 Volleyball	65	-43%	N/A
Martial Arts	57	613%	N/A
Rock Climbing	57	-3%	N/A
Gymnastics	44	144%	214%
Adapted Volleyball	35	-29%	N/A
Bowling	34	-33%	-69%
Adapted Soccer	30	-3%	-62%
Rodeo	24	50%	-44%
Unified Softball	22	-84%	N/A
Unified Cheer	21	5%	N/A
Football, 6 player	20	186%	-66%
Skiing, Cross Country	19	6%	-37%
Unified Golf	17	-58%	N/A
Adapted Bowling	15	N/A	-57%
Adapted Football	12	100%	N/A
Softball, Slow Pitch	12	20%	-56%
Squash	9	-53%	N/A
Equestrian	8	-88%	-94%
Adapted Golf	6	20%	N/A
Unified Tennis	5	-85%	N/A
Cycling	4	0%	N/A
Kayaking	3	50%	N/A
Unified Cross Country	2	-96%	N/A

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

Biggest, Fastest Growth, Largest Decline

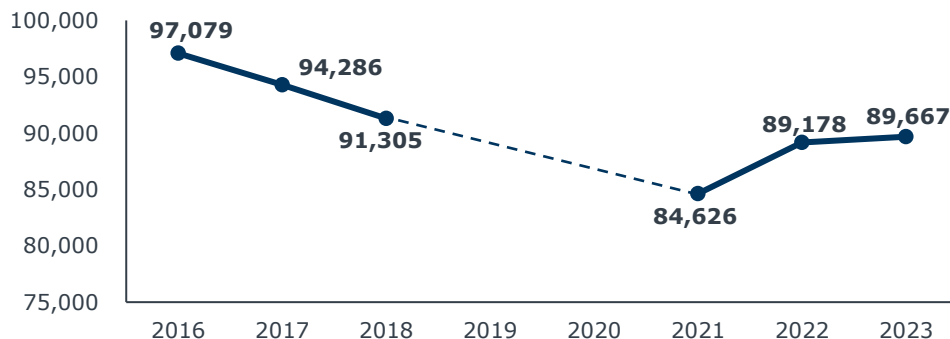
Boys

Biggest Sport

Football Growing After Pre-Pandemic Declines

Participation in football decreased 8% between 2016 and 2023. However, participation grew in both 2022 and 2023.

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

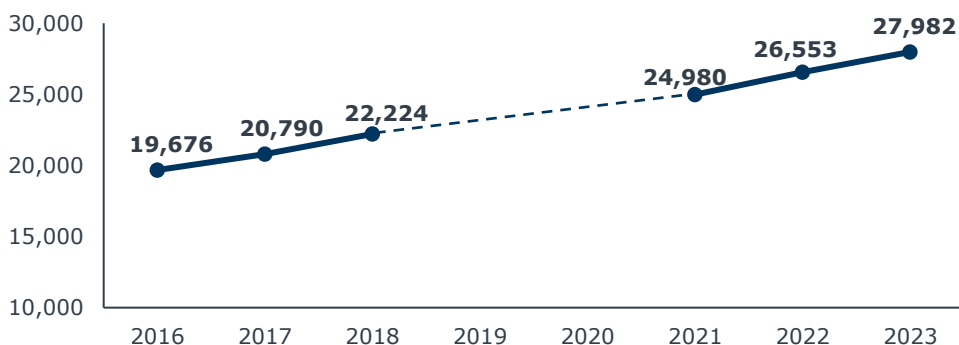


Fastest Growth¹

Steady Growth In Volleyball

Participation in volleyball increased every year between 2016 and 2023, for 42% total growth.

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

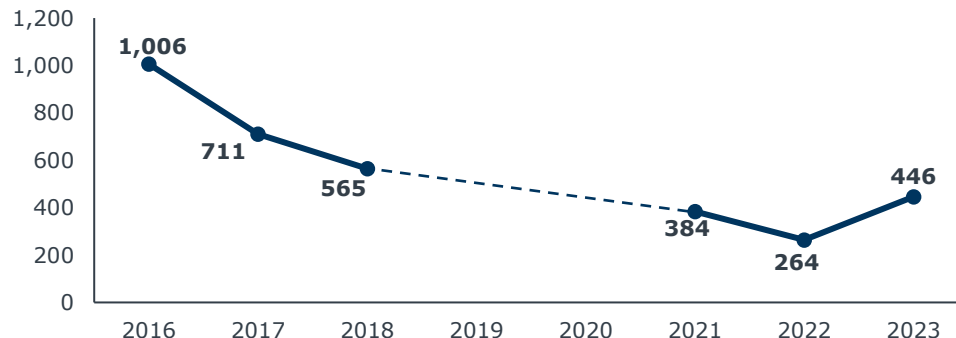


Largest Declines¹

Basketball Participation Leveling Off After Declines

Participation in weightlifting declined 56% between 2016 and 2023. Most of the decline occurred before the pandemic.

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



1) Excludes sports with fewer than 200 participants

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

Short- and Long-Term Changes in Participation

Girls

Areas of Consistent Growth

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

- Soccer
- Volleyball
- Flag Football
- Lacrosse
- Golf
- Wrestling
- Badminton
- Crew
- Mt. Biking
- Ice Hockey

Areas of Steady Decline

In comparison, participation has fallen in the last year and across the last eight years among 14 sports:

- Swimming & Diving
- Water Polo
- Gymnastics
- Football, 11-Player
- Rugby
- Baseball
- Decathlon
- Equestrian
- Fencing
- Adapted Track
- Football, 8-Player
- Skiing, Cross Country
- Adapted Soccer
- Bowling

Sport	2023-2024 Participation	Change, 2022-23 to 2023-24	Change, 2016-17 to 2023-24
Soccer	47,631	5%	1%
Volleyball	46,851	3%	5%
Track & Field, Outdoor	44,774	11%	-3%
Softball, Fast Pitch	29,483	0%	-11%
Basketball	28,950	0%	-15%
Competitive Spirit	22,182	6%	N/A
Tennis	21,864	4%	-5%
Swimming & Diving	21,525	-2%	-28%
Cross Country	19,080	3%	-25%
Water Polo	12,559	-2%	-21%
Flag Football	10,832	1,472%	991%
Lacrosse	10,162	5%	20%
Golf	8,913	6%	11%
Wrestling	7,921	24%	76%
Dance	6,420	28%	N/A
Badminton	5,518	18%	10%
Beach Volleyball	5,323	19%	N/A
Field Hockey	3,567	0%	-3%
Drill Team	1,784	12%	N/A
Unified Flag Football	1,112	694%	N/A
Unified Basketball	675	1%	N/A
eSports	641	10%	N/A

1) df

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
Gymnastics	540	-7%	-35%
Unified Soccer	529	23%	N/A
Unified Track & Field	490	4%	N/A
Surfing	460	2%	-17%
Football, 11-Player	359	-17%	-15%
Crew	322	10%	26%
Rugby	251	-10%	-32%
Mt. Biking	245	19%	10%
Skiing, Alpine	239	-7%	51%
Weightlifting	234	121%	-57%
Snowboarding	200	-3%	104%
Baseball	198	-10%	-30%
Decathlon	159	-16%	-17%
Sailing	158	56%	-25%
Equestrian	134	-43%	-78%
Unified Bowling	112	107%	N/A
Fencing	107	-29%	-39%
Unified Cheer	105	-15%	N/A
Archery	85	4%	-50%
Ultimate Frisbee	84	100%	N/A
Unified Volleyball	73	-46%	N/A
Adapted Basketball	57	10%	N/A

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
Roller Hockey	55	41%	N/A
Rock Climbing	50	-4%	N/A
Adapted Track	48	-27%	-33%
Riflery	45	18%	-38%
Ice Hockey	43	72%	105%
Football, 8-player	33	-39%	-13%
Rodeo	31	48%	-30%
Adapted Volleyball	28	-24%	N/A
Unified Softball	20	-85%	N/A
Skiing, Cross Country	14	-7%	-64%
Martial Arts	12	300%	N/A
Adapted Soccer	11	-63%	-82%
Adapted Bowling	10	N/A	-29%
Kayaking	9	200%	N/A
Football, 6-player	8	N/A	-47%
Adapted Football	6	-14%	N/A
Squash	5	-67%	N/A
Bowling	4	-80%	-93%
Cycling	4	0%	N/A
Unified Tennis	4	-93%	N/A
Unified Cross Country	1	-98%	N/A

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

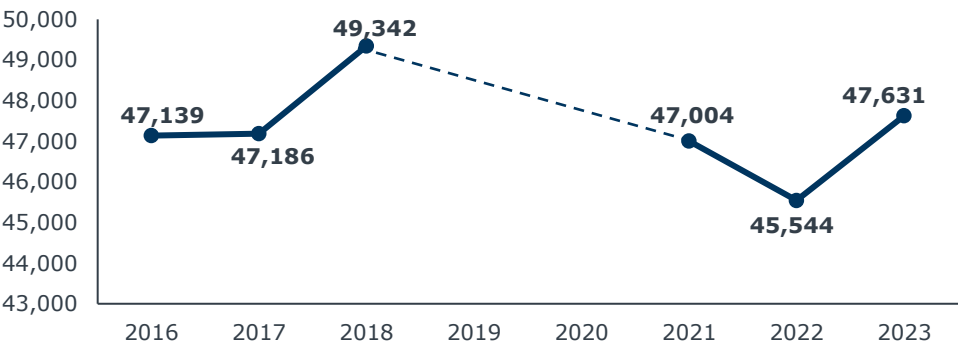
Biggest, Fastest Growth, Largest Decline

Girls

Biggest Sport Swings in Soccer Participation

Participation in soccer increased 1% between 2016 and 2023, despite multiple years of declines.

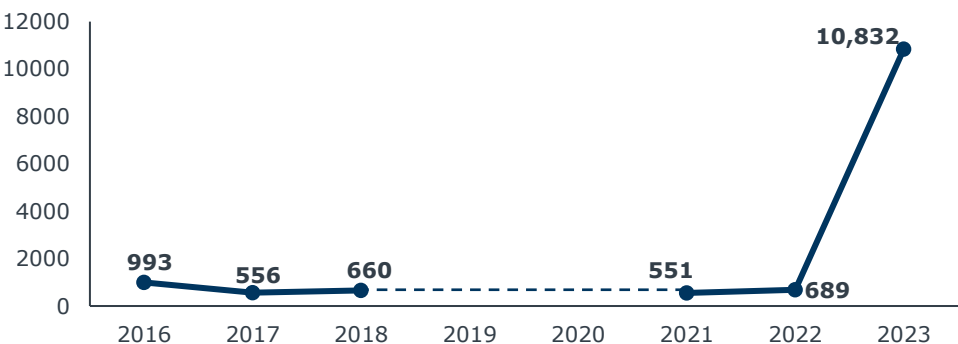
Change in Girls' Basketball Participation, 2016-17 to 2023-24



Fastest Growth Sudden Spike in Flag Football Participation

Participation in flag football increased 991% between 2016 and 2023, the likely result of more teams being funded and codified.

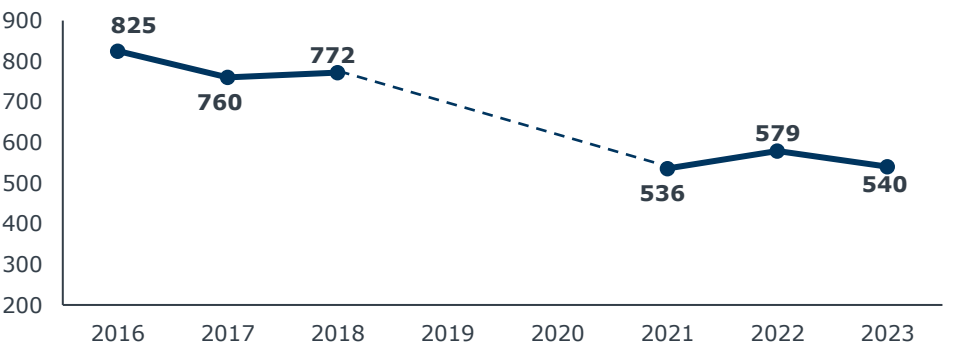
Change in Girls' Flag Football Participation, 2016-17 to 2023-24



Largest Decline¹ Steady Decline in Gymnastics

Participation in gymnastics declined 35% between 2016 and 2023. The largest decline occurred during the pandemic.

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



1) Excludes sports with fewer than 500 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 and so on.
- 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.