

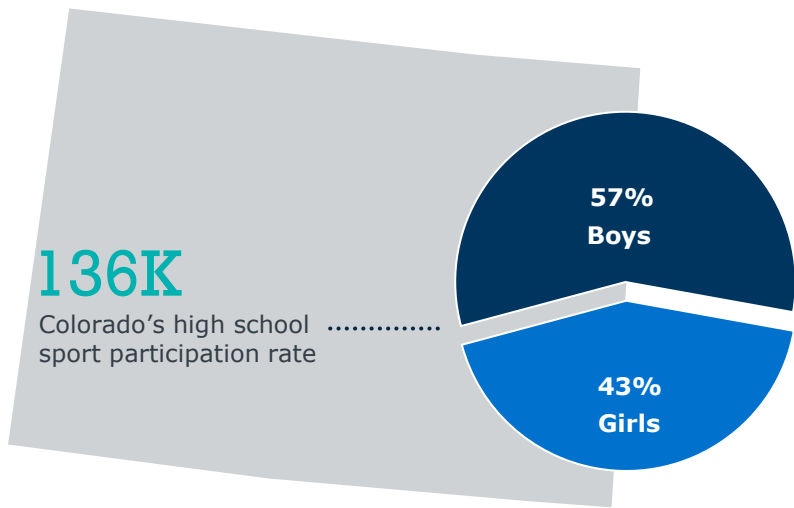
# High School Sports Participation State Profile

## State Profile: Colorado

### Boys Account for Most High School Sport Participation

As of 2023-2024, the high school sports participation rate was 136,386 in Colorado. Mirroring the national trend, boys accounted for more than half of participation.

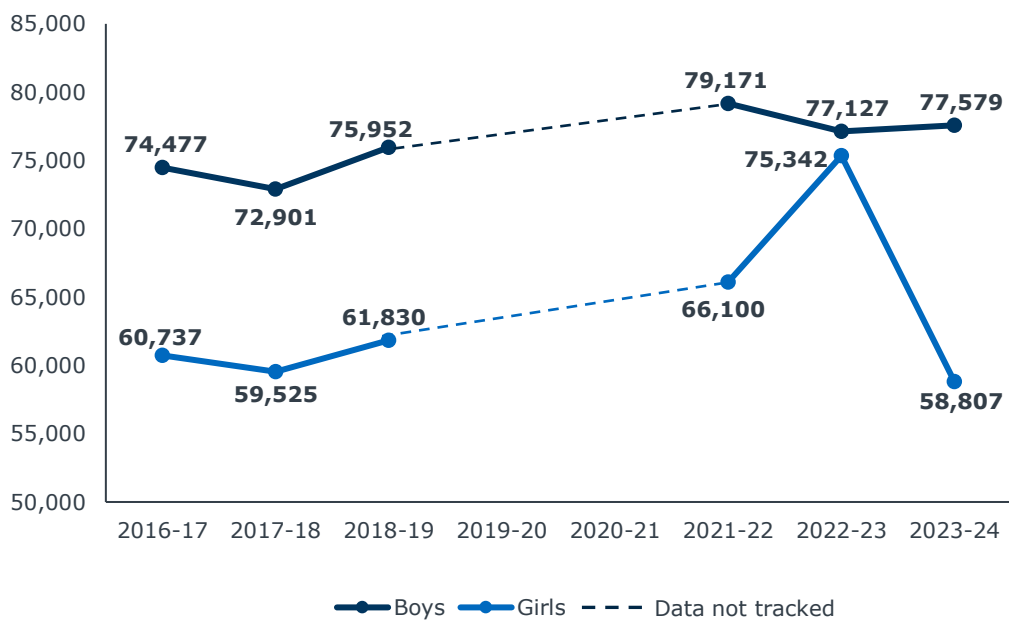
Share of Girls v. Boys Participation in High School Sports, 2023-24  
n=136,386 participation rate



### Gap Between Boys, Girls Widening After Almost Closing

Participation in high school sports is growing among boys and girls over the last eight years. Unlike many states, overall participation increased immediately after the pandemic. However, participation was down sharply among girls in 2023 and slowing among boys.

Change in Girls and Boys Participation Rates, 2016-17 to 2023-24



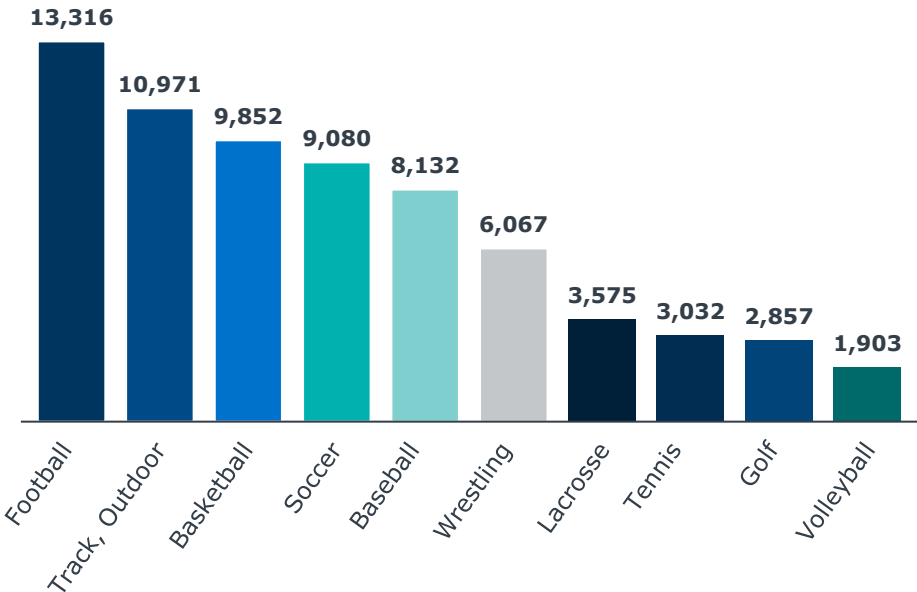
Source: EAB analysis of National Federation of State High School Association data.

# Top Boys' and Girls' Sports

## Football the Biggest Sport for Boys

Like most states, football was the biggest boys sport as of 2023-2024. Unlike national trends, volleyball was the 10<sup>th</sup> largest sport among boys.

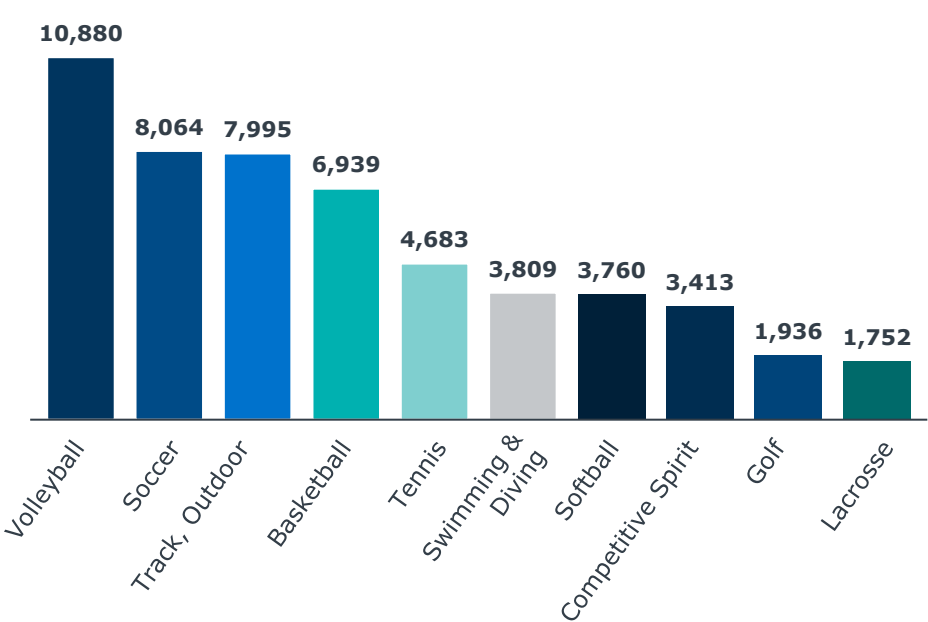
Top 10 Boys' Sports by Participation Rate, 2022-2023  
n=77,579 participation rate



## Volleyball By Far the Most Popular Sport among Girls

The top girls' sports in Colorado also largely reflect national trends. The biggest deviation was golf, the ninth largest sport in the state.

Top 10 Girls' Sports by Participation Rate, 2023-2024  
n=58,807 participation rate



# Short- and Long-Term Changes in Participation

## Boys

### Areas of Consistent Growth

Two sports grew both in the last year and across the last 10 years. This trend may signal emerging and/or sustainable recruitment areas. They included:

- Track & Field, Outdoor]
- Soccer
- Wrestling
- Tennis
- Golf
- Ice Hockey
- Football, 6-player
- Competitive spirit

### Areas of Steady Decline

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

- Football, 11-player
- Baseball
- Swimming and Diving
- Skiing, Cross Country

Sport	2023-2024 Participation	Change, 2022-23 to 2023-24	Change, 2016-17 to 2023-24
Football, 11-Player	13,316	-1%	-15%
Track and Field, Outdoor	10,971	13%	7%
Basketball	9,852	-3%	7%
Soccer	9,080	16%	9%
Baseball	8,132	-1%	-3%
Wrestling	6,067	23%	23%
Lacrosse	3,575	22%	-7%
Tennis	3,032	16%	3%
Golf	2,857	6%	28%
Volleyball	1,903	2%	N/A
Swimming & Diving	1,658	-1%	-16%
Esport	1,567	-23%	N/A
Football, 8-player	1,507	-11%	182%
Ice Hockey	1,321	2%	47%
Football, 6-player	1,241	47%	169%
Competitive Spirit	605	73%	267%
Unified Bowling	282	81%	N/A
Skiing, Alpine	186	-53%	15%
Dance	155	-56%	N/A
Skiing, Cross Country	117	-70%	-7%

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

# Biggest, Fastest Growth, Largest Decline

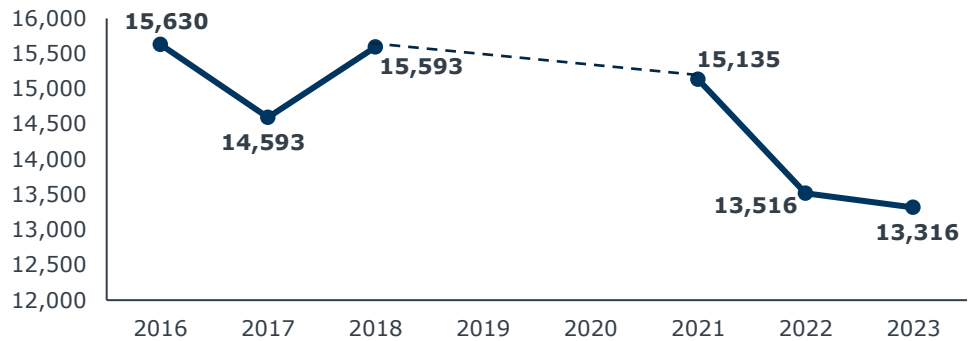
## Boys

### Biggest Sport

#### Football Down After Holding on During the Pandemic

Participation in football decreased 15% between 2016 and 2023, despite remaining relatively flat in the years immediately before and after the pandemic.

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

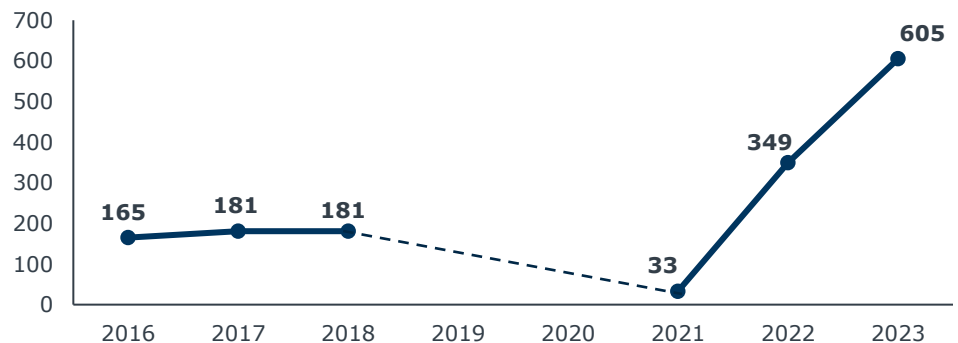


### Fastest Growth

#### Spirit Small but Growing Quickly Among Boys

Participation in competitive spirit increased 267% between 2016 and 2023, making it the 16<sup>th</sup> largest sport in the state.

Change in Boys Competitive Spirit Participation, 2016-17 to 2023-24

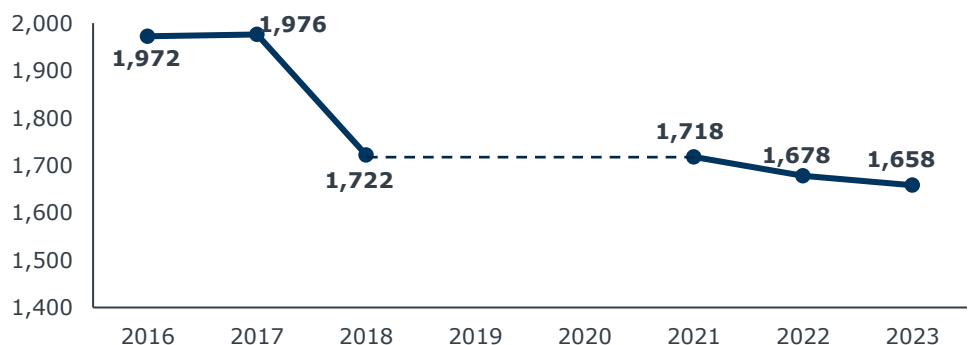


### Largest Decline

#### Swimming Participation Down But Leveling Off

Participation in swimming and diving declined 16% between 2016 and 2023. The largest drop was between 2017 and 2018 and has since leveled off.

Change in Boys Competitive Spirit 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 five 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
- Track and Field, Outdoor
- Golf
- Wrestling
- Ice Hockey

### Areas of Steady Decline

In comparison, participation fell in the last year and across the last eight years 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.

- Basketball
- Softball
- Competitive Spirit

Sport	2023-2024 Participation	Change, 2022-23 to 2023-24	Change, 2016-17 to 2023-24
Volleyball	10,880	-9%	15%
Soccer	8,064	7%	1%
Track and Field, Outdoor	7,995	4%	6%
Basketball	6,939	-5%	-2%
Tennis	4,683	20%	-24%
Swimming & Diving	3,809	11%	-15%
Softball, Fast Pitch	3,760	-8%	-2%
Competitive Spirit	3,413	-63%	-28%
Golf	1,936	13%	11%
Lacrosse	1,752	10%	-1%
Dance	1,149	-88%	N/A
Dance Team, Jazz	1,149	N/A	N/A
Wrestling	1,114	8%	579%
Field Hockey	643	-7%	7%
Gymnastics	577	-1%	11%
eSports	296	-56%	N/A
Unified Bowling	214	N/A	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
Skiing, Alpine	180	-57%	5%
Skiing, Cross Country	122	-71%	3%
Baseball	49	227%	-72%
Football, 11-Player	40	N/A	-25%
Ice Hockey	38	443%	443%
Football, 8-Player	3	N/A	0%
Football, 6-Player	2	N/A	-33%

# Biggest, Fastest Growth, Largest Decline

## Girls

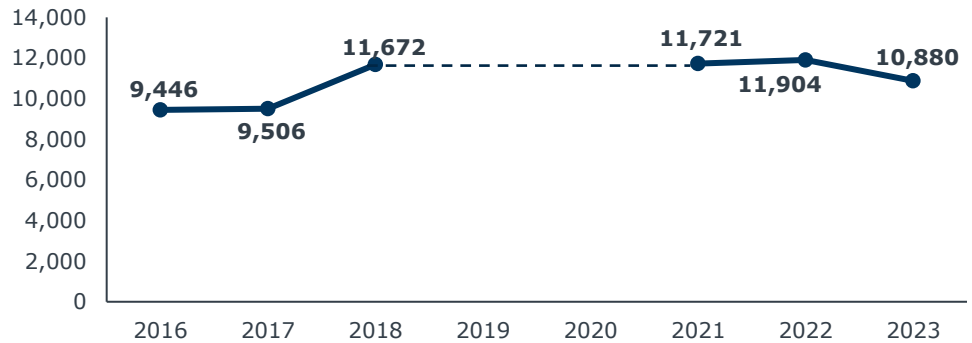
### Biggest Sport

#### Volleyball Participation

##### Mostly Flat

Participation in girls volleyball is up 15% since 2013, but growth has started to level off.

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

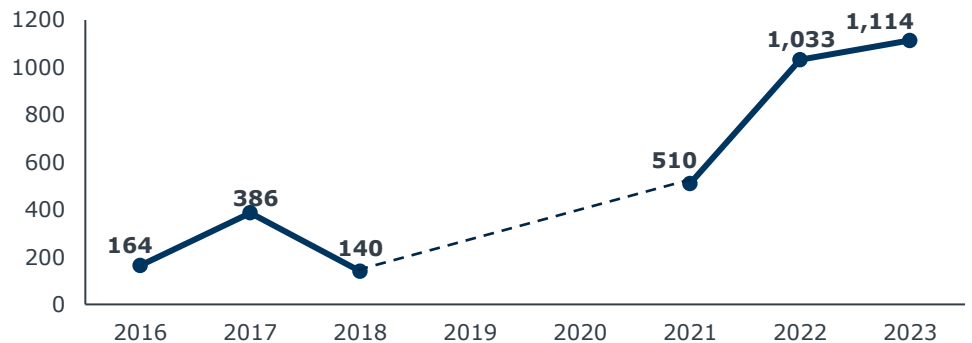


### Fastest Growth

#### Wrestling Small but Growing Fast Among Girls

Participation in wrestling is up dramatically since 2016. The sport grew particularly fast following the pandemic, increasing 264% between 2018 and 2021. Participation is up 118% since then.

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

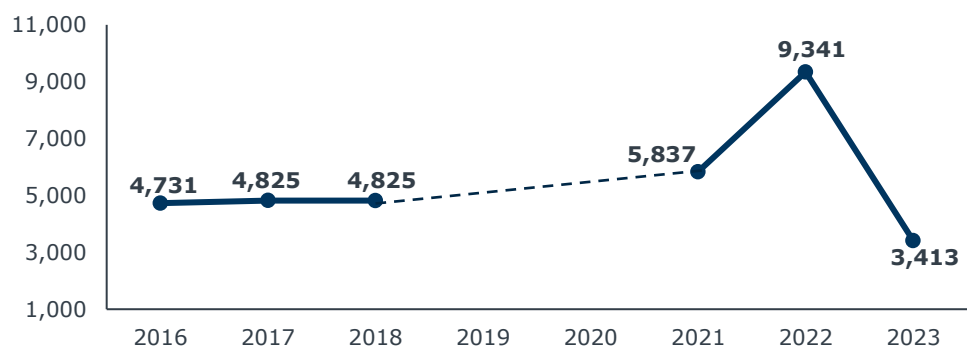


### Largest Decline

#### Spirit Experiences Sharp Drop After Steady Rise

Participation in competitive spirit increased almost every year between 2016 and 2023, but still declined by 28% overall after a sharp drop in 2023.

Change in Girls Competitive Spirit 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
<b>Total Boys' Participation</b>	<b>4,638,785</b>

### 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
<b>Total Girls' Participation</b>	<b>3,423,517</b>

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