

High School Sports Participation State Profile

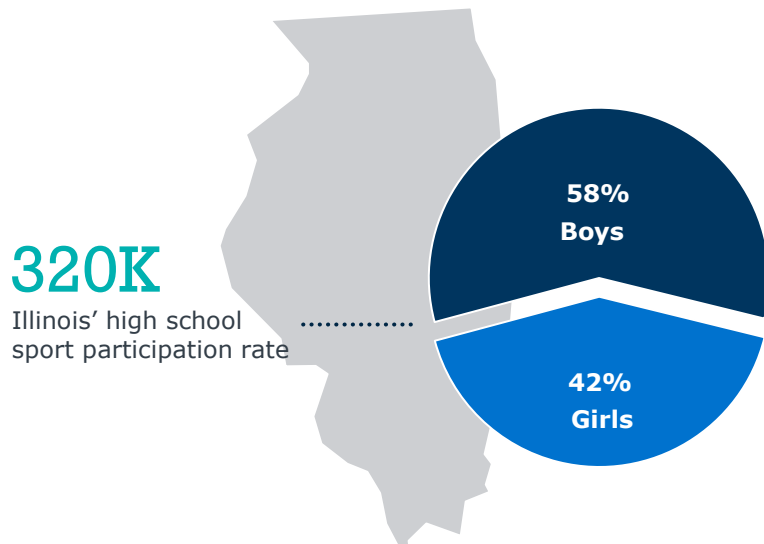
State Profile: Illinois

Boys Account for Most High School Sport Participation

As of 2022-2023, the high school sports participation rate was nearly 320,603 in Illinois. Mirroring the national trend, boys accounted for more than half of participation.

High School Sport Participation, Share of Girls v. Boys, 2023-24

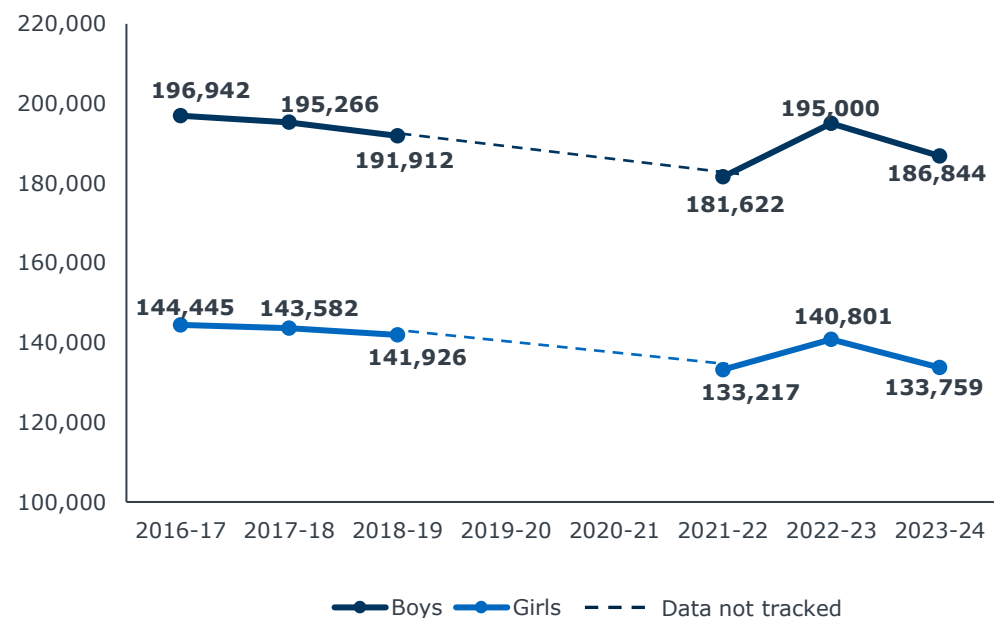
n=320,603 (total participation)



Participation Still Down From Pre-Pandemic Highs

Participation in high school sports is declining among boys and girls over the last eight years, despite a slight bump in participation in 2022.

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



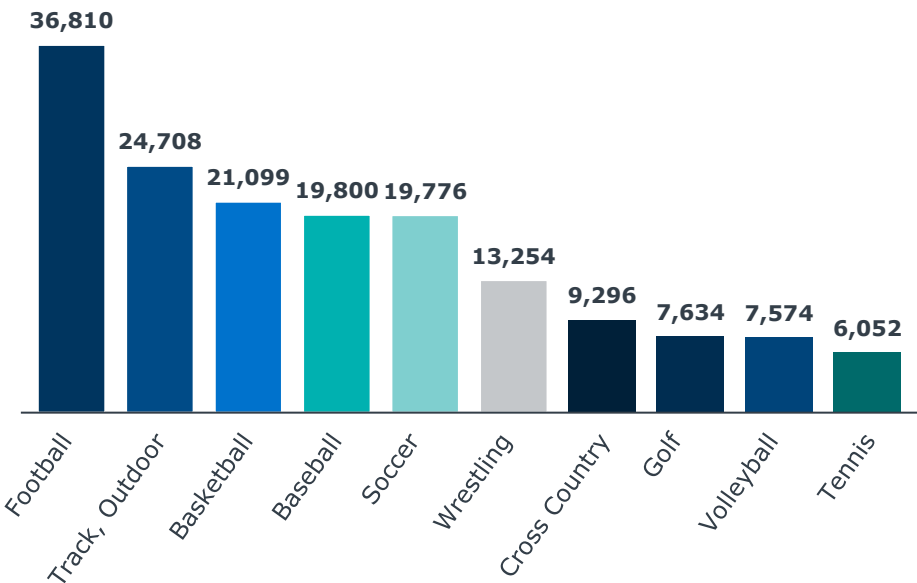
Source: EAB analysis of National Federation of State High School Association data.

Top Boys' and Girls' Sports

Football By Far the Largest

Like many other states, football was the biggest boys' sport as of 2023-2024. Overall, the top 10 biggest sports in Illinois are similar to national trends. The biggest exception is volleyball, which is the 9th largest sport in Illinois and not in the top 10 nationally.

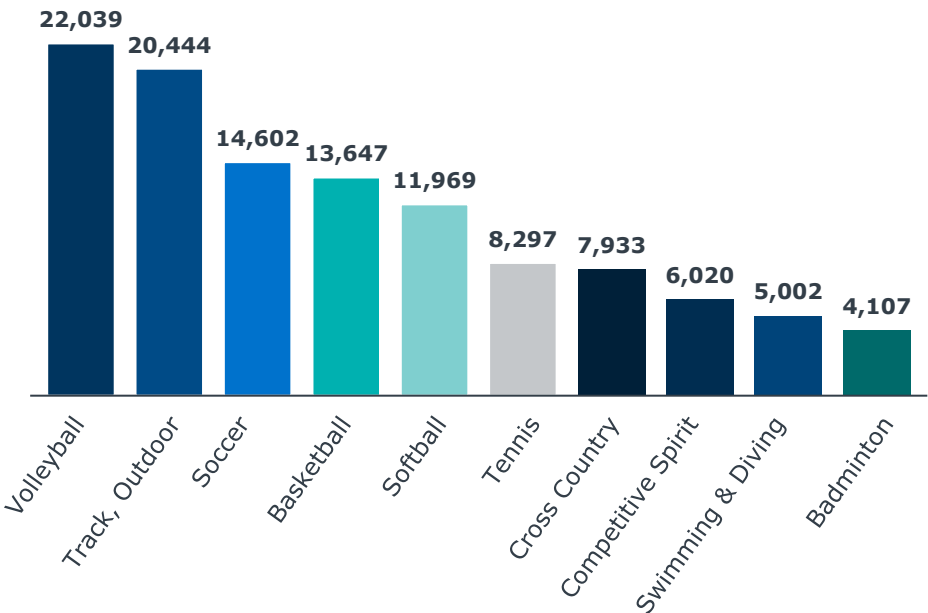
Top 10 Boys' Sports by Participation Rate, 2022-2023
n=186,844



Badminton the Outlier in Top Sports Among Girls

The top girls' sports in Illinois also reflect national trends, with volleyball, track, soccer, basketball, and softball all in the top five. The biggest deviation is badminton, which is the 10th largest sport in Illinois but did not make the top 10 nationally.

Top 10 Girls' Sports by Participation Rate, 2023-2024
n=133,759



Short- and Long-Term Changes in Participation

Boys

Areas of Steady Decline

Participation has fallen in the last year and across the last eight years among eight sports:

- Baseball
- Basketball
- Cross Country
- Football, 11-player
- Golf
- Swimming & Diving
- Tennis
- Water Polo
- Wrestling

Because the participation rate double counts multi-sport athletes, it is possible some of these declines may be attributed to growing specialization.

Sport	2023-2024 Participation	Change, 2022-23 to 2023-24	Change, 2016-17 to 2023-24
Football, 11-Player	36,810	-7%	-14%
Track and Field, Outdoor	24,708	0%	-1%
Basketball	21,099	-6%	-13%
Baseball	19,800	-4%	-12%
Soccer	19,776	2%	-6%
Wrestling	13,254	-10%	-7%
Cross Country	9,296	-11%	-21%
Golf	7,634	0%	2%
Volleyball	7,574	-1%	15%
Tennis	6,052	-9%	-10%
Swimming & Diving	4,733	-8%	-23%
Lacrosse	4,517	0%	76%
Bowling	3,226	-2%	28%
Bass Fishing	3,086	64%	N/A
Water Polo	1,782	-2%	-12%
Unified Basketball	750	4,900%	N/A
Adapted Swimming	20	122%	N/A
Unified Bass Fishing	10	400%	N/A

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

Biggest, Fastest Growth, Largest Decline

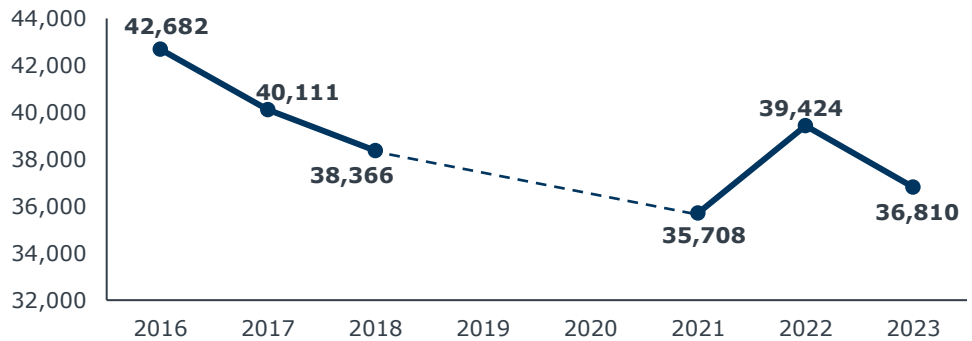
Boys

Biggest Sport

Football Experiencing Mostly Annual Declines

Boys' participation in football is down 14% since 2016, despite a slight bump in 2022.

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

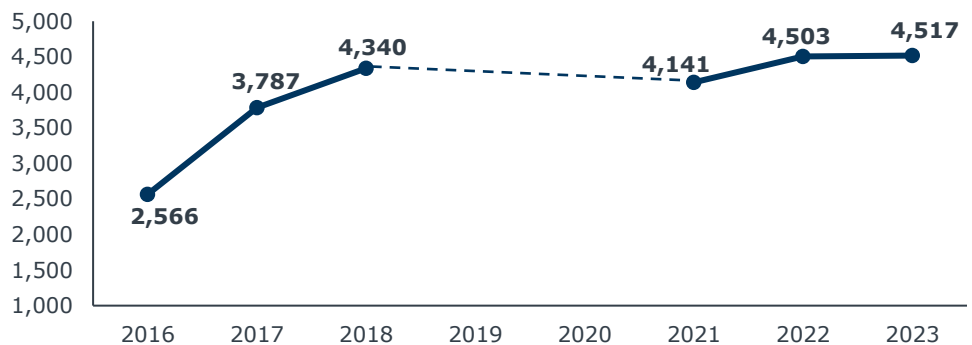


Fastest Growth

Steady Growth in Wrestling

In contrast, participation in boys' lacrosse increased 76% from 2013 to 2023. Growth was fastest between 2016 and 2018 and continues to increase steadily, if not as quickly. Lacrosse is not yet in the top 10 sports by participation but could be soon if continues to grow at this rate.

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

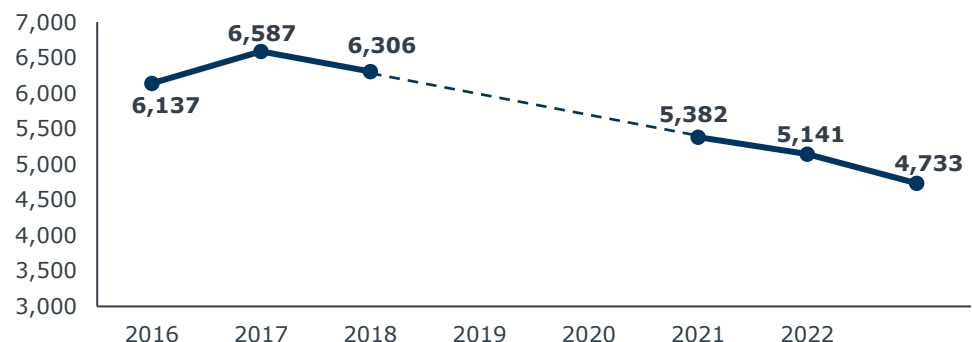


Largest Decline

Steady Decline In Swimming & Diving

Swimming, the 11th biggest sport, has steadily shrunk since 2017. Lacrosse, the 12th largest sport, is likely to surpass swimming if these trends continue.

Change in Boys' Swimming & Diving 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

Two 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:

- Badminton
- Lacrosse

Areas of Steady Decline

In comparison, participation has fallen in the last year and across the last eight years decade among 11 sports:

- Basketball
- Bowling
- Cross Country
- Dance
- Golf
- Gymnastics
- Soccer
- Softball
- Swimming & Diving
- Volleyball
- Water Polo

Because the participation rate double counts multi-sport athletes, it is possible some of these declines may be attributed to growing specialization.

Sport	2023-2024 Participation	Change, 2022-23 to 2023-24	Change, 2016-17 to 2023-24
Volleyball	22,039	-2%	-1%
Track and Field, Outdoor	20,444	0%	0%
Soccer	14,602	-4%	-10%
Basketball	13,647	-9%	-19%
Softball, Fast Pitch	11,969	-4%	-21%
Tennis	8,297	-3%	1%
Cross Country	7,933	-16%	-26%
Competitive Spirit	6,020	0%	-13%
Swimming & Diving	5,002	-17%	-28%
Badminton	4,107	1%	6%
Golf	3,914	-8%	-2%
Dance	3,872	-4%	-12%
Lacrosse	3,861	1%	113%
Bowling	2,853	-7%	-7%
Wrestling	2,093	-2%	N/A
Water Polo	1,503	-9%	-23%
Gymnastics	1,281	-10%	-25%
Football, 11-Player	200	19%	N/A
Baseball	95	-14%	N/A

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

Biggest, Fastest Growth, Largest Decline

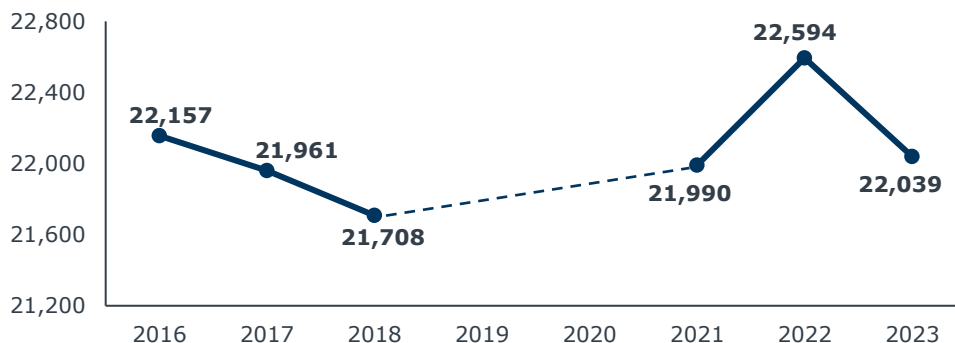
Girls

Biggest Sport

Volleyball Down Slightly But Recovering Since Pandemic

Long-term participation in volleyball is down slightly but has been rebounding since an eight-year low in 2018.

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

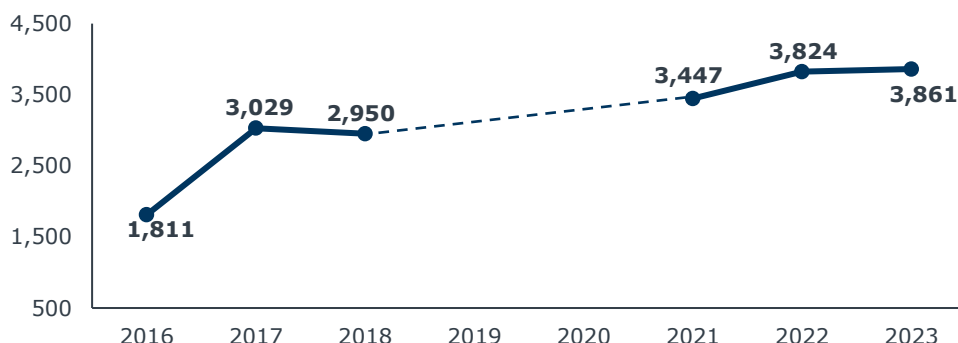


Fastest Growth

Steady Growth for Lacrosse, the 13th Largest Sport

Like boys, participation in lacrosse among girls has increased significantly since 2016, more than doubling (+113%). Growth was similarly fastest between 2016 and 2017 and continues to increase steadily.

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

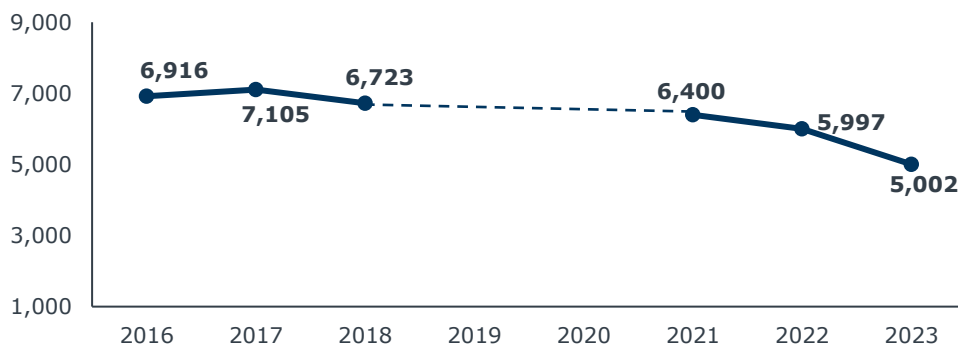


Largest Decline

Swimming & Diving Poise to Fall Out of Top 10

Like many states, participation in swimming & diving, the 10th largest sport, is steadily declining. If it continues to do so, and badminton could overtake it in the top 10.

Change in Girls' Swimming & Diving 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 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.