

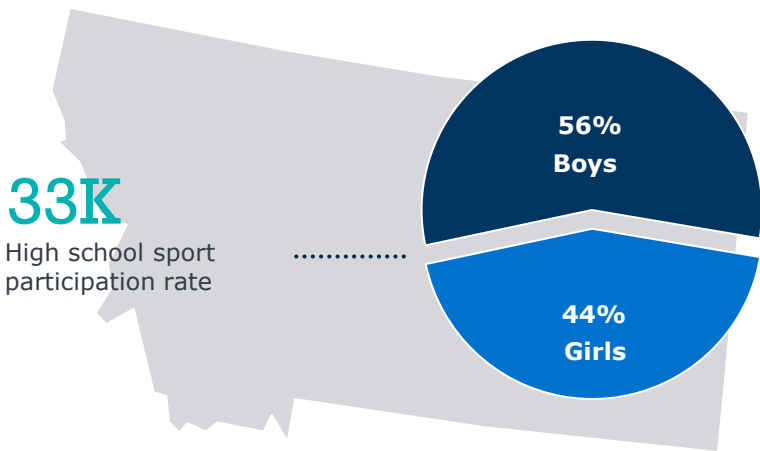
High School Sports Participation State Profile

State Profile: Montana

Boys Account for Most High School Sport Participation

As of 2023-2024, the high school sports participation rate was 33,744 in Montana. Mirroring the national trend, boys accounted for more than half of participation.

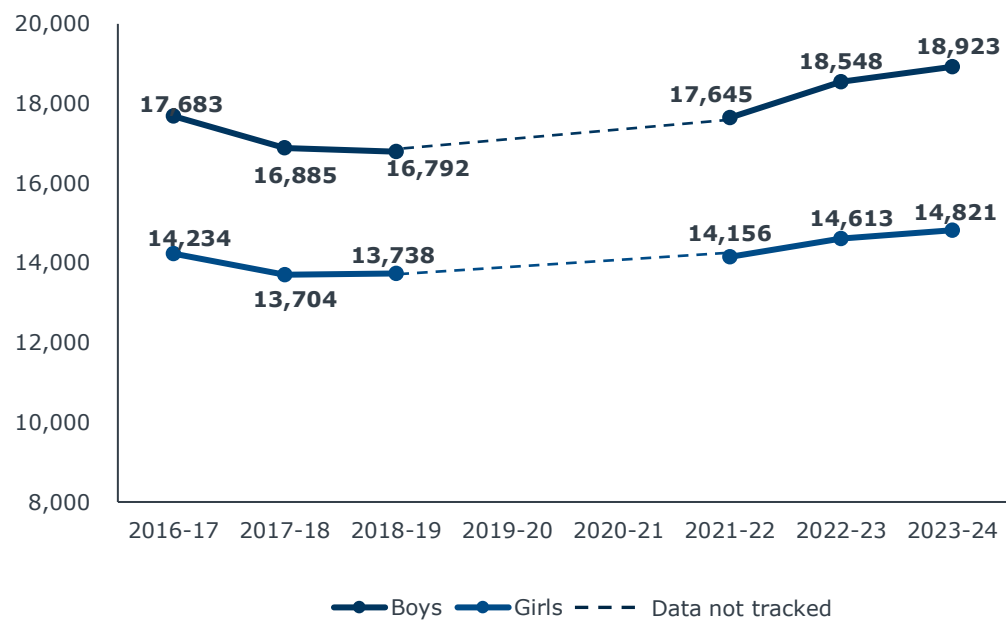
High School Sport Participation, Share of Girls v. Boys, 2023-24
n=33,744 (total participation)



Gap Between Boys, Girls Expanding Slightly

Participation in high school sports is growing among boys and girls over the last eight years. The boys’ participation rate increased faster, contributing to slight growth in the gap with girls.

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



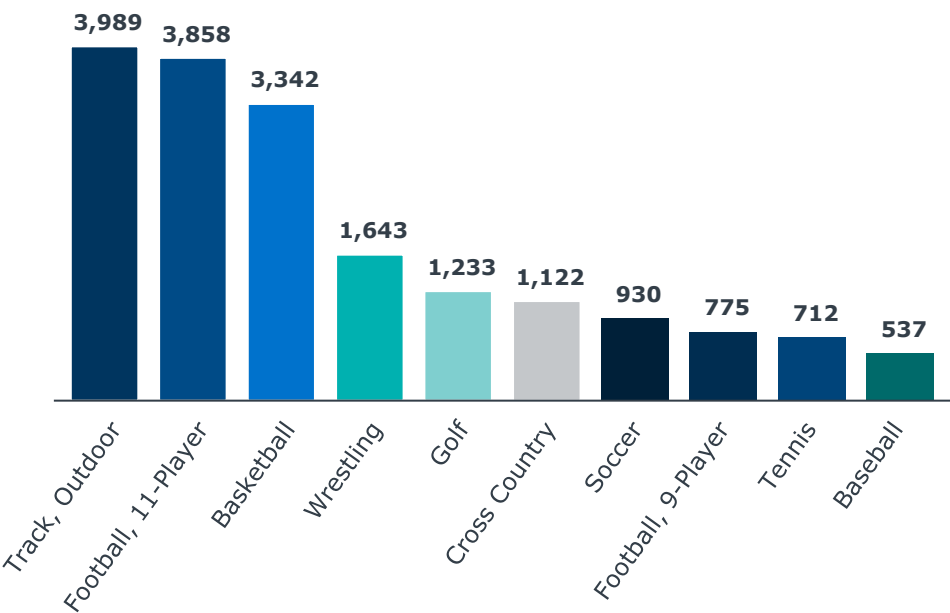
Source: EAB analysis of National Federation of State High School Association data.

Top Boys' and Girls' Sports

Track Surpasses Football

Unlike most states, outdoor track and field was the biggest boys' sport as of 2023-2024. Another deviation from national trends is wrestling, which was the fourth largest sport in Montana and not in the top 10 nationally.

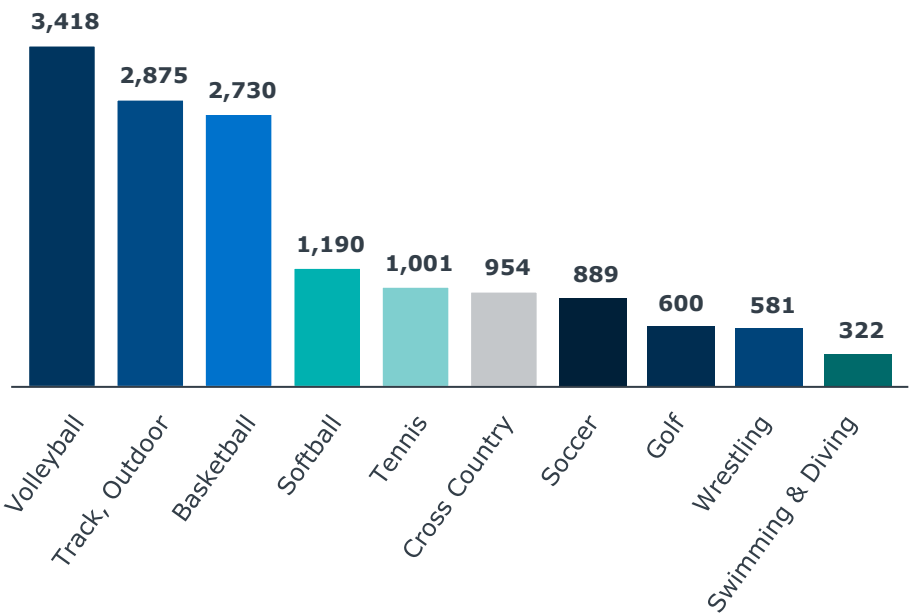
Top 10 Boys' Sports by Participation Rate, 2022-2023
n = 18,923 (boys' participation rate)



Wrestling Breaks into Top 10 Sports

The top girls' sports in Montana largely reflect national trends. The biggest deviation is wrestling, which is the ninth biggest sport in the state and not in the top 10 nationally.

Top 10 Girls' Sports by Participation Rate, 2023-2024
n = 14,821 (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

Four 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:

- Golf
- Outdoor Track & Field
- Tennis
- Wrestling

Areas of Steady Decline

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

- Basketball
- Cross Country

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
Track and Field, Outdoor	3,989	7%	12%
Football, 11-Player	3,858	1%	-7%
Basketball	3,342	-3%	-5%
Wrestling	1,643	5%	20%
Golf	1,233	12%	30%
Cross Country	1,122	-6%	-7%
Soccer	930	-5%	10%
Football, 8-player	775	-1%	3%
Tennis	712	5%	1%
Baseball	537	22%	N/A
Football, 6-player	508	-7%	21%
Swimming & Diving	243	3%	0%
Adapted Track	31	N/A	N/A

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

Biggest, Fastest Growth, Largest Decline

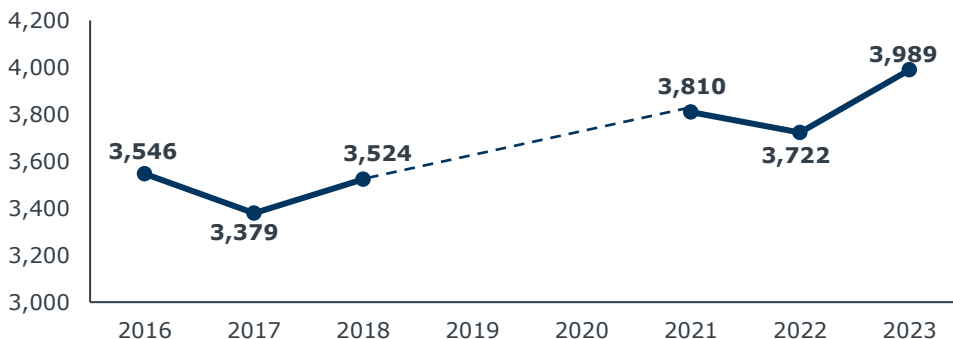
Boys

Biggest Sport

Some Volatility for Track, But Growing Overall

Despite shrinking some years, participation in track and field increased 12% overall between 2016 and 2023.

Change in Boys' Outdoor Track and Field Participation, 2016-17 to 2023-24

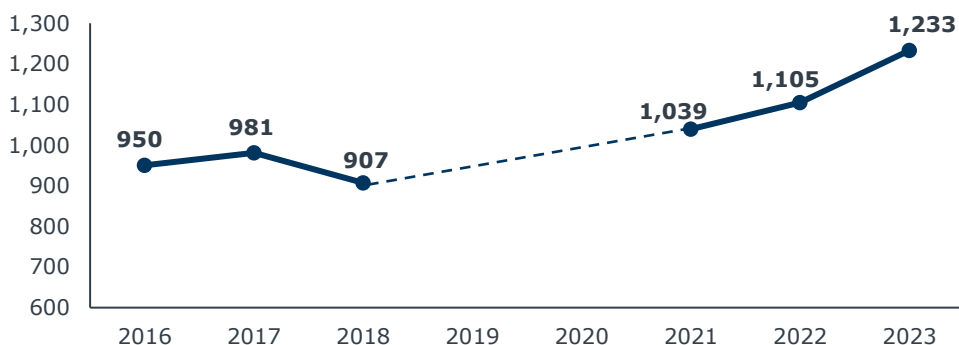


Fastest Growth

Steady Growth in Wrestling

Participation in golf increased every year but one between 2016 and 2023, for 30% total growth.

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

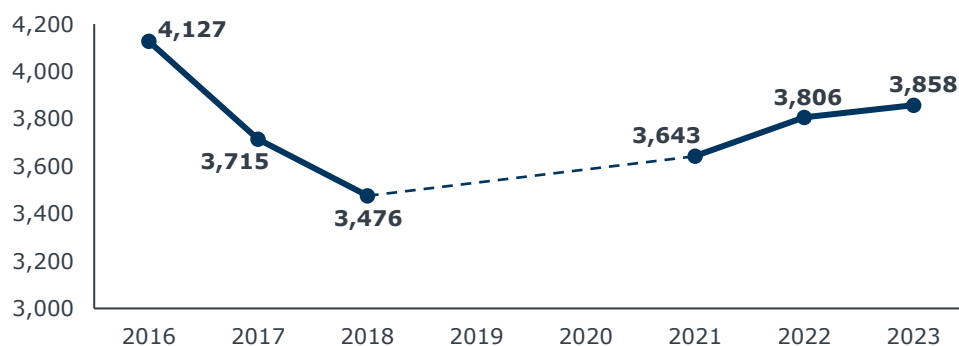


Largest Decline¹

Football Recovering From Pre-Pandemic Slide

Participation in football is down 7% since 2016. However, it has shown signs of growth since 2018, increasing every year since then.

Change in Boys' 11-Player Football Participation, 2016-17 to 2023-24



1) Cross country also declined by 7%, but football's decline was larger in absolute numbers

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

Short- and Long-Term Changes in Participation

Girls

Areas of Consistent Growth

Five 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:

- Golf
- Outdoor Track & Field
- Soccer
- Tennis
- Wrestling

Areas of Steady Decline

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

- Basketball
- Cross Country
- Swimming & Diving

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	3,418	1%	-5%
Track and Field, Outdoor	2,875	2%	8%
Basketball	2,730	-5%	-9%
Softball,- Fast Pitch	1,190	-3%	3%
Tennis	1,001	3%	6%
Cross Country	954	-1%	-12%
Soccer	889	1%	7%
Golf	600	11%	11%
Wrestling	581	27%	2,321%
Swimming & Diving	322	-13%	-16%
Flag Football	221	195%	N/A
Adapted Track	25	N/A	N/A
Football, 11-Player	11	0%	83%
Football, 6-player	2	-60%	N/A
Football, 8-player	2	N/A	100%

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

Biggest, Fastest Growth, Largest Decline

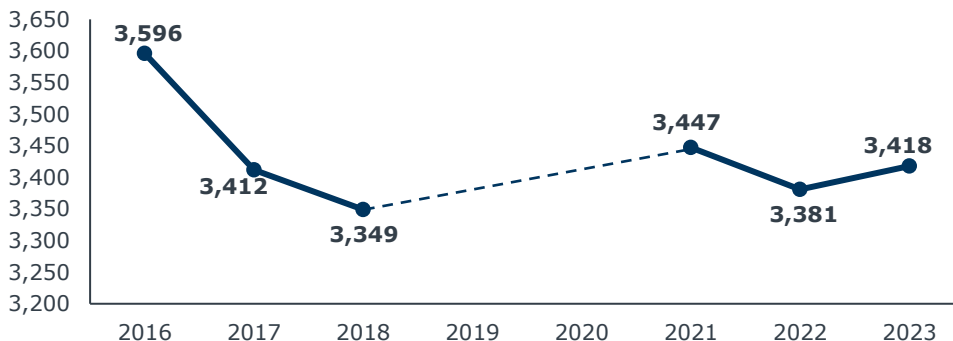
Girls

Biggest Sport

Volleyball Shrinking Slightly

Participation in volleyball is down 5% since 2016, but it has shown some signs of growth since the pandemic.

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

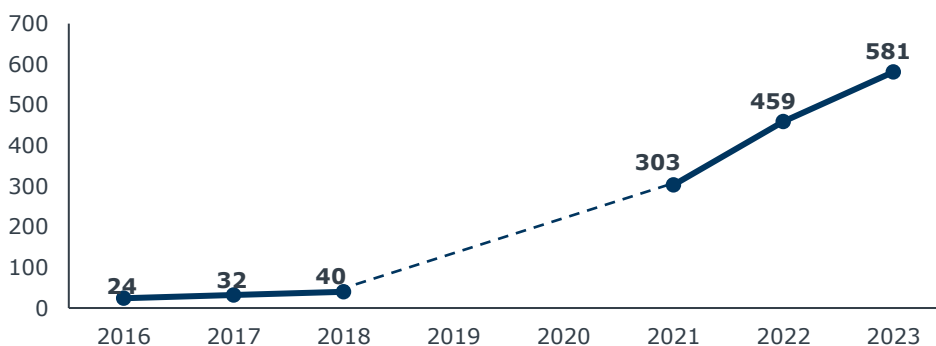


Fastest Growth

Wrestling Small but Growing Fast Among Girls

Participation in wrestling has increased every year since 2016 for 2,321% total growth. Growth was particularly fast starting in 2021.

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

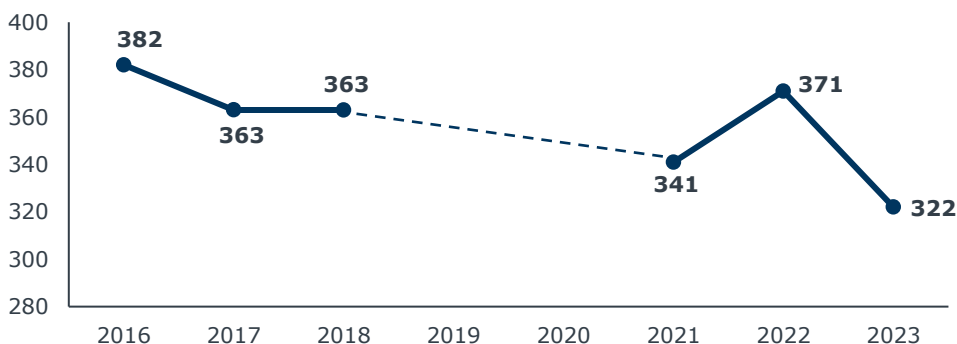


Largest Decline

Already Small, Swimming Participation Drops

Participation in swimming is down 16% since 2016 and could fall out of the top 10 sports if trends continue.

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.