

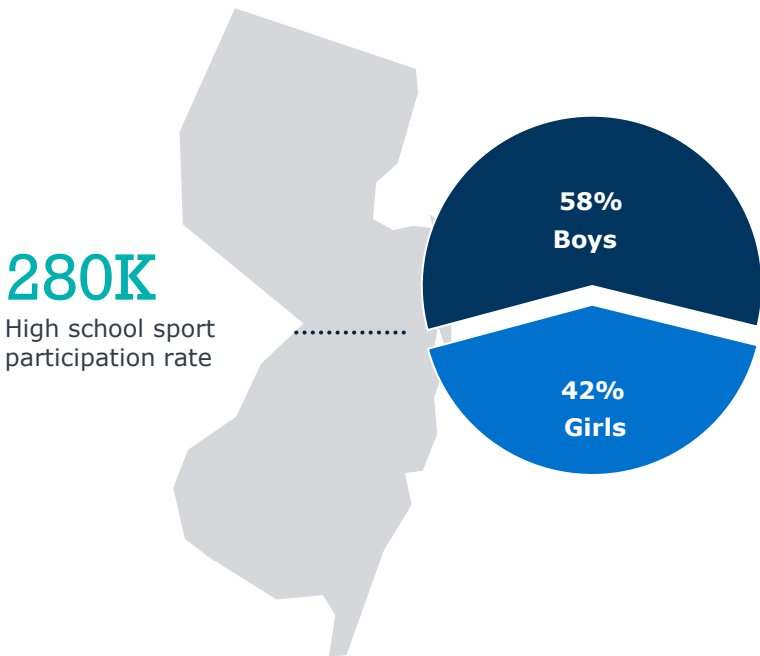
High School Sports Participation State Profile

State Profile: New Jersey

Boys Account for Most High School Sport Participation

As of 2023-2024, the high school sports participation rate in New Jersey was 280,798. Mirroring the national trend, boys accounted for more than half of participation.

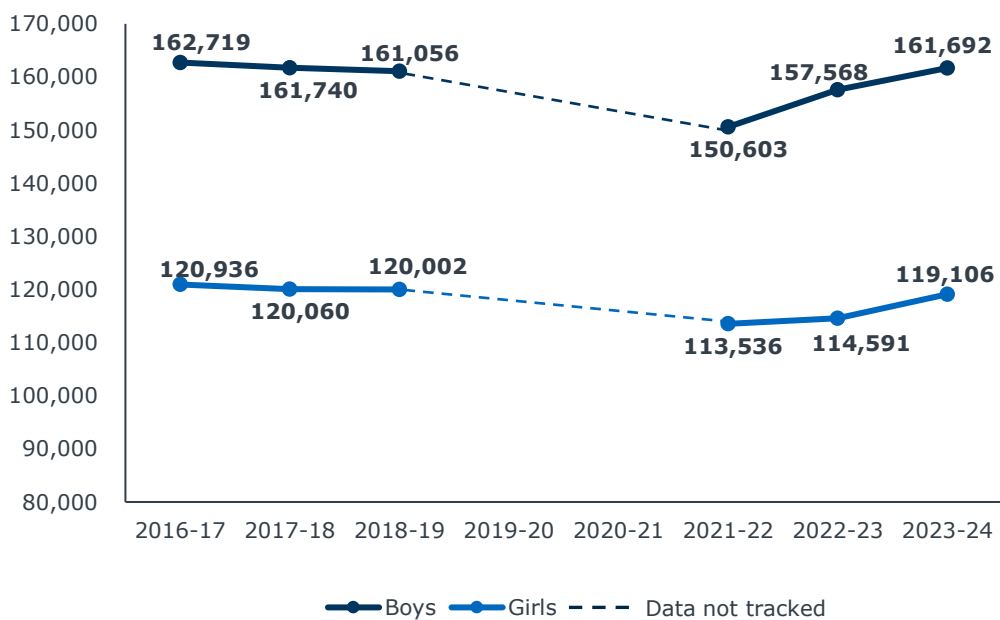
High School Sport Participation, Share of Girls v. Boys, 2023-24
n=280,798 (total participation)



Gap Between Boys, Girls Persists After Pandemic

Participation in high school sports is declining slightly among boys and girls over the last eight years, but it has started picking back up since the pandemic.

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



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

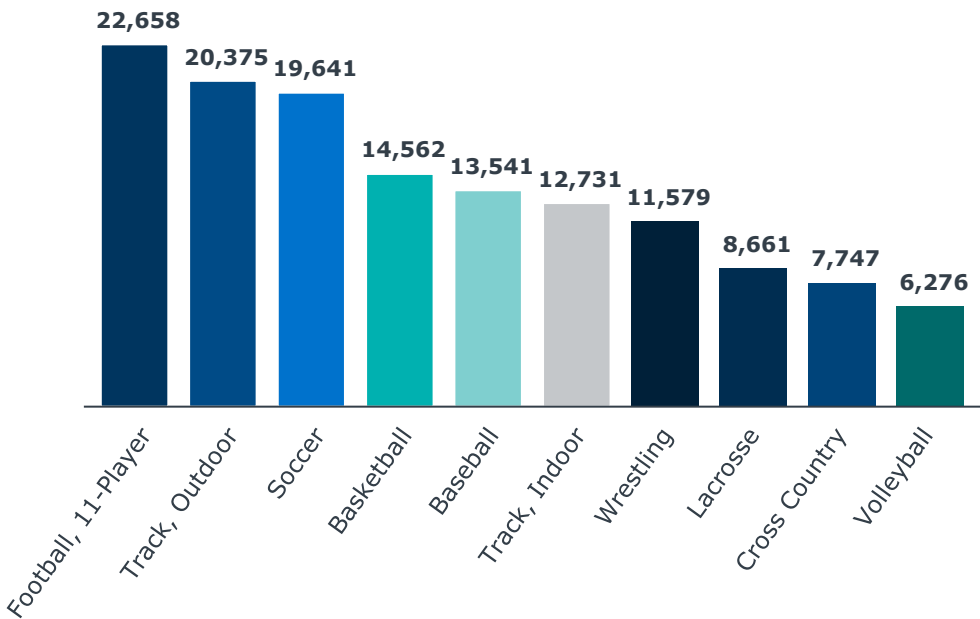
Top Boys' and Girls' Sports

Volleyball Emerges As Top 10 Sport for Boys

Like most states, football was the biggest boys' sport as of 2023-2024. The biggest deviation from national trends was volleyball, which was the 10th largest sport in the state.

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

n = 161,692 (boys' participation rate)

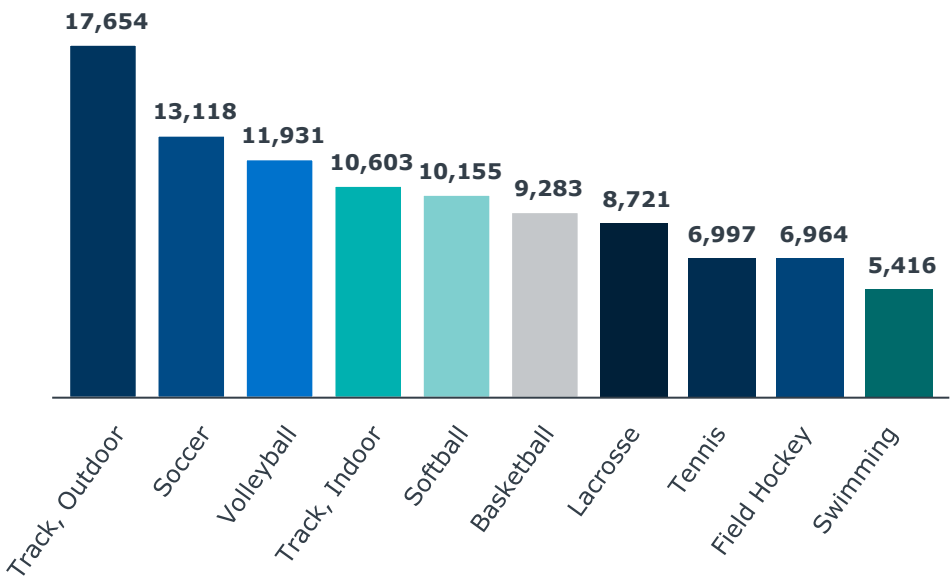


Track Takes Two Spots in Top 5

The top girls' sports in New Jersey was outdoor track and field. Meanwhile, indoor track was the fourth largest sport. It is likely that there is significant overlap of participants in those sports.

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

n = 119,106 (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:

- Bowling
- Golf
- Volleyball
- Wrestling

Areas of Steady Decline

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

- Baseball
- Football, 11-Player
- Ice Hockey
- Lacrosse

Sport	2023-2024 Participation	Change, 2022-23 to 2023-24	Change, 2016-17 to 2023-24
Football, 11 Player	22,658	-4%	-8%
Track & Field, Outdoor	20,375	3%	-1%
Soccer	19,641	5%	-0.2%
Basketball	14,562	1%	-4%
Baseball	13,541	-0.5%	-11%
Track & Field, Indoor	12,731	5%	-2%
Wrestling	11,579	15%	26%
Lacrosse	8,661	-2%	-11%
Cross Country	7,747	6%	-9%
Volleyball	6,276	3%	61%
Tennis	5,668	1%	-6%
Swimming & Diving	4,577	2%	-11%
Golf	4,268	11%	11%
Ice Hockey	3,201	-5%	-8%
Bowling	2,954	1%	6%
Fencing	1,286	1%	-2%
Unified Basketball	1,036	75%	N/A
Unified Track and Field	615	15%	N/A
Unified Bowling	316	-2%	N/A

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

Biggest, Fastest Growth, Largest Decline

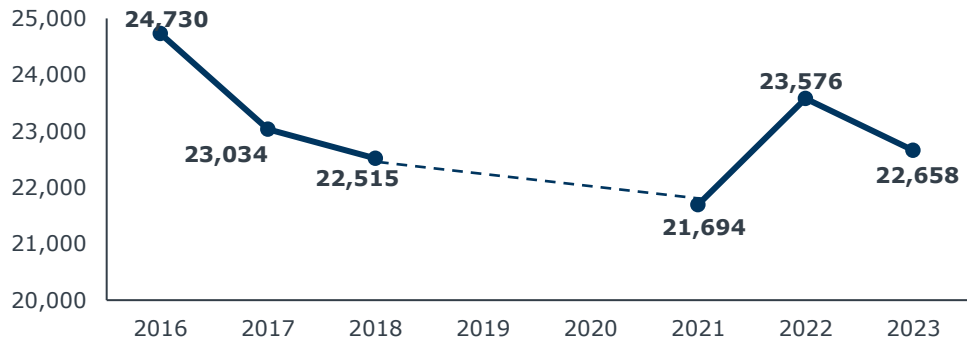
Boys

Biggest Sport

Football Down Since Pre-Pandemic Slide

Participation in football has decreased every year but one since 2016, for a total decline of 8%.

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

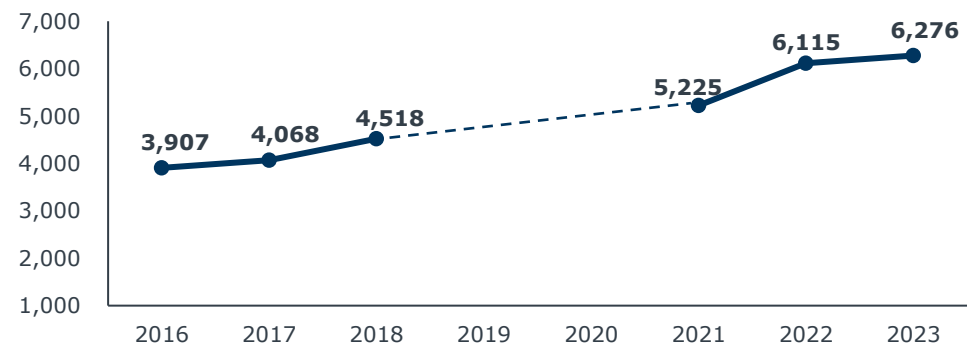


Fastest Growth

Steady Growth in Volleyball

In contrast, participation in boys' volleyball grew every year between 2016 to 2023, for total growth of 61%.

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

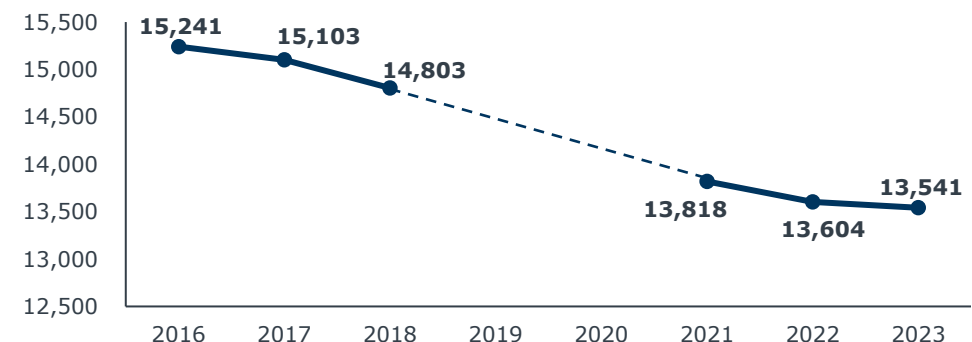


Largest Decline¹

Year-Over-Year Declines in Baseball Participation

Participation in baseball, the fifth largest sport in New Jersey, declined 11% between 2016 and 2023.

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



1) Lacrosse and swimming & diving also declined by 11% in this time period

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

Short- and Long-Term Changes in Participation

Girls

Areas of Consistent Growth

Six 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:

- Baseball
- Football, 11-Player
- Golf
- Ice Hockey
- Volleyball
- Wrestling

Areas of Steady Decline

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

- Basketball
- Bowling
- Fencing
- Field Hockey
- Gymnastics
- Indoor Track & Field
- Lacrosse
- Soccer
- Softball

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

Sport	2023-2024 Participation	Change, 2022-23 to 2023-24	Change, 2016-17 to 2023-24
Track & Field, Outdoor	17,654	7%	-2%
Soccer	13,118	-0.2%	-12%
Volleyball	11,931	2%	22%
Track & Field, Indoor	10,603	-8%	-4%
Softball	10,155	-0.2%	-17%
Basketball	9,283	-1%	-9%
Lacrosse	8,721	-1%	-8%
Tennis	6,997	0.3%	0.0%
Field Hockey	6,964	-5%	-20%
Swimming & Diving	5,416	4%	-17%
Cross Country	5,155	2%	-17%
Flag Football	3,121	N/A	N/A
Golf	2,396	6%	35%
Bowling	1,891	-1%	-9%
Wrestling	1,669	46%	1,339%
Fencing	1,078	-7%	-9%
Gymnastics	868	-3%	-3%
Ice Hockey	567	6%	59%
Unified Track and Field	480	11%	N/A
Unified Basketball	367	12%	N/A
Football, 11-Player	324	479%	384%
Unified Bowling	206	25%	N/A
Baseball	142	133%	274%

Biggest, Fastest Growth, Largest Decline

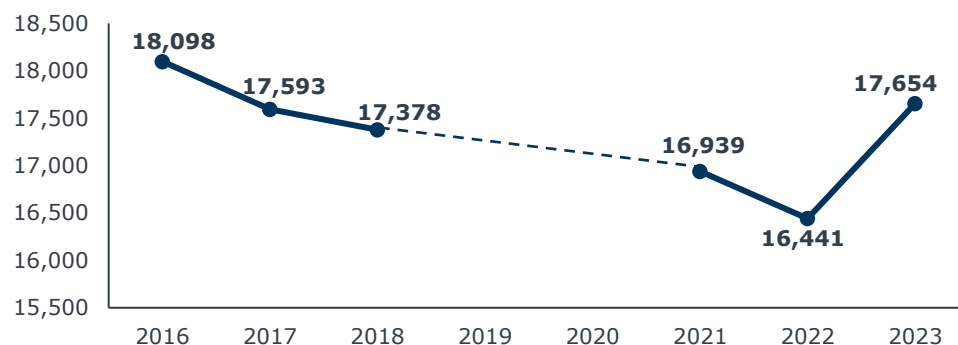
Girls

Biggest Sport

Track Rebounding After Years of Decline

Participation in outdoor track is down 2% since 2016, after declining every year through 2022. However, participation jumped 7% from 2022 to 2023.

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

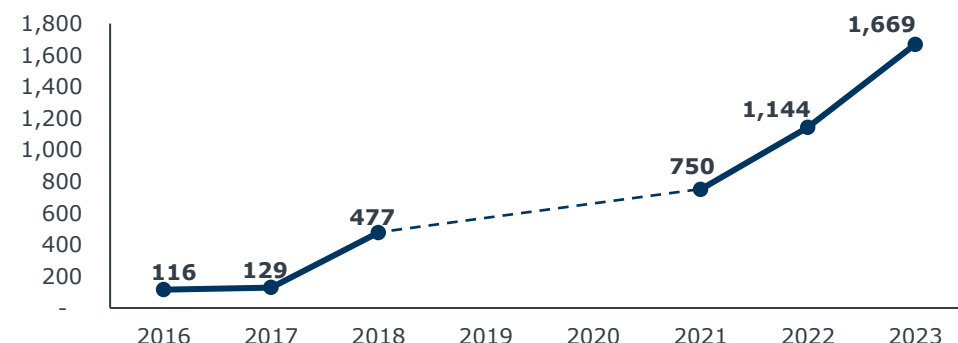


Fastest Growth

Wrestling Small but Growing Fast Among Girls

Participation in wrestling increased 1,339% between 2016 and 2023. It is currently the 15th largest sport in the state but could break the top 10 if this trend continues a few more years.

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

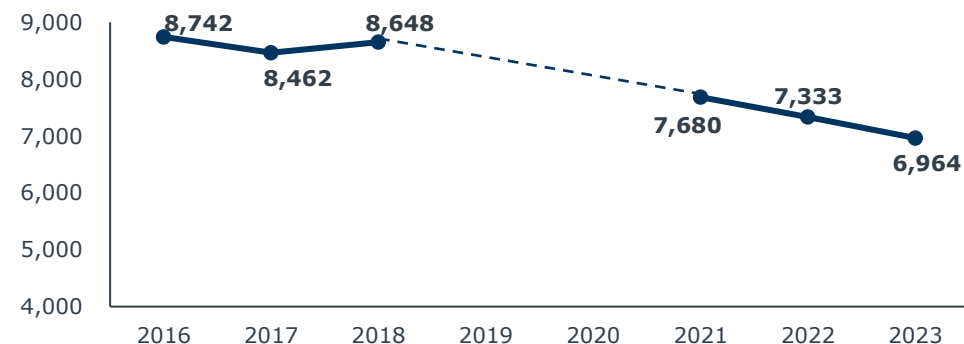


Largest Decline

Steady Decline for Field Hockey

Participation in field hockey has decreased every year but one since 2016, for a total decline of 20% by 2023.

Change in Girls' Field Hockey 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.