

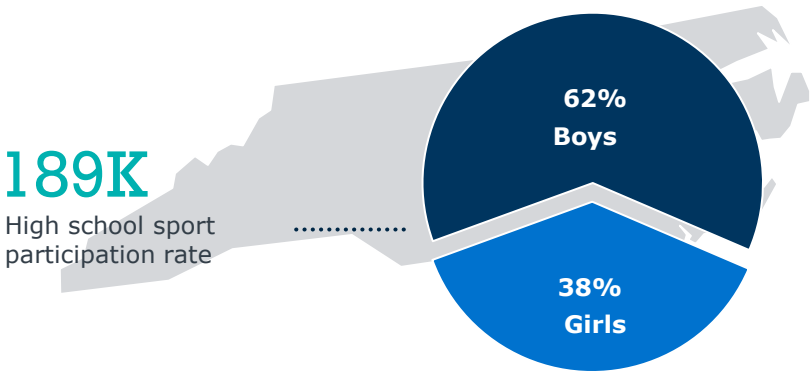
High School Sports Participation State Profile

State Profile: North Carolina

Boys Account for Most High School Sport Participation

As of 2023-2024, the high school sports participation rate was 189,237 in North Carolina. Mirroring the national trend, boys accounted for more than half of participation.

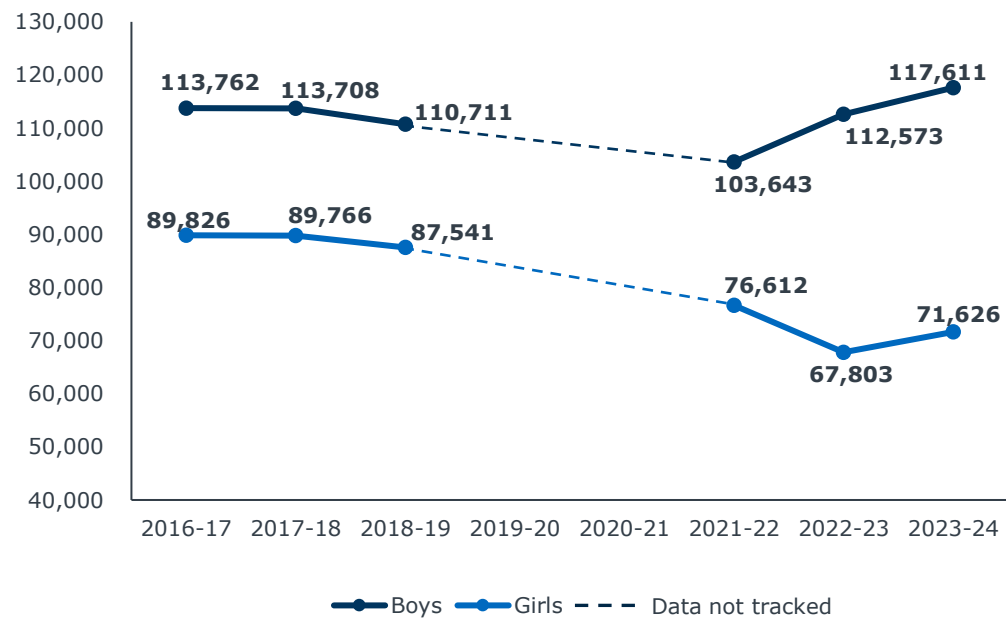
High School Sport Participation, Share of Girls v. Boys, 2023-24
n=189,237 (total participation)



Gap Between Boys, Girls Expands After Pandemic

Participation in high school sports is growing among boys and shrinking among girls over the last eight years. The gap in participation has expanded since 2016, when it used to be 56% boys and 44% girls.

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

Running Sports Take Three Spots in Top 10

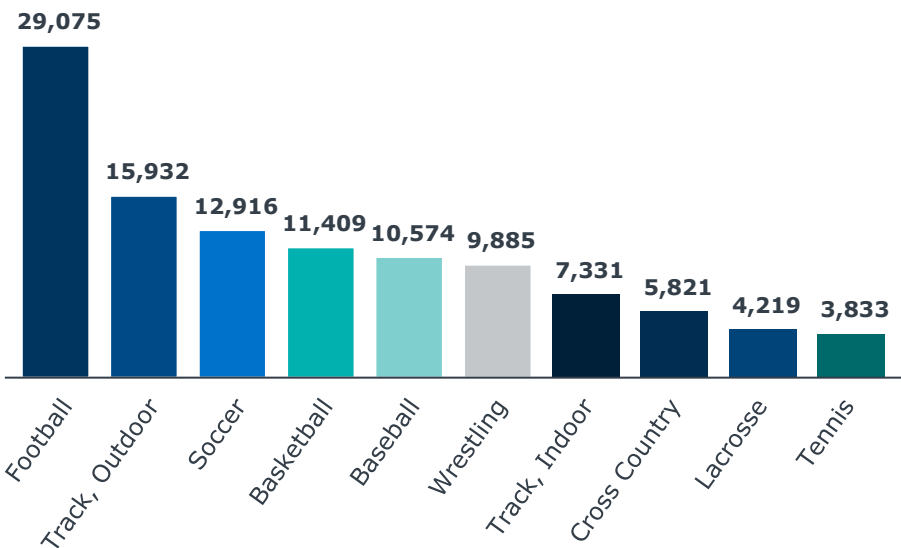
Like most states, football was the biggest boys' sport as of 2023-2024. All three running sports (indoor and outdoor track and cross country) made it into the top 10). Otherwise, the biggest deviation from national trends was lacrosse, which is the 9th largest sport in North Carolina and not in the top 10 nationally.

Running Sports Also Well-Represented in Girls' Top 10

Like boys, all three running sports made it into the top 10. Otherwise, the most sports reflect national trends, except competitive spirit. While spirit is in the 8th largest sport nationally, it is not in the top 10 in North Carolina.

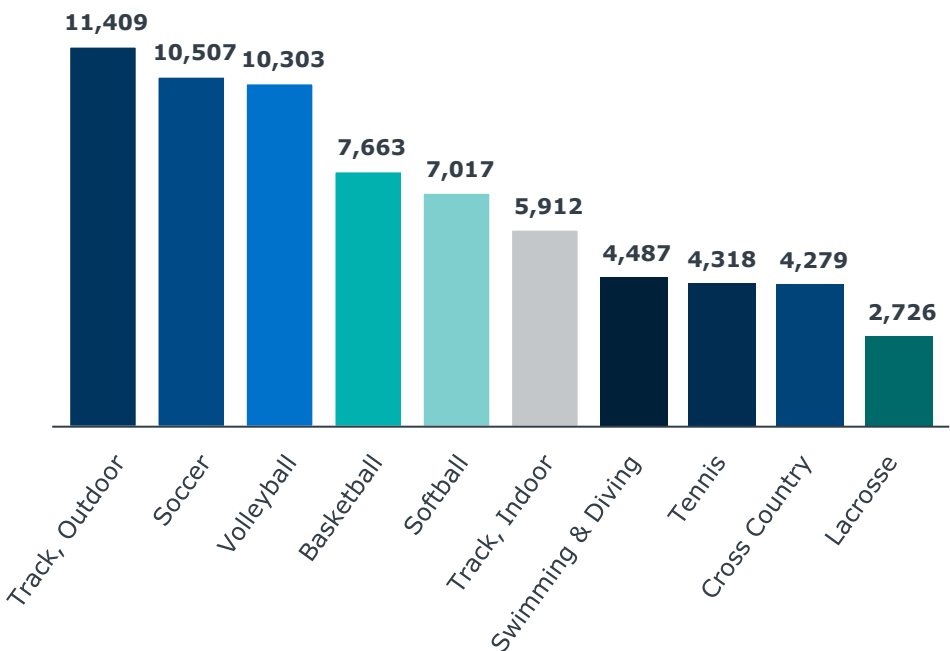
Top 10 Boys' Sports by Participation Rate, 2022-2023

n = 117,611 (boys' participation rate)



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

n = 71,626 (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

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:

- Basketball
- Golf
- Indoor Track & Field
- Lacrosse
- Soccer
- Wrestling

Areas of Steady Decline

In comparison, participation fell in the last year and across the last eight years decade among two sports:

- Baseball
- Football

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	29,075	-1%	-4%
Track & Field, Outdoor	15,932	0%	7%
Soccer	12,916	9%	4%
Basketball	11,409	1%	5%
Baseball	10,574	-1%	-4%
Wrestling	9,885	8%	18%
Track & Field, Indoor	7,331	13%	26%
Cross Country	5,821	10%	-11%
Lacrosse	4,219	6%	9%
Tennis	3,833	2%	-3%
Swimming & Diving	3,338	1%	-14%
Golf	3,278	7%	6%

Biggest, Fastest-Growing, Largest-Declining Sports

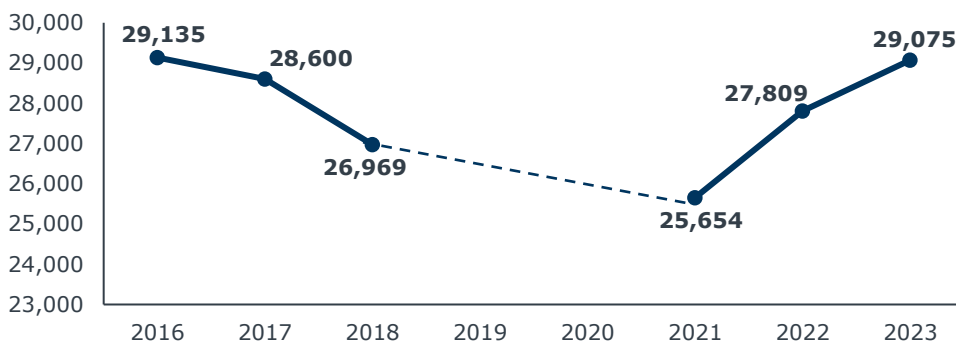
Boys

Biggest Sport

Football Recovering After Pre- and Post-Pandemic Fall

Overall, participation in football decreased 4% from 2016 and 2022, however, it is showing recent signs of growth. Participation increased 13% from 2021 to 2023.

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

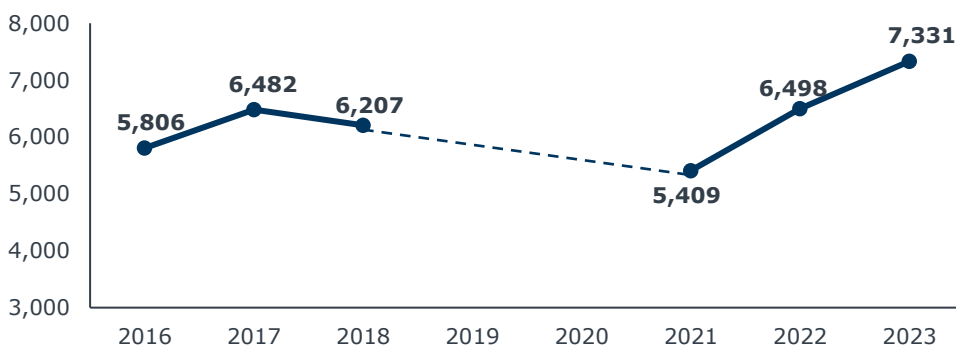


Fastest Growth

Indoor Track and Field Up Since the Pandemic

Participation in indoor track and field grew 26% between 2016 and 2023, after a few years of declines.

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

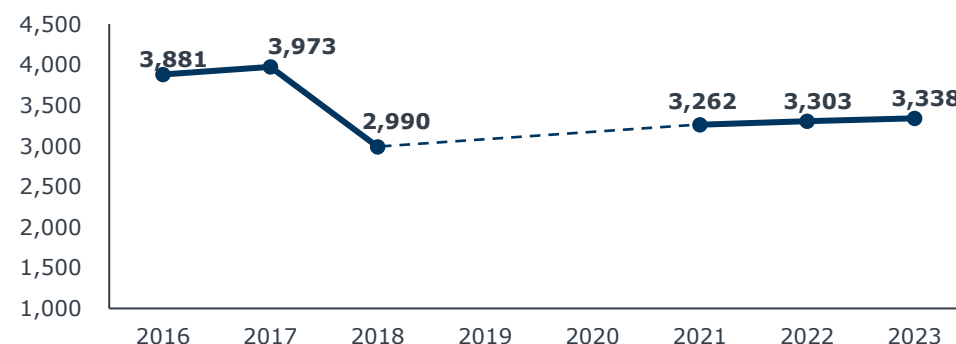


Largest Decline

Swimming and Diving Makes Small Gains After Fall

Participation in swimming and diving is down 14% since 2013. However, it has increased slightly each year since 2021.

Change in Boys' Basketball 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

Eight 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
- Indoor Track & Field
- Lacrosse
- Outdoor Track & Field
- Soccer
- Swimming & Diving
- Tennis

Areas of Steady Decline

In comparison, participation did not fall in the last year and across the last eight years among any sports.

Sport	2023-2024 Participation	Change, 2022-23 to 2023-24	Change, 2016-17 to 2023-24
Track & Field, Outdoor	11,409	3%	9%
Soccer	10,507	3%	2%
Volleyball	10,303	5%	10%
Basketball	7,663	3%	-4%
Softball	7,017	2%	-10%
Track & Field, Indoor	5,912	16%	19%
Swimming & Diving	4,487	4%	-10%
Tennis	4,318	8%	1%
Cross Country	4,279	5%	-20%
Lacrosse	2,726	1%	14%
Golf	1,573	12%	21%
Wrestling	1,432	74%	N/A

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

Biggest, Fastest Growth, Largest Decline

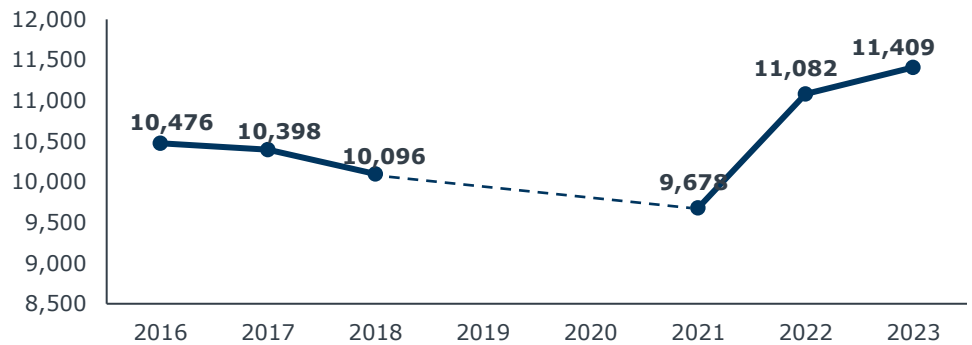
Girls

Biggest Sport

Sharp Increase in Recent Years After Steady Decline

Overall, participation in track and field is up 9% since 2016. Growth occurred between 2021 and 2023 after experiencing declines every year before.

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

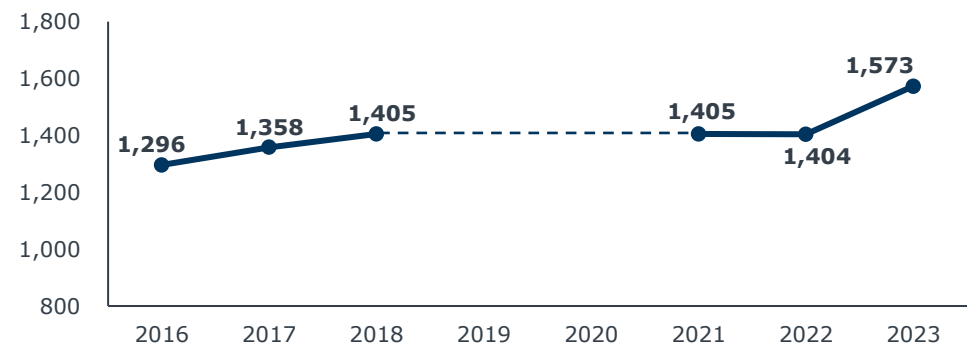


Fastest Growth

Golf Sees Steady Growth

Participation in golf increased 21% between 2016 and 2023, growing every year but one.

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

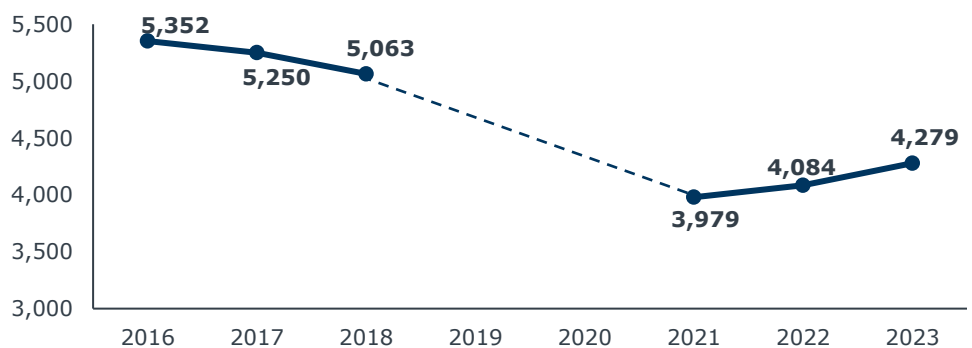


Largest Decline

Cross Country Shows Some Growth After Steep Drop

Participation in cross country, the 9th largest sport, fell 20% between 2016 and 2023. However, it has increased slightly each since 2021.

Change in Girls' Cross Country 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.