

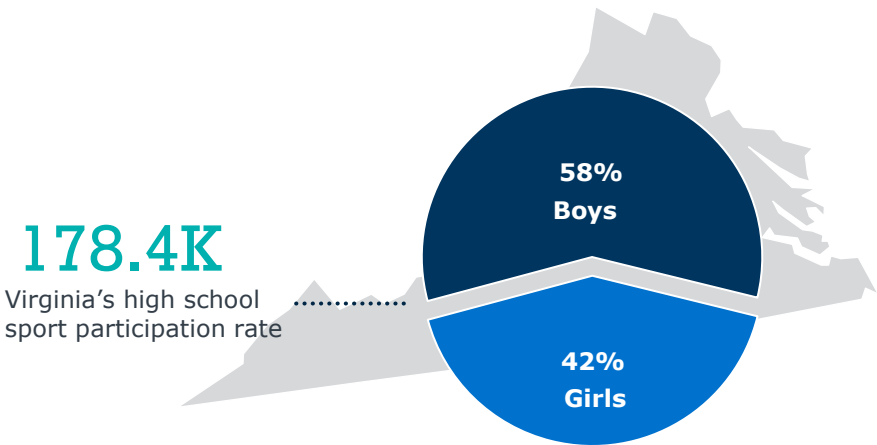
High School Sports Participation State Profile

State Profile: Virginia

Boys Account for Most High School Sport Participation

As of 2023-2024, the high school sports participation rate was 178,426 in Virginia. Mirroring the national trend, boys accounted for more than half of participation.

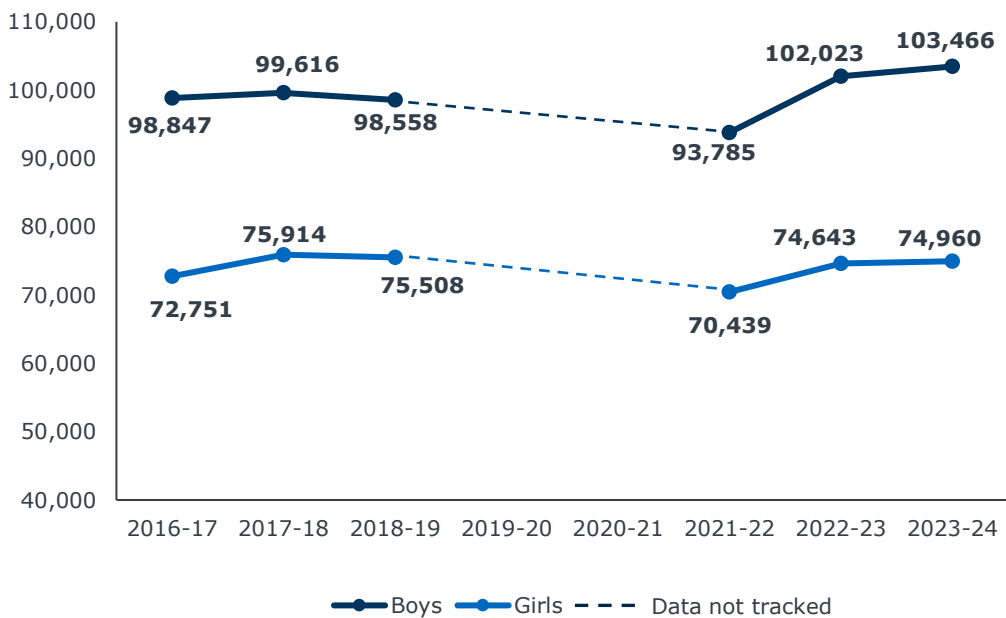
High School Sport Participation, Share of Girls v. Boys, 2023-24
n = 178,426



Gap Between Boys, Girls Persists After Pandemic

Participation in high school sports is growing among boys and girls over the last eight years. Growth has been slightly faster among boys, increasing the gap in participation.

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



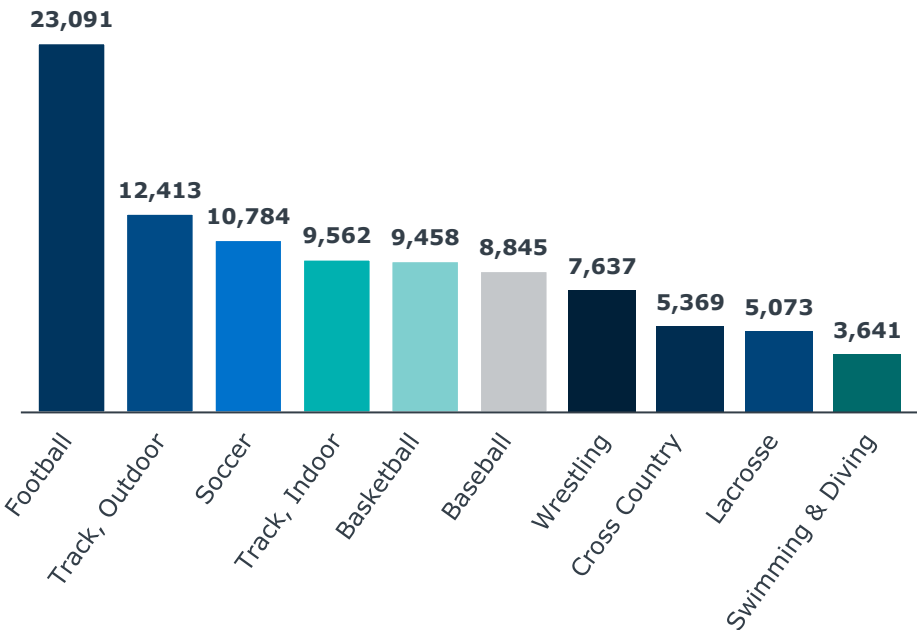
Source: EAB analysis of National Federation of State High School Association data.
eab.com

Top Boys' and Girls' Sports

Top Boys' Sports Largely Mirror National Trends

Like most states, football was the biggest boys' sport as of 2023-2024. The remaining sports largely reflect national trends. The biggest deviation was lacrosse, which was the ninth largest sport in the state and not in the top 10 nationally.

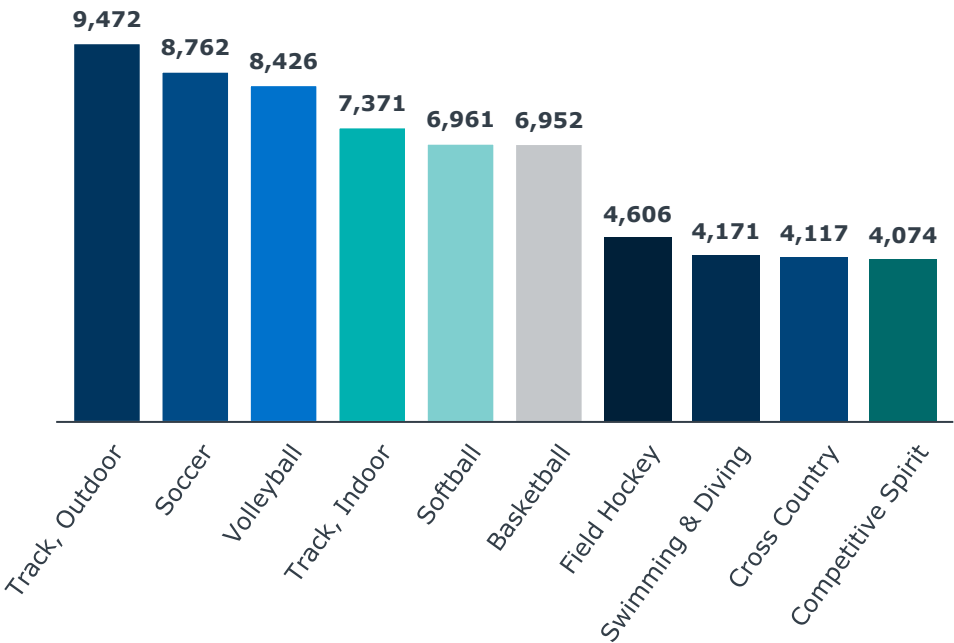
Top 10 Boys' Sports by Participation Rate, 2023-2024
n = 103,466



Field Hockey Emerges As Top Sport in Among Girls

The top girls' sports in Virginia also largely reflect national trends. The biggest deviation was field hockey, which was the seventh largest sport in the state and not in the top 10 nationally.

Top 10 Girls' Sports by Participation Rate, 2023-2024
n = 74,960



Short- and Long-Term Changes in Participation

Boys

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:

- Basketball
- Golf
- Indoor Track & Field
- Volleyball
- Wrestling

Areas of Steady Decline

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

- Baseball
- Swimming and 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
Football, 11-Player	23,091	0%	-4%
Track & Field, Outdoor	12,413	0%	8%
Soccer	6,353	0%	4%
Track & Field, Indoor	9,562	7%	24%
Basketball	9,458	3%	1%
Baseball	8,845	-2%	-4%
Wrestling	7,637	11%	109%
Cross Country	5,369	5%	-19%
Lacrosse	4,073	-1%	7%
Swimming & Diving	3,641	-1%	-4%
Tennis	2,931	2%	0%
Golf	2,676	4%	5%
Volleyball	1,305	5%	4%
eSports	593	2,595%	N/A
Competitive Spirit	88	10%	-7%

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

Biggest, Fastest Growth, Largest Decline

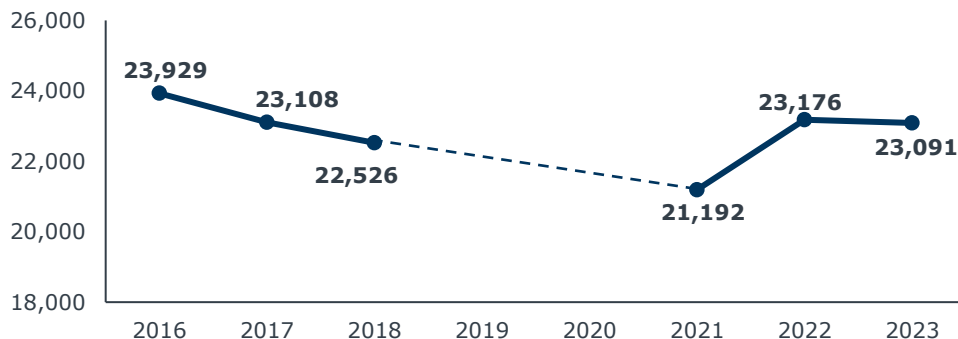
Boys

Biggest Sport

Football Recovering from Pre-Pandemic Decline

Participation in football fell just 4% from 2016 and 2023 after rebounding after the pandemic.

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

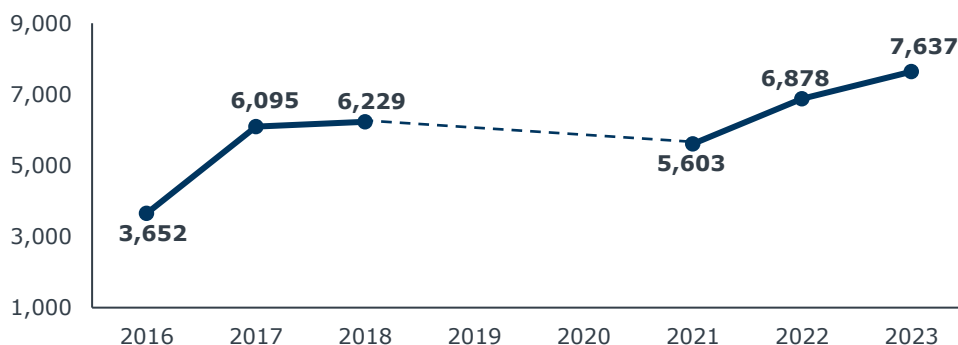


Fastest Growth

Wrestling Resumes Growth

Participation in wrestling increased every year but one between 2016 and 2023, for 109% total growth. The largest increase occurred from 2016 to 2017.

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

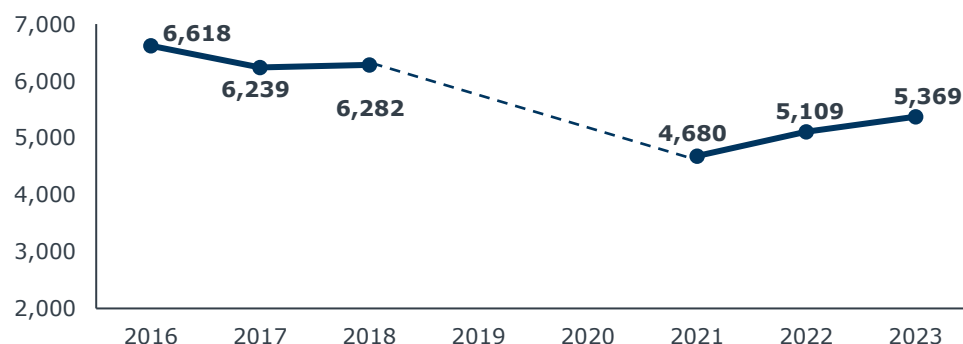


Largest Decline

Cross Country Slow to Recover from Pandemic

Participation in cross country was down 19% from 2016. However, it started showing signs of recovery, with a 15% increase between 2021 and 2023.

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



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

Short- and Long-Term Changes in Girls' 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
- Indoor Track & Field
- Outdoor Track & Field
- Tennis
- Wrestling

Areas of Steady Decline

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

- Baseball
- Basketball

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 & Field, Outdoor	9,472	5%	5%
Soccer	8,762	1%	-4%
Volleyball	8,426	0%	3%
Track & Field, Indoor	7,371	4%	15%
Softball	6,961	0%	-8%
Basketball	6,952	-2%	-8%
Field Hockey	4,606	0%	-9%
Swimming & Diving	4,171	0%	702%
Cross Country	4,074	3%	-9%
Competitive Spirit	4,074	3%	-9%
Lacrosse	3,952	0%	5%
Tennis	3,719	4%	3%
Gymnastics	979	0%	10%
Wrestling	669	43%	321%
Golf	554	10%	26%
eSports	117	1850%	N/A
Football, 11-Player	57	-64%	63%
Baseball	1	-75%	-75%

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

Biggest, Fastest Growth, Largest Decline

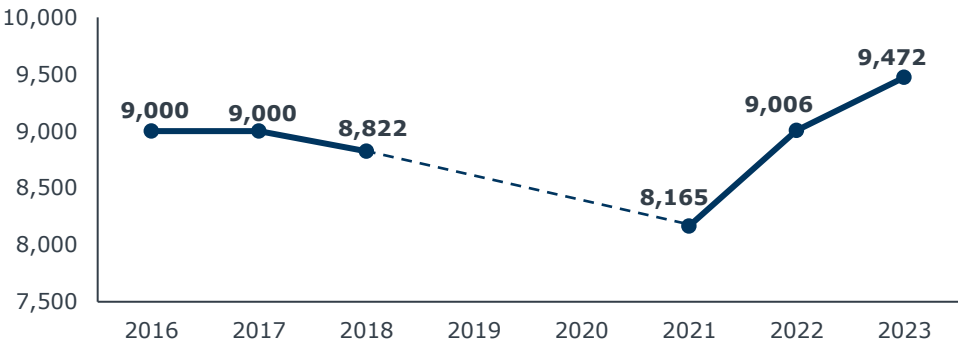
Girls

Biggest Sport

Outdoor Track Recovers Fully From Pandemic Fall

Participation in outdoor track and field was up 5% by 2023, despite decreasing every year between 2016 and 2021.

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

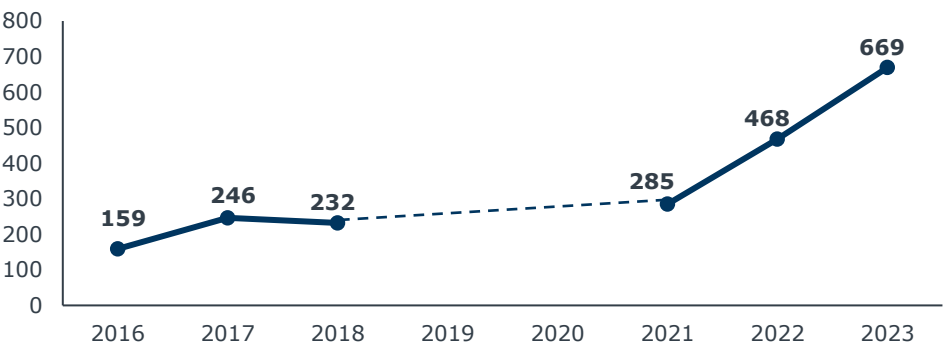


Fastest Growth

Wrestling Small but Growing Fast Among Girls

Participation in wrestling increased every year but one between 2016 and 2023, for 321% total growth.

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

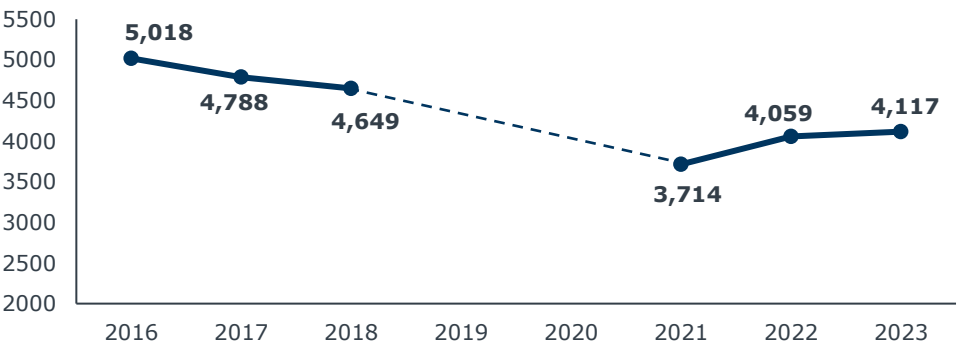


Largest Decline

Cross Country Rebounding Slightly After Steady Fall

Participation in cross country declined 18% between 2016 and 2023. However, it started showing signs of recovery, with an 11% increase from 2021 to 2023.

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.