



NEWS RELEASE

Participation in High School Sports Tops Eight Million for First Time in 2023-24

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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INDIANAPOLIS, IN (August 21, 2024) — More than eight million participants competed in high school sports in the 2023-24 school year – an all-time record and the first time ever that total participation has exceeded the eight-million mark.

The NFHS High School Athletics Participation Survey indicated that 8,062,302 participants were involved in high school sports in 2023-24, which is up 210,469 from the previous year and tops the previous record of 7,980,886 set in 2017-18. The total includes 4,638,785 boys and 3,423,517 girls – both record highs – according to figures obtained from the 51 NFHS member state associations, which includes the District of Columbia.

The 2023-24 total marked the second consecutive increase after numbers tumbled during the pandemic. Since the initial survey after the pandemic, participation in high school sports has increased 444,248 in two years and represents a turnaround from the decline that started the year before the COVID-19 pandemic.

“We are thrilled to learn that participation in high school sports has exceeded eight million for the first time,” said Dr. Karissa Niehoff, CEO of the NFHS. “The comeback from the pause of school sports during the pandemic has been so gratifying and certainly indicates the staying power of education-based sports in our nation’s schools. We salute coaches, athletic directors and other school administrators for making these experiences happen for student-athletes.”

Two of the biggest storylines are the increases in all forms of high school football – boys and girls – and the continued rise in both girls and boys wrestling. Eleven-player football remained the most popular boys sport and registered an increase for the second consecutive year from 1,028,761 to 1,031,508. There also was an increase in 8-player football participation from 23,812 to 26,420.

The biggest gains in football, however, came on the girls side, particularly with the emerging sport of flag football. The number of participants in girls flag football more than doubled from 2022-23 to 2023-24. A total of 42,955 girls participated in flag football in 2023-24 compared to 20,875 the previous year – a 105 percent increase. And from the 15,716 participants in 2021-22, there has been an increase of 173 percent. There also was an increase in the number of girls competing on 11-player football teams from 3,654 to 4,094.

Including boys and girls competitors in 6-, 8-, 9- and 11-player football, and girls and boys participants in flag football, the overall football total for 2023-24 was 1,118,705 – an increase of 28,825 from 2022-23.

Another highlight is the sizeable jump in wrestling – boys and girls – for the second consecutive year. An additional 32,443 boys were involved in wrestling last year, jumping from 259,431 to 291,874. Since the 2021-22 season, there has been a gain of 60,000 in boys wrestling – an amazing 25 percent increase. And participation on girls teams has continued its historic rise as well with 64,257 participants last year – an increase of 102 percent from the 31,654 in 2021-22.

Outdoor track and field, volleyball and soccer all registered increases and remained the top three participatory sports for girls. Track and field increased four percent to 506,015, followed by volleyball at 479,125 and soccer at 383,895. Although the number of participants was down about 6,000, basketball (367,284) remained in the No. 4 spot followed by fast-pitch softball (345,451), tennis (195,766), cross country (192,989), competitive spirit (181,023 – up 20 percent), swimming and diving (138,174) and lacrosse (101,204).

Outdoor track and field, and soccer had significant gains on the boys side as well. After 11-player football and outdoor track and field (625,333), the rest of the boys top 10 includes basketball (536,668), baseball (471,701), soccer (467,483), wrestling (291,874), cross country (239,381), tennis (157,835), golf (155,174) and swimming and diving (116,799).

The number of participants in Esports and Unified Sports also registered increases in 2023-24. A total of 27,051 students participated in Esports last year, which included 23,041 boys and 4,010 girls –

an increase of 3,129 participants from the previous year. The survey indicated a total of 51,502 participants in the 15 Unified Sports, up from 42,010 in 2022-23.

Texas (859,301) and California (834,103) remained atop the list of state participation. New York (341,454) remained in third, followed by Pennsylvania (336,946), Ohio (323,117), Illinois (320,603), Florida (299,398), Michigan (289,740), New Jersey (280,798) and Minnesota (224,179).

TEN MOST POPULAR BOYS PROGRAMS

Schools			Participants		
1.	Basketball	18,587	1.	Football – 11-Player	1,031,508
2.	Track and Field – Outdoor	17,274	2.	Track and Field – Outdoor	625,333
3.	Baseball	16,146	3.	Basketball	536,668
4.	Cross Country	15,511	4.	Baseball	471,701
5.	Golf	14,055	5.	Soccer	467,483
6.	Football – 11-Player	13,788	6.	Wrestling	291,874
7.	Soccer	12,754	7.	Cross Country	239,381
8.	Wrestling	11,149	8.	Tennis	157,835
9.	Tennis	10,175	9.	Golf	155,174
10.	Swimming & Diving	7,855	10.	Swimming & Diving	116,799

TEN MOST POPULAR GIRLS PROGRAMS

Schools			Participants		
1.	Basketball	18,090	1.	Track and Field – Outdoor	506,015
2.	Track and Field – Outdoor	17,267	2.	Volleyball	479,125
3.	Volleyball	16,849	3.	Soccer	383,895
4.	Softball – Fast Pitch	15,635	4.	Basketball	367,284
5.	Cross Country	15,228	5.	Softball – Fast Pitch	345,451
6.	Soccer	12,307	6.	Tennis	195,766
7.	Golf	11,089	7.	Cross Country	192,969
8.	Tennis	10,645	8.	Competitive Spirit	181,023
9.	Swimming & Diving	8,133	9.	Swimming & Diving	138,174
10.	Competitive Spirit	7,827	10.	Lacrosse	101,204

The NFHS High School Athletics Participation Survey was started in 1971 and was compiled in its current form through the 2018-19 school year, resuming annually with the 2021-22 survey. The

complete 2023-24 NFHS High School Athletics Participation Survey will be available soon on the NFHS website at www.nfhs.org.

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About the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS)

The NFHS, based in Indianapolis, Indiana, is the national leadership organization for high school sports and performing arts activities. Since 1920, the NFHS has led the development of education-based interscholastic sports and performing arts activities that help students succeed in their lives. The NFHS sets direction for the future by building awareness and support, improving the participation experience, establishing consistent standards and rules for competition, and helping those who oversee high school sports and activities. The NFHS writes playing rules for 17 sports for boys and girls at the high school level. Through its 50 member state associations and the District of Columbia, the NFHS reaches more than 19,800 high schools and 12 million participants in high school activity programs, including more than eight million in high school sports. As the recognized national authority on interscholastic activity programs, the NFHS conducts national meetings; sanctions interstate events; offers online publications and services for high school coaches and officials; sponsors professional organizations for high school coaches, officials, speech and debate coaches, and music adjudicators; serves as the national source for interscholastic coach training; and serves as a national information resource of interscholastic athletics and activities. For more information, visit the NFHS website at www.nfhs.org.

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