

NATIONAL FEDERATION OF STATE
HIGH SCHOOL ASSOCIATIONS



NEWS RELEASE

High School Sports Participation Increases for 27th Consecutive Year

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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INDIANAPOLIS, IN (August 10, 2016) – Led by an encouraging report in football participation nationwide, the number of participants in high school sports increased for the 27th consecutive year in 2015-16 according to the annual High School Athletics Participation Survey conducted by the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS).

Based on figures from the 51 NFHS member state high school associations, which includes the District of Columbia, the number of participants in high school sports reached an all-time high of 7,868,900 – an increase of 61,853 from the previous year.

After a decline of almost 10,000 participants in football the previous year, the number of boys playing 11-player football in 2015 was almost identical to 2014 with a drop of just 309 – from 1,083,617 to 1,083,308.

While some states reported a decline in football participation in 2015, 24 states registered increases in boys participation in 11-player football. When combining boys and girls participation in 6-, 8-, 9- and 11-player football, the number of participants increased 138 – from 1,114,253 to 1,114,391.

“The NFHS and its member state associations have taken significant steps over the past 10 years to minimize the risk of participation in football and all high school sports, so this report on the continued strong interest and participation in high school football is very encouraging,” said Bob Gardner, NFHS executive director. “With the adoption of state laws and protocols for concussion management in place, we continue to believe that the sport of football at the high school level is as safe as it has been since the first rules were written in 1932 – and we believe this year’s participation report is confirmation of that belief.”

After a decline the previous year, boys participation increased about 25,000 to an all-time high of 4,544,574, while girls participation increased for the 27th consecutive year with an additional 36,591 participants and set an all-time high of 3,324,326.

Track and field registered the largest increase in participants for both boys and girls, with an additional 12,501 boys and 7,243 girls. Track and field ranks second to football in boys participants with 591,133, and remains the most popular sport for girls with 485,969 participants.

In addition to track and field, six other top 10 girls sports registered increases in 2015-16, including volleyball, soccer, softball, cross country, tennis and lacrosse. The top 10 girls sports remained the same as the previous year: track and field, volleyball, basketball, soccer, fast-pitch softball, cross country, tennis, swimming and diving, competitive spirit squads, and lacrosse.

After track and field among the top 10 boys sports, soccer registered the largest gain with an additional 7,753 participants, followed by cross country (up 6,710), basketball (up 4,949) and baseball (up 2,248). Although the top five boys sports remained the same as last year – 11-player football, track and field, basketball, baseball and soccer – cross country moved to sixth place ahead of wrestling, which dropped to seventh after a decline of 7,555 participants. Tennis, golf and swimming and diving complete the top 10 listing of boys sports.

Lacrosse continued its rise among emerging sports with 197,572 total participants to rank 10th in girls participation and 11th for boys. Among some of the non-traditional high school sports on this year’s survey, archery (8,668), badminton (17,645) and flag football (12,093) continued to register increases in participation. Also, while boys wrestling had a drop in participation, an additional 2,000 girls participated in the sport last year for an all-time high of 13,496.

Participation in adapted sports also increased in 2015-16 from 8,483 participants to 9,491 with schools in 12 states now offering these programs for students with disabilities.

The top 10 states by participants remained the same; however, Florida moved ahead of New Jersey to eighth position this year. Texas and California topped the list again with 809,075 and 802,117, respectively, followed by New York (372,772), Illinois (344,143), Ohio (319,929), Pennsylvania (319,853), Michigan (295,436), Florida (285,885), New Jersey (279,371) and Minnesota (237,686). Thirty-three of the 51 NFHS member state associations reported increases in participation in 2015-16.

The participation survey has been compiled since 1971 by the NFHS through numbers it receives from its member associations. The complete 2015-16 High School Athletics Participation Survey is attached in PDF format and will be posted 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 19,000 high schools and 11 million participants in high school activity programs, including more than 7.8 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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