

2014-15 Interscholastic High School Athletics Participation, Academic Performance, and Eligibility Requirements

Key Findings

1. In total, 36% of MMSD high school students participated in interscholastic athletics, with participation rates varying by school, grade and demographic group.
2. Sixty-one percent of interscholastic high school student athletes were white.
3. Soccer, cross country, track, and football had the greatest number of participants across the district.
4. Overall, higher percentages of interscholastic high school student athletes received no Ds (71%) or Fs (86%) than non-participants (58% and 66%).
5. All four potential eligibility models explored result in significant disparities in interscholastic athletics eligibility across student groups.

During 2015, athletics has been a topic of interest for MMSD’s Board of Education. Athletics participation ties directly into MMSD’s Strategic Framework Goal #2: Every student has access to a challenging and well-rounded education, which is measured in part by access and participation data for extra-curricular and co-curricular activities like athletics. In this report, we investigate the athletic participation, academic performance, and eligibility of student athletes during the 2014-15 school year through three research questions:

1. Who participated in interscholastic high school athletics in 2014-15?
2. What was the prevalence of Ds and course failures among MMSD high school students who participated in interscholastic athletics in 2014-15?
3. What percent of students from different demographic groups would have been eligible to participate in MMSD high school interscholastic athletics in 2014-15 under various eligibility criteria?

A complementary report –*The Effect of Interscholastic High School Athletics Participation on Student Outcomes for the Classes of 2012-2014* – is available at mmsd.org/research.

Question 1: Who participated in interscholastic high school athletics in 2014-15?

To answer this question, we looked at enrollment in MMSD-sponsored interscholastic sports. If a sport appears on a student’s schedule (where MMSD athletic rosters are recorded) during 2014-15 without the designation that it was through Madison School & Community Recreation (MSCR) we count them as a participant in that sport and as a participant in interscholastic athletics (e.g., “Boys Tennis – 9th Blue” counts but “Volleyball – MSCR” does not). This designation also does not include students who participated in other athletic activities outside of MMSD, nor does it reflect the intensity of participation (e.g. participated for one week or for the entire season), which is not recorded. Students who try out for a sport and are cut at the beginning of the season also do not appear, as the sport will never appear on their schedule, so interest in sports likely is higher than the figures reported here. Table 1 lists the demographics of the 2,813 high school students (36%) who participated in interscholastic athletics during 2014-15.

Table 1: 2014-15 Participation Rates by Demographic Group

Grouping Category	Group	% of Students in Any Sport	# of Student Athletes
Total	Grand Total	36%	2813
	East	31%	535
	La Follette	37%	581
	Memorial	41%	823
	West	41%	861
	Shabazz	5%	6
	Innovative & Alt	2%	6
Race/Ethnicity	Asian	30%	218
	African-American	21%	351
	Hispanic	25%	317
	Multiracial	34%	219
	White	47%	1700
Gender	Female	33%	1243
	Male	38%	1570



Grouping Category	Group	% in Any Sport	# of Student Athletes
Income	Not Free/Reduced	48%	2109
	Free/Reduced	20%	704
Special Education Status	Not Special Ed.	41%	2599
	Special Ed.	14%	214
ELL Status	Not ELL	39%	2400
	ELL	24%	413
Grade	9	45%	867
	10	40%	761
	11	30%	589
	12	29%	596

Across MMSD, 36% of high school students participated in MMSD-sponsored interscholastic athletics during 2014-15. Of the four conventional high schools, West had the highest participation (861 students; 41%) while East had the lowest (535 students; 31%). Participation rates were highest among white students (47%), male students (38%), not low-income students (48%), not special education students (41%), and not ELL students (39%). Athletics participation was lower in higher grades, dipping from 45% in grade 9 to 29% in grade 12. These rates reflect all high school students, although some are ineligible to participate for reasons such as age, residential ineligibility, or part-time or virtual enrollment.

Table 2 lists participant totals and demographics for the 17 interscholastic high school sports MMSD offered in 2014-15.

Table 2: 2014-15 Participant Totals by Sport and Demographic Group

Grouping Category	Group	Any Sport	Baseball + Softball	Basketball	Cheer	Cross Country	Football	Golf	Gymnastics	Hockey	Pom Pon	Soccer	Swimming & Diving	Tennis	Track	Volleyball	Wrestling
Total	Grand Total	2813	291	287	62	490	474	65	61	75	65	630	243	297	475	317	85
School	East	535	49	53	4	72	112	9	15	14	14	145	61	41	71	71	22
	La Follette	581	85	84	35	46	139	12	5	11	20	120	35	54	92	75	30
	Memorial	823	74	68	11	183	123	18	19	25	20	150	70	120	175	85	17
	West	861	82	81	11	189	95	24	22	24	11	212	77	81	137	86	16
Race/Ethnicity	Asian	218	6	6	5	41	11	5	2	1	2	40	8	82	20	23	4
	African-American	351	10	116	20	9	128	0	3	0	8	40	1	7	79	26	15
	Hispanic	317	14	13	7	34	64	1	5	3	3	150	15	14	45	21	9
	Multiracial	219	20	43	6	25	53	2	3	3	7	35	12	16	45	32	17
Gender	White	1700	241	108	24	381	215	57	48	68	45	364	205	177	285	214	40
	Female	1243	113	99	61	236	24	18	61	10	63	272	128	137	202	196	9
Income	Male	1570	178	188	1	254	450	47	0	65	2	358	115	160	273	121	76
	Not Free/Reduced	2109	253	153	29	465	269	63	53	71	51	460	231	255	366	244	56
Special Education Status	Free/Reduced	704	38	134	33	25	205	2	8	4	14	170	12	42	109	73	29
	Not Special Ed.	2599	278	250	61	455	395	62	59	73	64	603	232	287	446	304	68
ELL Status	Special Ed.	214	13	37	1	35	79	3	2	2	1	27	11	10	29	13	17
	Not ELL	2400	277	270	52	455	419	60	56	73	63	444	228	244	417	282	69
Grade	ELL	413	14	17	10	35	55	5	5	2	2	186	15	53	58	35	16
	9	867	92	121	8	142	140	18	20	17	9	246	50	79	139	136	25
	10	761	87	85	24	133	138	16	17	22	7	156	73	92	145	89	19
	11	589	55	47	17	101	93	18	14	15	24	110	69	61	101	52	13
	12	596	57	34	13	114	103	13	10	21	25	118	51	65	90	40	28

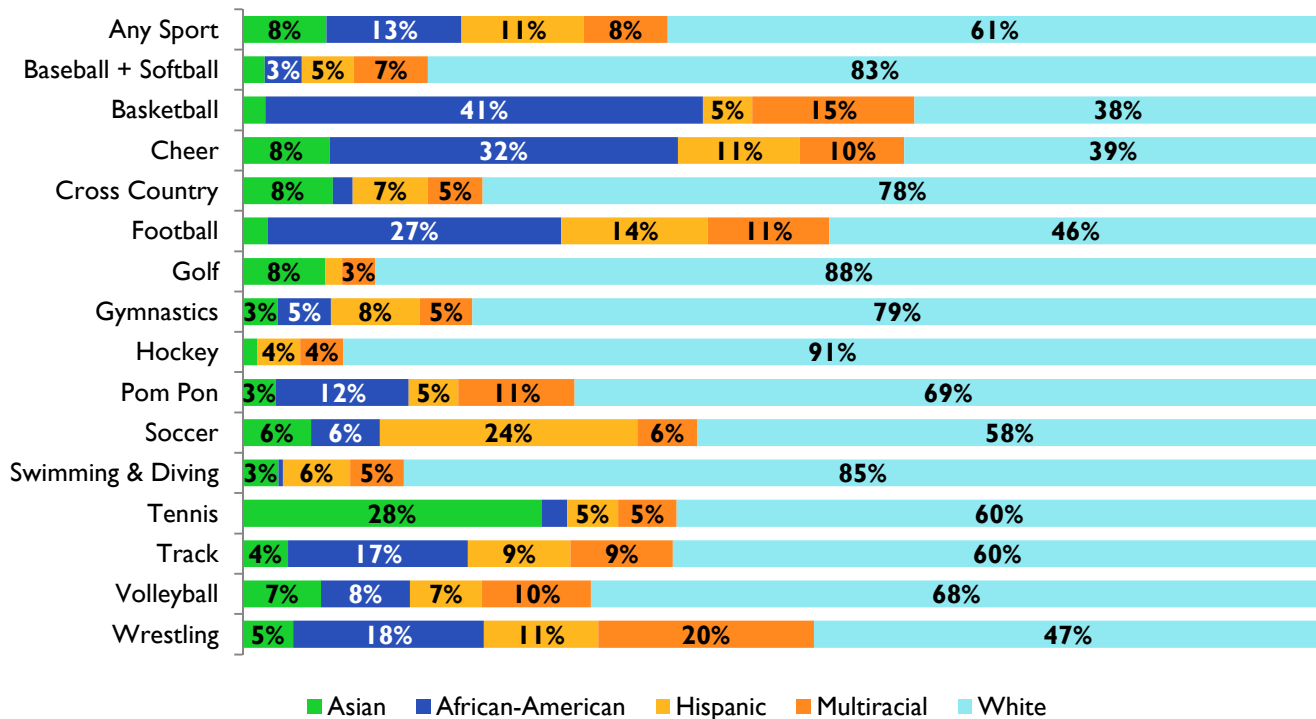
Note: Shabazz High had six athletics participants and another five came from Innovative & Alternative programs. We do not show these schools' data separately in the table above because of the small student counts, but these students are included in all demographic breakouts. Some students appear as participants in sports not typically played by that gender (e.g. 24 females in football), partially due to the presence of student managers in athletics participation records.

Soccer (630), cross country (490), track (475) and football (474) have the greatest number of students participating across the district. The sports with the greatest participation at each high school include soccer at East (145), football at La Follette (139), cross country at Memorial (183), and soccer at West (212). African-American students had the highest number of participants in football (128) and basketball (116), while white students had the highest number of participants in cross country (384) and soccer (364). Sports vary in their participation by grade; while some sports see higher number of participants from earlier grades (such as basketball, soccer, and volleyball), others remain relatively consistent or even see higher participation rates among students in grades 11 and 12 (such as golf, wrestling, and pom pon).



The graph below shows the racial/ethnic identification of student-athletes overall and by sport.

Figure 1: 2014-15 Racial/Ethnic Identification of Student-Athletes



In total, 61% of student-athletes were white. Sports with the highest percentage of students of color were basketball (62%), cheer (61%), and football (54%). Sports with the lowest percentage of students of color were hockey (9%), golf (12%), and swimming & diving (15%).



Question 2: What was the prevalence of Ds and course failures among MMSD high school students who participated in interscholastic athletics in 2014-15?

The Board has asked about the academic performance of interscholastic high school student athletes compared to non-athletes. To answer this question, we examined student transcripts from 2014-15. Table 3 lists students receiving Ds and Fs by participation in interscholastic athletics and demographics in 2014-15.

Table 3: Students Receiving Ds and Fs by Athletics Participation and Demographics in 2014-15

Grouping Category	Demographic Group	Athletics Participation	Students	Ds in 2014-15			Fs in 2014-15		
				0	1	2 or more	0	1	2 or more
Total	All Students	Not in athletics	5097	55%	14%	31%	60%	11%	29%
		In athletics	2813	71%	11%	18%	86%	6%	8%
Race/Ethnicity	Asian	Not in athletics	499	63%	14%	23%	76%	9%	15%
		In athletics	218	87%	6%	7%	94%	4%	1%
	African-American	Not in athletics	1287	47%	14%	39%	43%	11%	46%
		In athletics	351	32%	16%	52%	62%	12%	26%
	Hispanic	Not in athletics	956	41%	16%	43%	50%	13%	37%
		In athletics	317	51%	15%	34%	73%	12%	15%
	Multiracial	Not in athletics	416	49%	14%	37%	52%	11%	38%
		In athletics	219	54%	16%	30%	73%	13%	14%
	White	Not in athletics	1908	66%	14%	19%	75%	9%	16%
		In athletics	1700	82%	9%	8%	94%	3%	3%
Gender	Female	Not in athletics	2550	58%	15%	27%	63%	11%	26%
		In athletics	1243	79%	9%	12%	90%	5%	5%
	Male	Not in athletics	2547	52%	14%	34%	57%	11%	32%
		In athletics	1570	64%	12%	23%	83%	7%	10%
Free/Reduced Lunch	Not FRL	Not in athletics	2320	69%	13%	18%	76%	9%	14%
		In athletics	2109	81%	9%	10%	94%	3%	3%
	FRL	Not in athletics	2777	43%	15%	41%	47%	12%	42%
		In athletics	704	39%	17%	44%	63%	15%	22%
Special Education	Not SPED	Not in athletics	3733	56%	15%	30%	62%	10%	27%
		In athletics	2599	73%	10%	16%	88%	5%	7%
	SPED	Not in athletics	1364	52%	14%	34%	55%	11%	34%
		In athletics	214	37%	20%	43%	64%	15%	21%
ELL	Not ELL	Not in athletics	3799	58%	14%	28%	61%	10%	29%
		In athletics	2400	73%	10%	17%	87%	6%	7%
	ELL	Not in athletics	1298	46%	16%	38%	58%	13%	29%
		In athletics	413	57%	16%	28%	79%	9%	12%
School	East High	Not in athletics	1189	49%	17%	35%	58%	12%	30%
		In athletics	535	59%	13%	27%	77%	10%	13%
	La Follette High	Not in athletics	977	47%	16%	37%	61%	10%	29%
		In athletics	581	62%	13%	25%	82%	7%	10%
	Memorial High	Not in athletics	1165	56%	16%	28%	60%	11%	29%
		In athletics	823	77%	10%	14%	90%	4%	5%
	West High	Not in athletics	1261	58%	11%	30%	69%	10%	21%
		In athletics	861	78%	9%	13%	90%	4%	5%
Grade	9	Not in athletics	1046	48%	15%	38%	58%	11%	31%
		In athletics	867	73%	9%	17%	87%	6%	7%
	10	Not in athletics	1154	47%	14%	39%	57%	10%	33%
		In athletics	761	69%	10%	21%	86%	5%	9%
	11	Not in athletics	1402	54%	16%	30%	53%	11%	36%
		In athletics	589	69%	12%	20%	84%	8%	8%
	12	Not in athletics	1495	67%	13%	20%	71%	10%	19%
		In athletics	596	70%	14%	16%	86%	6%	7%

Note: data for Native American, Pacific Islander, Innovative & Alternative High, and Shabazz High students does not appear in the table above because the low number of athletics participants from these groups makes it impossible to present these data breakouts without compromising student privacy.

Overall, approximately 71% of athletics participants received no Ds and 86% received no Fs during the 2014-15 school year. These rates are substantially better than those of non-participants, which are 55% and 60%. The trend of higher



academic performance for student athletes does not always hold across student groups in terms of Ds received, but continues to be evident for Fs. For example, African-American student athletes and those receiving free or reduced lunch do not exhibit lower rates of Ds than their non-athlete peers, but they do exhibit lower rates of course failures.

The data for 9th grade students in athletics is particularly notable, given that the percent of 9th grade students receiving two or more course failures is a milestone metric within MMSD's Strategic Framework, research-proven to be predictive of on-time high school completion. Overall, MMSD stands at 20% on this metric, but student-athlete performance is vastly better at 7%.

While Table 3 clearly shows differences in course grades between athletes and non-athletes, this does not imply that athletics caused these differences. It is possible that students who choose to participate in athletics are predisposed to do better in academics due to a variety of factors (e.g., previous performance, internal motivation). Investigating whether athletics participation causes students to not earn Ds and Fs would require a more rigorous research design.

Question 3: What percent of students from different demographic groups would have been eligible to participate in MMSD high school interscholastic athletics in 2014-15 under various eligibility criteria?

The Board has asked MMSD leadership to explore increasing the eligibility criteria for interscholastic athletics participation. To identify potential options, RPEO looked at the 2014-15 eligibility policy. Currently, MMSD has eligibility guidelines for student athletes that are dependent upon their grades received during a particular school year and/or term. In 2014-15, all students were eligible to participate in MMSD-sponsored interscholastic athletics, regardless of academic performance. However, a student could incur contest suspension(s) by failing a certain number of courses during an academic term or year or for unexcused absences. Athletics suspensions also include school day lengths, such as "ineligible for not less than 10 school days," but for simplicity, we present them in terms of athletics contests. The possible suspensions are listed below:

- One course failure – one contest suspension
- More than one course failure during a single term – two contest suspension
- More than two course failures during a single term – suspension from next season

With these policies in mind, we created four hypothetical models for eligibility:

- **Model 1:** No course failures during the academic year (one or more failures = ineligibility)
- **Model 2:** One course failure maximum during a single term (two or more failures = ineligibility)
- **Model 3:** Two course failures maximum during a single term (three or more failures = ineligibility)
- **Model 4:** Cumulative GPA of 2.0 or above (per Board member request)

We then used 2014-15 transcripts to determine which students would and would not be eligible under each model.

We are aware that none of these models are an exact reflection of current MMSD eligibility practices, which are very difficult to reconstruct retroactively because of the use of progress grades in-season, which are not stored permanently, and the seasonal components to eligibility. Instead, these models are designed as hypothetical and illustrative of varying approaches that could be used.



Table 4 shows the percent of students who would have been eligible for athletics participation in 2014-15 under four hypothetical eligibility models:

Table 4: Students Eligible for Interscholastic Athletics Participation in 2014-15 by Eligibility Model and Demographics

Grouping Category	Demographic Group	Number of Students	Percent Eligible Under Eligibility Models			
			Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Total	All Students	7910	69%	82%	88%	78%
Race/Ethnicity	Native American	29	52%	76%	86%	72%
	Asian	717	82%	91%	95%	91%
	African-American	1638	47%	63%	74%	55%
	Hispanic	1273	55%	74%	84%	68%
	Multiracial	635	59%	75%	82%	71%
	Pacific Islander	10	30%	60%	80%	30%
	White	3608	84%	92%	95%	92%
Gender	Female	3793	72%	84%	90%	82%
	Male	4117	67%	80%	86%	75%
Free/Reduced Lunch	Not Free/Reduced	4429	84%	93%	96%	91%
	Free/Reduced	3481	50%	67%	77%	63%
Special Education	Not Special Education	6332	73%	84%	90%	82%
	Special Education	1578	56%	72%	80%	62%
ELL	Not ELL	6199	71%	82%	88%	79%
	ELL	1711	63%	80%	88%	76%
School	East High	1724	64%	79%	86%	77%
	Innovative & Alt High	317	36%	50%	61%	41%
	La Follette High	1558	69%	83%	89%	79%
	Memorial High	1988	72%	83%	89%	80%
	Shabazz High	110	26%	52%	65%	73%
	West High	2122	78%	88%	92%	83%
Grade	9	1913	71%	83%	88%	78%
	10	1915	68%	79%	86%	77%
	11	1991	62%	76%	84%	76%
	12	2091	75%	88%	93%	81%

Unsurprisingly, *Model 3: Two course failures maximum during a single term* would lead to the highest eligibility rates across student groups, while *Model 1: No course failures during an academic term* would lead to the lowest rates.

The key finding from Table 4 is that regardless of the eligibility model used, there are significant disparities in athletics eligibility across student groups. For example, under *Model 4: Cumulative GPA of 2.0 or above*, 92% of white students would have been eligible to participate, while only 55% of African-American students would have been eligible.



In addition, we chose to examine eligibility under each model with a focus on actual 2014-15 interscholastic athletics participants. In other words, we explored how these hypothetical models would have affected the eligibility of students who chose to participate in interscholastic athletics, rather than all students – athletes and not. Table 5 shows the results.

Table 5: Students Eligible for Interscholastic Athletics Participation by Eligibility Model and Demographics, 2014-15 Interscholastic Athletics Participants

	Demographic Group	Number of Students	Percent Eligible Under Eligibility Models			
			Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Total	All Competitive Athletes	2813	86%	94%	97%	93%
Race/Ethnicity	Asian	218	94%	99%	99%	98%
	African-American	351	62%	79%	89%	73%
	Hispanic	317	73%	89%	94%	85%
	Multiracial	219	73%	90%	95%	88%
	White	1700	94%	98%	99%	98%
Gender	Female	1243	90%	97%	99%	96%
	Male	1570	83%	92%	96%	90%
Free/Reduced Lunch	Not Free/Reduced	2109	94%	98%	99%	98%
	Free/Reduced	704	63%	83%	91%	77%
Special Education	Not Special Education	2599	88%	95%	98%	94%
	Special Education	214	64%	84%	90%	73%
ELL	Not ELL	2400	87%	95%	97%	93%
	ELL	413	79%	92%	96%	89%
School	East High	535	77%	90%	95%	90%
	La Follette High	581	82%	94%	98%	91%
	Memorial High	823	90%	96%	98%	94%
	West High	861	90%	95%	97%	94%
Grade	9	867	87%	95%	97%	91%
	10	761	86%	93%	97%	93%
	11	589	84%	94%	96%	93%
	12	596	86%	94%	97%	94%
	Not in Athletics	5097	60%	75%	83%	70%

Overall, each model would have reduced the percentage of athletes eligible to participate, ranging from 97% of 2014-15 athletes eligible under *Model 3: Two course failures maximum during a single term* to 86% eligible under *Model 1: No course failures during the academic year*. Under each potential model, it is clear that there would be a disproportionate impact on certain student groups, including African-American students and students receiving free/reduced lunch. For example, under *Model 4: Cumulative GPA of 2.0 or above*, 27% of current African-American athletes would be ineligible relative to 2% of current white athletes.