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New Study Demonstrates that Girls on the Run Transforms Young Girls' Lives

More than 2,000 Girls Participate Annually

MILLBURN, NJ - As students prepare to head back to school, parents are looking for after-school activities that provide safe and structured spaces where children can learn skills and be physically active. Girls on the Run offers this and so much more.

A recent independent study provides compelling evidence that Girls on the Run is highly effective at driving transformative and lasting change in the lives of third to fifth grade girls. The program's intentional curriculum places an emphasis on developing competence, confidence, connection, character, caring, and contribution in young girls through lessons that incorporate running and other physical activities. Throughout the course of the ten-week program, girls learn critical life skills including managing emotions, resolving conflict, helping others, and making intentional decisions. It is the combination of the research-based curriculum, trained coaches, and a commitment to serve all girls that sets Girls on the Run apart from other after-school programs.

The independent study was conducted by Maureen R. Weiss, Ph.D, a leading expert on youth development. "Girls on the Run participants scored higher in managing emotions, resolving conflict, helping others, and making intentional decisions than participants in organized sport or physical education," confirms Weiss. "Being able to generalize skills learned in the program to other situations such as at school or at home is a distinguishing feature of Girls on the Run compared to traditional youth sports and school physical education, and suggests that the intentional life skills curriculum and coach-training program can serve as exemplars for other youth programs."

Key study results include the following:

1. 97 percent of girls said they learned critical life skills at Girls on the Run that they are using at home, at school, and with their friends.
2. 7 out of 10 girls who improved from pre-season to post-season sustained improvements in competence, confidence, connection, character, caring, or physical activity beyond the season's end.

3. Girls in Girls on the Run were significantly more likely than girls in physical education or organized sports programs to learn and use life skills, including managing emotions, resolving conflict, helping others, and making intentional decisions.
4. Girls who were the least active before Girls on the Run increased their physical activity level by 40 percent from pre-season to post-season and maintained this increased level beyond the program's end.

“For the 17 years that our council has been changing the lives of girls and young women, these studies confirm what we see at the finish line, hear from the families, and witness in our local communities: Girls on the Run is a uniquely powerful program that has incredible impact on girls’ self-esteem and character,” shares Girls on the Run New Jersey East Executive Director Sydney Davis. “Through mentoring from volunteer coaches, learning from our intentionally designed curriculum, and collective goal setting, girls who experience Girls on the Run are empowered to stand up for themselves and pursue their dreams with more confidence, connectedness, and self-awareness. It is exciting to see on paper what we observe on a consistent basis.”

For more information about fall registration for Girls on the Run, please visit girlsontherunnj.org.

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About Girls on the Run

Based in Charlotte, NC, Girls on the Run is a nonprofit organization with local Councils in all 50 states. Founded in 1996 with 13 girls, Girls on the Run has now served nearly than one and a half million girls. Over the course of the ten-week program, girls in third to fifth grades develop essential skills to help them navigate their worlds and establish a lifetime appreciation for health and fitness. The program culminates with girls positively impacting their communities through a service project and being physically and emotionally prepared to complete a celebratory 5K event. With the largest 5K series by number of events in the world, Girls on the Run hosts more than 330 5Ks per year.

Girls on the Run was recently included as a top research-based program in a Social-Emotional Learning Guide developed by researchers at Harvard University and has been recognized by the National Afterschool Association (NAA) as one of the most influential after-school programs.

About the study

Maureen R. Weiss, Ph.D., a leading scholar in positive youth development research, led the independent, longitudinal study. Dr. Weiss is a professor in the School of Kinesiology and an adjunct professor in the Institute of Child Development at the University of Minnesota. She has published more than 150 refereed journal articles and book chapters, and has edited or co-edited four books on youth sport and physical activity. She received the 2014 President’s Council on Fitness, Sports & Nutrition Science Board’s Honor Award and the Distinguished Scholar Award from the North American Society for the Psychology of Sport and Physical Activity in 2016.