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Baldwin Park Middle School Inspires Students with Running Program

BALDWIN PARK – When Sierra Vista Junior High eighth-grader Adrianna Cantu signed up for Girls on the Run, she wanted to explore a new running program; however, after two years on the team she has gained confidence and inner strength that will serve her beyond the track.

More than 12 Sierra Vista Junior High students meet bi-weekly for Girls on the Run, a national program that teaches the importance in nurturing emotional, mental and physical well-being with a curriculum that creatively integrates running.

“I have learned to never give up on myself and be someone I’m not,” Cantu said. “There is a lot of stress that we go through in middle school, but with Girls on the Run, we have people here who we can talk to and who always care. It’s like being in a big family where you can be yourself.”

Each after-school practice doubles as a life lesson for participants, using positive reinforcement and goal-setting to build the confidence and stamina needed to complete a three-mile run. The 10-week program will conclude with a Girls on the Run Los Angeles 5K culminating event Sunday, May 6 at Whittier Narrows, the Meadows.

Sierra Vista Junior High has participated in Girls on the Run Los Angeles for nine years. In 2015, the program expanded to fourth and fifth grades at Baldwin Park Unified’s De Anza and Tracy elementary schools, with 10 runners at both sites.

Stress management was the topic during a recent practice, with students breaking into groups to write sources of stress on balloons, including grades, state testing, sibling competition and family expectations. Teammates tossed the balloons back and forth, trying to keep them from touching the floor. The exercise taught participants to rely on each other and that juggling stress is more manageable when there are others to help.

Students then wrote on a second group of balloons tools to handle stress, such as playing an instrument, exercising or spending time in nature. After the exercise, students ran for 30 minutes and with every lap visualized an issue and ways to address it by applying coping mechanisms they learned.

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“It’s not all about running – Girls on the Run helps you break out of your shell and become your own person,” Sierra Vista High School sophomore Sydney Galindo said. “I have learned that society tries to put you in a box and it’s your job to go outside of that and be who you want.”

Galindo ran in Girls on the Run for two years at Sierra Vista Junior High, and since then she has coached in the program for two years. Galindo said it was important for her to return to share her knowledge and support.

“It is inspiring to see the new friendships that develop between the girls who seemed least likely to be friends, and to have our past participants return to help assist and guide is very meaningful,” said Veronica Gamboa, a physical education teacher at Sierra Vista Junior High and coach for Girls on the Run.

“This is an incredible program that not only focuses on running, but also challenges the girls to explore different aspects about themselves and to recognize their inner strength regardless of their athletic abilities.”

PHOTOS

BPUSD_SVJHS_RUN_1: Sierra Vista Junior High students play catch with a balloon inscribed with sources of stress during a meeting of Girls on The Run, a national program that emphasizes emotional, mental and physical well-being with a curriculum that integrates running.

BPUSD_SVJHS_RUN_2: Sierra Vista Junior High students bond over teamwork exercises designed to inspire healthy living during a meeting of Girls on the Run, a national program that emphasizes emotional, mental and physical well-being with a curriculum that integrates running.

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