

## **Go Girls Go! Program Successfully Implemented at Benjamin Chambers Elementary School**

Most elementary schools are busy during the day, but this past spring at Benjamin Chambers Elementary School, the flurry of activity continued until late in the evening. The halls were filled with the laughter and energy of more than 45 girls, coach/mentors and staff members thanks to a collaborative program of the Chambersburg Area School District and Healthy Communities Partnership.

In the fall of 2015, HCP received a grant from Summit Endowment to develop a program entitled Go Girls Go! for girls that focused on building healthy self-image through education and activity. The program pairs girls in 4th and 5th grades with adult coach/mentors who talk with them about a variety of topics including friendship, teamwork, self-esteem and healthy eating.

"We are really excited about the response to the program," shared HCP Executive Director, Karen Johnston. "This program is new for us, so we hoped to have 20 girls and 2 or 3 coach/mentors, we have 45 girls and nearly a dozen coach/mentors. The response has been amazing!"

The program met after school, twice a week, for ten weeks. Girls and coach/mentors were asked to commit to the length of the program. "The consistency of both girls and coach/mentors is important to build relationships. Those relationships have so many positive impacts in girls' lives," Johnston shared.

Girls joined HCP staff at the end of the school day for activities and snacks, checked in with their coach/mentors on a variety of life topics then have a discussion about the topic of the day. The last half of the program day was set aside for running. "The idea is to help girls build confidence while they take on a physical activity," said Johnston.

Studies show that girls tend to drop out of sports at a higher rate than boys when they reach 4th through 6th grades. The Go Girls Go! program is designed to increase emotional health and develop the love of running for girls in the program, and it did just that. The program, whose goal was to work with the girls to engage them in the lessons and encourage them to complete a 5k saw 41 girls complete their first 5k along the rails to trails in Chambersburg at the end of April. Just one week later 38 girls, 15 mentors and HCP staff participated in the Cumberland Valley Breast Care Alliance Run.

Now that the program has reached a successful completion, staff have been asking, "what's next?" The answer to that question may come in the fall...look for us out on the running paths with girls from the Chambersburg area! To volunteer or donate to this program, please contact our office at 717.264.1470.

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