“We Run SMS”: Semmes Middle School Running Club

A Healthy Students Initiative Program

**School:** Semmes Middle School

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**School Serves:** 1698 students, ages 11-15; grades 6th -8th

***Program Purpose:***

The purpose of the SMS running club is to offer a way for adolescents to get physically active and show pride in self, school, and community. It will teach participants responsibility by allowing them to set their own goals and accomplishments. It will provide an opportunity for students in a high poverty area to become more physically active in their daily lives. This club would show participants how they can give back to themselves and the world around them. This running club would start at an early age to create a positive life pattern of health and fitness.

***Program Description:***

The U.S. government states on the Center for Disease Control site that “Low-income families usually have less access to both healthy food choices and opportunities for physical activity. Many need nearby retail stores that provide healthy, affordable foods, as do many rural and predominately minority communities. At the same time, many low income communities lack or have restricted access to sidewalks, green spaces, parks, and recreational centers that may be perceived as unsafe; all are possible barriers to leisure time and physical activity.” Our school is located in a high poverty area, making us a government recognized Title 1 school. Title 1 schools are schools that meet achievement while being one of the Nation’s highest poverty schools. In Semmes Middle School, 68% of our total student body is in low income/poverty status with the U.S. government. Thus, many of our students do not have the means to partake in extracurricular events due to funding. We do not wish a child to resort to physical inactivity, due to financial reasons, as many times it starts a life pattern of inactivity. The focus we wish to push is that they need to make life choices now for their health and fitness that will carry on throughout adulthood. Students need to learn how to set goals for themselves, and will do so by signing up for running events, and then take the time to train as a club and individually for their goals to become accomplished. This responsibility and dedication towards setting goals and seeing them through to accomplishment is something that they can continue on throughout adulthood in health and fitness, as well as other areas. According to the Center of Disease Control and Prevention website from the U.S. Government, it has been statistically documented that in the U.S. today, over 12.5 million children are classified as obese. Of that, over 3.7 million come from low income families, and a third of those 3.7 million were obese. So the growing trend of adult obesity is starting at ages as low as 5 years and continues to be a life pattern that many follow, many times based upon income. Since our school falls in that low income area, many of our students become a statistic. This club would provide a positive outlet for students to work on their fitness while encouraging and supporting other members. It will allow them to become a part of society and their community by participating in events, such as the Azalea Trail Run, and the Senior Bowl Charity Run, which give back to organizations through participation. It would be a club that will be open based upon interest, not upon academic status or grade level, as health and fitness reaches all types of students. If we had the funding, it would work to solidify and maintain the duration of this club for benefit of health and fitness for this generation and generations to come at Semmes Middle School.

***Projected Outcomes and Measurable Impact:***

The long term projected outcome for the SMS Running Club is to decrease the number of obese adolescents and adults in Mobile County, the state of Alabama, and the nation. This club plans to instill lifelong lessons in responsibility, representation, and accountability in the members. The members will work to set short and long term goals for themselves as students at Semmes Middle School and as members of our world’s society throughout their lives. Members will know the importance of setting short and long term goals for themselves, and the efforts to be made in order to get that goal accomplished. This accomplishment of goals instills a sense of pride in self and in the organization you are representing. Members will have a place where they can feel they belong, and know they are doing something to help themselves based on any effort they give towards running, not just running the fastest. Members will be encouraged to build on their health and fitness by working to perform at the level that best suits them. Any work is progress, and as long as they are active, they are accomplishing a goal in that. In order to measure progress and outcomes, we as a club have many short term goals. Members will be asked to select a minimum of three racing events to participate in during the duration of the school year, in addition to one mandated race for all members: The Azalea Trail Run. This allows students to begin when they feel they are best prepared, and also allows them to choose from days and times that are best for them and their families’ needs. Races throughout the year will be short term goals for each member, with the common long term goal of the Azalea Trail Run for all members. Members will train all year to participate in the Azalea Trial Run to show progress made through training and other races. This is a way for us to measure the objectives of health and by looking at the progress of results from previous races to the Azalea Trial Run. We also plan to have other incentives to act as motivation. One being a “10 Mile” club: for every 10 miles completed by the members in training and competition, they earn a shoe charm for their shoe laces. This way, they can proudly display and explain their awards to the public, and it gives them a sense of accomplishment when they have earned this award. We also plan to display a map of the United States for students to chart their mileage ran using themselves running the roads of the U.S. By the end of the year, they will be able to visualize how far they would be in the U.S. if they had run all their miles consecutively. This public display also serves as an encouragement to the public to get involved, and to support those making an effort at their own health and fitness.

***Statement of Need:***

As the largest middle school in the state of Alabama, and in a high poverty area, we have a plethora of students who look for good ways to keep busy, and stay out of trouble. This club would be open to any person, regardless of grade or academic level, and would encourage a pattern of physically activity and fitness that benefits the short and long term health of its’ members. The club will serve as an inspiration to the families and community to make a positive health change in their own lives by watching the accomplishments of the members involved.

***Utilization of Funds:***

The projected use for the funds received would be as follows: Since we are a newly developing club, the funds would be used for the basic start up and duration of the club itself. First, we would use some of the funds to contribute towards the cost of fees for the races the members will participate in throughout the year. Since over 65% of our students are in high poverty, the cost of the events would be a hindrance for them to participate in the running club. A person’s health and fitness should never be based upon money, so the funds received would help alleviate that burden off of the members. Funds also would be use to purchase the shoe charms for the members for each 10 miles they run and accomplish that goal. It serves as a visual reminder to themselves and the public that they have met a great goal. Lastly, funds will be used to help in the purchasing of shirts that students can train in, and wear at events that show their pride in their school affiliation, as they are competing. The shirts serve as a visual representation of the support our school gives the members that represent Semmes Middle School. The shirts also give the wearers a sense of belonging and pride in their school; it shows they are a part of something good that is happening in their community. The shirts also show the public the devotion of our school and organization to end childhood obesity in our county and nation. By seeing how dedicated we as a school and club are to the cause of better health and fitness throughout adulthood, we hope to prove to be an inspiration to other people and clubs to begin their own personal stride for better health and fitness.

The Semmes Middle School Running Club is not an existing project. It is one that, through the devotion of many students’ efforts and pleas, we wish to begin in our middle school and community. The interest amongst the student body is there, so now is the time to answer that call, and implement a program that will be beneficial to members in as many ways possible. The Center of Disease Control website reveals the startling statistics on the rate of obesity in children and how it follows through to adulthood. Studies show that obese children are more likely to have high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and type 2 diabetes, which are risk factors for cardiovascular disease. Obese children are also more likely to become obese adults. How do we plan to decrease this growing rate? By creating a running club for our middle school students, and create life patterns for better health and fitness. We strive to meet the needs of all students, and allow them every chance to succeed in all areas, especially health and fitness that will carry on after they leave our halls. “We Run SMS”.