



**For Immediate Release**

## **NEW STUDENTS RUN PHILLY STYLE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TAKES THE BATON**

**Andrew Kucer plans to grow the organization's infrastructure, capacity to bring the popular program to even more Philadelphia youth**

**PHILADELPHIA (March 29, 2016)** – This month, Students Run Philly Style kicked off its 12<sup>th</sup> season with a new executive director at the helm. Andrew Kucer takes the baton from founding executive director Heather McDanel to lead the organization into its next phase of growth and impact.

Established in 2004 at the behest of the Independence Foundation and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Students Run Philly Style uses running to build positive mentoring relationships between adolescents and adults. Each year, Students Run helps over 1,200 kids train for a milestone race, including the Philadelphia Marathon and the Blue Cross Broad Street Run. The program aims to address both the health crisis of childhood obesity and the need to build resiliency in Philadelphia youth.

“The guidance of my own mentor helped get me where I am today,” said Kucer. “Mentoring is a critical part of the equation to helping youth facing adversity build the skills and confidence to achieve their potential. I’m elated by the opportunity to bring this program that combines mentoring with running to even more of Philadelphia’s youth.”

Prior to joining Students Run, Kucer helped launch a national nonprofit entity for the Michaels Organization, the largest affordable housing owner in the country, and served as the National Director of Philanthropy for Big Brothers Big Sisters of America. He holds a Bachelor of Arts in Urban Studies with a concentration in Community Organizations from Stanford University and a Juris Doctor from the Villanova University School of Law.

McDanel, Students Run’s highly-regarded founder and executive director of 11 years, made the decision to step down in order pursue new interests and to give Students Run the benefit of a fresh leadership perspective for its future.

On the ground, 300 volunteer mentors, many of whom have a long history of volunteering with the organization, continue to lead teams of students across every zip code in Philadelphia.

“Students Run sets the gold standard for volunteerism; our mentors are the most dedicated I have ever seen. They spend ten hours a week for almost ten months a year with our youth,” said Kucer. “When our students spend three days a week with their mentors, they build a meaningful, trusting relationship with adults who share and believe in their goals. Those shared miles and goals eventually translate beyond running and change the ways our students see their place in the world.”

Since its inception, Students Run has increased its participant base from 50 to 1,200 youth. “Not only does our program make a difference in the lives of its participants, but it provides a safe and productive out-of-school time activity for these students,” said Kucer. “As schools struggle to do more with less funding, Students Run is helping fill a void. This is why we have seen a continued increase in program participants and why each year new schools approach us about bringing the program to their community.”

Some of Kucer’s priority areas of focus include expanding the organization’s capacity to respond to its recent growth, evaluating the longitudinal impact of the program, and forging new corporate partnerships.

The new leader first met the youth who benefit from Students Run earlier this month at the program’s season kickoff, a running clinic and goal-setting workshop at the NovaCare Center. With over 600 kids in attendance, it was Students Run’s largest kickoff event to date.

“The students I’ve had the pleasure of meeting have clearly been impacted by this program. When you complete a marathon at the age of 14, your definition of what’s possible in life is forever changed. I see these kids adopting new outlooks for their futures, and setting goals for themselves beyond what they ever thought possible,” said Kucer.

### **About Students Run Philly Style**

*Students Run Philly Style* is the only program in Philadelphia that offers marathon training to help young people succeed in life. The program achieves this by connecting students with adult mentors who help them imagine and accomplish goals beyond their dreams, including the completion of a marathon. The program delivers powerful results for youth, including increasing high school graduation rates, improving health, providing safe choices after school and developing positive relationships with caring adults. For more information please visit [www.studentsrunphilly.org](http://www.studentsrunphilly.org).

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