



**For Immediate Release**  
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## **Afterschool Alliance and Running USA Team Up To Fight Childhood Obesity**

### ***New 'Running Rocks' Initiative to Involve Thousands of Youth Running Events Annually***

Washington, DC – The Afterschool Alliance and Running USA today announced the launch of a bold joint initiative aimed at combating the growing epidemic of childhood obesity by creating running and/or walking activities for children at thousands of afterschool programs across the nation. The unique collaboration, “Running Rocks: Fun and Fitness Afterschool,” begins this fall as a pilot effort in seven cities. It will expand to hundreds more next year, and is expected to grow to include thousands of communities over the next few years.

“Afterschool programs play a vital role in the lives of our communities, inspiring learning, keeping kids safe and healthy, and helping working families” said Afterschool Alliance Executive Director Judy Y. Samelson. “Running Rocks will help children create healthy habits at an early age, steering them away from obesity and all of its associated health problems. Too many schools have been forced to neglect physical fitness in the push for test-score gains, and afterschool programs are uniquely suited to fill the void. We’re thrilled to be working with Running USA to help get and keep kids healthy.”

“Running and walking are two of the very best forms of aerobic exercise – simple, inexpensive, and powerfully effective,” said Running USA Executive Director Basil Honikman. “We’re delighted to be able to connect Running USA events and members to afterschool programs around the nation to help every young American embrace running and fitness as a lifetime habit.”

Running Rocks will provide fun, incentive-based running and walking activities for afterschool youth across the nation. Youth will participate in training programs, building toward personalized goals, and culminating in local race events where they will be recognized for their accomplishments. A website will go live in the next few months to publicize the program, promote a national calendar, provide each participant with a personal web space and enable online registration and events. All online technology will be powered by The Active Network.

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## Add One

The initial pilot effort includes seven sites, testing three separate models for the program. After the first wave of events this fall, the Afterschool Alliance and Running USA will evaluate the results and fine tune the program for a larger roll-out beginning in Spring 2005. Participating pilot sites include:

- Flint, Michigan: Flint City Schools is collaborating with the Crim Festival of Races in Flint and the Detroit Free Press/Flagstar Bank Marathon;
- New York City, New York: The After-School Corporation (TASC) is collaborating with the New York Road Runners Foundation, established by New York Road Runners, Inc., producer of the ING New York City Marathon;
- St. Louis, Missouri: The Spirit of St. Louis Marathon and Family Fitness Weekend, partnering with the St. Louis Public Schools Afterschool programs to bring Read, Right and Run to their youth in Afterschool, are involving afterschool-age youth in special running events;
- Richmond, Virginia: The SunTrust Richmond Marathon is bringing its Fit for Life Youth Running Program to Elementary and Middle Schools in Hannico and Chesterfield Counties, creating events for afterschool youth;
- Washington DC and Fairfax County, Virginia: Students at Flint Hill Elementary's afterschool program in Vienna, Virginia are training for races associated with the Marine Corps Marathon and Alan Webb's Race for the Kids in Reston;
- Decatur, Georgia: The DeKalb County School System Family Technology Resource Center afterschool program is developing a fitness program and race event; and
- Bowling Green, Ohio: Community Learning Centers of Wood County is developing a fitness program and race event.

In Flint, for example, 3<sup>rd</sup> through 6<sup>th</sup> graders at the participating school began training early this school year for a 5K event that was held in conjunction with the Detroit Free Press/Flagstar Bank Marathon on October 24. Students will travel by bus to Detroit, and run the 5K, which will end inside Ford Field, home of the Detroit Lions. In Fairfax, afterschool students of the Run4Fun program began training earlier this year and will participate in a Fun Run associated with the Marine Corps Marathon and in Alan Webb's Race for the Kids in Reston, Virginia.

Based on the experiences of these programs during this school year, the program will expand next spring, and continue to grow thereafter. Based on the successful model of the Afterschool Alliance's *Lights On Afterschool* project, which on October 14 organized rallies at more than 7,000 afterschool sites across the nation, project sponsors expect Running Rocks to grow to include several thousand events by 2008.

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The program will address a growing epidemic of youth obesity, due in great measure to sedentary lifestyles and poor nutrition. According to one study, less than ten percent of elementary, junior, middle and high schools provide daily physical education for students, and less than half of all schools offer intramural activities or physical activity clubs for students. Just over 15 percent of U.S. children between the ages of six and 19 are overweight, and another 15 percent are at risk of becoming so. The health toll on these children over the course of their lifetimes could be profound. Approximately 300,000 deaths a year are attributed to unhealthy dietary habits and sedentary behavior. Physical inactivity – a habit often established during youth – is associated with increases in high cholesterol, high blood pressure, and type 2 diabetes.

Running helps lower blood pressure, maximize lung potential, strengthen the heart and cardiovascular capacity, and burns an average of 100 calories per mile.

### About Running USA

Running USA, the national professional association for the running industry was founded in 1999 as a tax-exempt, non-profit corporation. Its mission is to build the sport of road running and thereby contribute to health and fitness across the country. Running USA members include major road races with almost 3 million participants, media representatives, the athletic industry and USA Track & Field. Visit Running USA on the web at [www.runningusa.org](http://www.runningusa.org).

### About the Afterschool Alliance

The Afterschool Alliance is a nonprofit public awareness and advocacy organization supported by a group of public, private, and nonprofit entities working to ensure that all children and youth have access to afterschool programs by the year 2010. More information is available at [www.afterschoolalliance.org](http://www.afterschoolalliance.org).

### About The Active Network, Inc.

Founded in 1998 and based in La Jolla, Calif., The Active Network, Inc. is a leading provider of application and marketing services for the participatory activities and non-profit sectors. The company's network of properties includes Active.com ([www.active.com](http://www.active.com)), eteamz ([www.eteamz.com](http://www.eteamz.com)) and Active Team Sports, ActiveGiving ([www.ActiveGiving.com](http://www.ActiveGiving.com)), RecWare, and Active Marketing Group. Its application services automate information collection, participant registration, facility reservation and fundraising management, reducing the cost and complexity of managing and organizing participatory activities and fundraising events. Its marketing services offer integrated online and field marketing campaigns to reach active consumers. The Active Network also offers a one-stop shop of services for active lifestyles. The company serves one of the largest customer bases in its market, including more than 7,000 event organizers, 600 park and recreation departments, 1,000 non-profit organizations and 2,500 leagues and camps. For more information, please visit [www.theactivenetwork.com](http://www.theactivenetwork.com) or call 1-888-543-7223.

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