



# NEWS RELEASE

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## STUDENTS RUN LA END OF SEASON SURVEYS REVEAL IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON YOUTH IN LOS ANGELES

**LOS ANGELES, Calif. – May 5th, 2021** - Students Run LA (SRLA), a local youth mentoring non-profit, recently concluded their 2020 - 2021 season with over 2,500 students and teachers completing a socially distanced marathon. SRLA is a school-based program serving over 170 middle and high schools in underserved neighborhoods across LA. Many of the students (ages 12 - 18) who participate in SRLA are from communities of color hit hardest by the COVID-19 pandemic.

As the SRLA 2020 - 2021 season came to a close, SRLA leaders and students completed surveys reflecting on their experience. The immense impact of COVID-19 on the Los Angeles community is demonstrated in the [results](#).

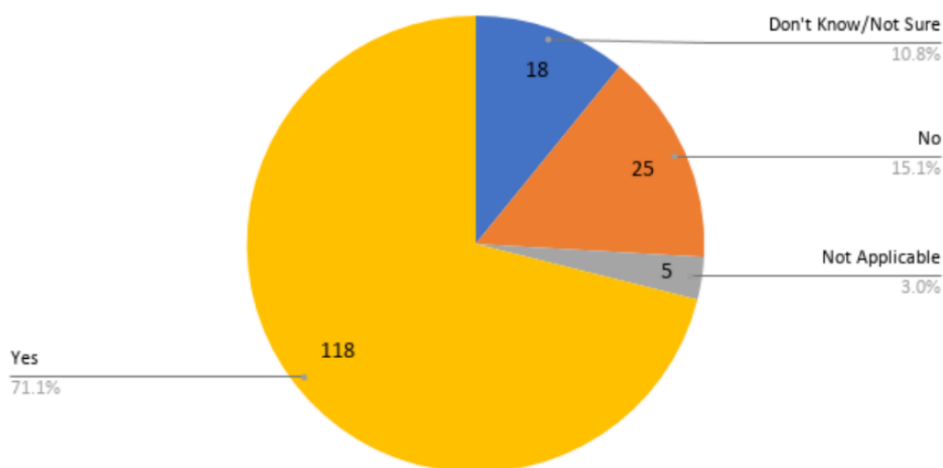
“We all have our personal problems that may have arisen due to the pandemic but having a team to always be there to support us was significant to me. I am so grateful for the opportunity to run with SRLA,” reflected Marlene, an 8th grader at Griffith Middle School in her end-of-season survey.



For the 2020 - 2021 season, Students Run LA was able to adapt its season to continue remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic; however, the impact of the disease on the program and participants is unmistakable.

71% of SRLA groups reported that at least one student became ill with COVID-19 during the course of the season. Even one student becoming ill was a major hurdle for SRLA group leaders; both because a COVID-19 illness could backtrack a student’s training for weeks or even months and because it meant the possibility of community spread.

### Groups reporting that at least one SRLA student became ill with COVID-19.



The impact of COVID-19 on students' families was even greater, with 75% of SRLA groups reporting that at least one family member living with an SRLA student became ill with COVID-19. The illness of a family member could be extremely disruptive to an SRLA student's training and academics.

Caroline Rhude, one of the SRLA leaders at Hamilton High School, explained, "Some students had their entire family struck ill with the Covid virus and had to drop out of school to support with jobs."

One barrier to training this season was the very real fear of infection when leaving the house. 77% of SRLA groups reported that parents were concerned about COVID-19 in their neighborhoods and did not want their children outside. This led to some creative solutions for students to stay on track with training, including timed indoor workouts and formulas to convert stationary bike miles to running miles.

The 2020-2021 pandemic created a "Tale of Three Seasons" for SRLA, showing how the intensity of the virus in LA County shifted notably from September to March.

From September to November, while SRLA's first three events of the season were taking place, 43% of groups were completing their weekend training runs virtually, 23% were meeting in person, and 34% were taking a hybrid approach (meeting sometimes in person and sometimes virtually). During this time, many leaders were figuring out a meeting approach that worked best for their students and their school community.

"At the beginning of the season everything was fine, although it was different. But after Thanksgiving almost everyone around us were sick, our team fell apart for a few months, it became extremely hard to maintain momentum." says Laura Valenzuela, SRLA Leader at PUC Community High School.

From December to January, Los Angeles experienced a massive surge in COVID-19 cases which led to stricter stay at home orders. During this time, many SRLA groups were forced to shift their training approach: 75% of groups were completing their training runs virtually, 17% were taking a hybrid approach and just 9% met in person.

Denise Miller the SRLA Leader at Carter High School recalls “For part of the season we could supposedly meet as a group but with such arduous, unfeasible COVID constraints, it essentially precluded us from training as a group. Independent training for the first few months was manageable. But as we approached double-digit mileage it became rough. There were many factors, but the combination of distance learning, solo training, college prep, work schedules for some, emotional and mental strain, and students &/or family contracting COVID, it was brutal.”

By the close of the SRLA season (February to March), vaccines had become available in Los Angeles County and the surge from earlier in the winter began to ease. This allowed more groups to resume meeting in person. During February and March 61% of groups were meeting virtually, 22% were taking a hybrid approach, and 17% were meeting in person.

The [SRLA Cross the Finish Line Challenge](#), the final event of the season, which took place on March 20th and 21st, had the most in-person participation of the season with 43% of groups meeting in-person, 34% meeting completely virtually, and 24% taking a hybrid approach.

According to Brian Pfeffer, the SRLA Leader at Animo South LA, “The Culminating Challenge was our school's first in-person student event of the entire year. This was a crucial first step back towards normal.” In total, more than 1,800 SRLA runners completed this final event, with more than 800 runners completing a full 26.2-mile marathon.

“This was an incredibly tough year for our SRLA Leaders and students, but they showed true grit and determination to make it through this pandemic season,” said Executive Director, Marsha Charney. “Getting together and connecting with each other virtually and striving for the same shared goal created a sense of community, reassuring students that they were not alone.”

This season presented SRLA students with great challenges, however, with the support of their leaders, their teammates, and their communities they were able to persevere.

### **About Students Run LA**

For 32 years, Students Run LA, a local nonprofit, has provided a free youth mentoring, marathon-training program throughout Greater Los Angeles. Each year during “normal times,” SRLA creates a safe, supportive community at 185+ public schools, welcoming more than 3,200 students of all backgrounds and abilities to train alongside their volunteer teachers to complete the Los Angeles Marathon. Annually, more than 95% of the students who attempt the Marathon complete the 26.2-mile course; and more than 95% of the seniors in SRLA graduate from high school with plans to attend college the following fall, 75% of whom are the first in their families to go to college. For more information, please visit <https://srla.org/> and connect with @SRLA on Twitter, @StudentsRunLA on Instagram and Facebook.

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