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Expanded Learning Program for City Youth Returns to Middle Schools

NextUp to reach 700 youth at Boushall, Henderson and Lucille Brown in 2017-2018

Richmond, VA (Sept. 11, 2017) – An after-school, expanded learning system designed to provide middle school students in the City of Richmond with access to enrichment opportunities began enrolling hundreds of students this week for a fourth consecutive year. Since its inception in 2013, NextUp has served nearly 1,000 middle school students enrolled at Boushall, Henderson and Lucille Brown middle schools.

“Middle school is a period when young teens’ lives can often go right or wrong. How they spend their time beyond the school day influences their future greatly. They want to test the boundaries of their independence at a time when they’re also feeling more pressure to achieve and less confident about their academic capabilities,” said Barbara Couto Sipe, Executive Director, NextUp. “NextUp’s powerful network of providers offers youth at its partner middle schools the chance to explore their interests, gain confidence in leadership and have fun while learning something new – after the school day ends, in a safe, secure environment. This keeps the kids engaged in learning and coming back to school each day.”

NextUp coordinates 35 service providers who deliver expanded learning opportunities mostly on-site at the three schools, after the school day ends. Students enroll in programs that interest them in the Arts, STEM, Leadership, Work Readiness, Sports and Wellness. These include:

- *Game On Girl!*, provided by Greater Richmond Fit4Kids.
- *Edible Schoolyard*, provided by Greater Richmond Fit4Kids. With a NEW community garden opening at Boushall Middle School this year, all three school sites will have full gardens developed and managed by the students.
- *Running clubs*, provided by Sports Backers at all three schools.
- *Chess clubs*, offered at all three schools with competitions in regional tournaments.
- *Work readiness programs* at all three schools:
 - *First Tech Robotics*, provided by Virginia FIRST. Students learn coding, engineering and compete across the region and state.
 - *Building Skills 4 Life*, provided by M.H. West and Co. Students learn about financial literacy, business planning, and positive work habits.

- *TechConnect*, provided by RPS Education Foundation. Students develop computer skills and earn a free laptop at the end of the session. This program addresses a significant technology gap for RPS students.

Richmond is among a growing number of cities with expanded learning systems designed to meet the educational, social and safety needs of middle school students.

Since 2014, student outcomes from NextUp continue to improve. Data shows that participating students – many who are considered at-risk and would otherwise lack access to safe, supervised out-of-school programs – have improved school attendance, grades and behavior. Approximately two-thirds have improved or maintained positive school attendance and improved or maintained the same grade of C or better in English and Math. More than three-fourths of NextUp students improved or maintained positive behavior; felt challenged in a good way; and learned to get along better with peers.

“The after-school hours between 3pm and 6pm are the most dangerous times in a young teen’s life, especially when they are left unsupervised,” said Sipe. “They can fall into risks of substance abuse, violence, sexual activities and poor decision making. This year, hundreds of youth in Richmond middle schools will benefit from NextUp and we are grateful to our partners and funders who are continuing to make NextUp possible.”

NextUp works in partnership with Richmond Public Schools, Higher Achievement, the YMCA and Communities in Schools of Richmond at each of its schools. Its numerous program partners include Anoshi Kids Dance, Axiom, Blue Sky Fund, Co-Lab Productions, EnRichmond Foundation, Greater Richmond Fit4Kids, JumpStarz Jump Rope, Kidz R Cookin’, Kids’ Kitchen RVA, Mary and Frances Youth Center. M.H. West & Co., Quill Theatre, Relationship Foundation of Virginia, Richmond Performing Arts Alliance, Richmond Public Schools Education Foundation, Sports Backers, Trinity Village Center, VCU Department of Forensic Science, and Virginia FIRST. Funding is provided primarily by corporations, as well as individual donors and government.

Students have until Friday, September 22, to register. The Fall session will begin Monday, October 2. For more information, please visit <http://nextuprva.org/>.

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