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At-home fitness incentive program aimed at students

Leah Square

leah.square@mcherald.com

Highland Elementary PE coach Dock Daniel hopes a new at-home fitness incentive program will encourage students to be more active away from school.

The Moving Student Bodies Program, which kicks off next week, requires participants to log all physical activity done at home for the remaining eight weeks of school in exchange for a chance to win prizes.

"The underlying thing is we're trying to get them to be physically active," Daniel said, "and we're giving them some sort of incentive to be physically active."

Students will need to log a minimum of three hours of exercise each week and have it verified by a parent in order to be eligible for a drawing for the grand prize - a 22-inch bicycle for a girl and a boy. Other exercise equipment and DVDs also will be given away through drawings, Daniel said.

Highland's 600 third-, fourth- and fifth-graders already get about 160 minutes of physical activity a week during the school day through PE classes and recess, where the kids have access to a playground and walking trail, Daniel said.

Although the Mississippi Healthy Students Act adopted in 2007 requires students to get 150 minutes of physical activity during the five-day school week, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, along with national health experts, recommend children get 60 minutes of physical activity every day, adding up to 420 minutes a week.

The new at-home program, combined with the exercise done in-school, should bring Highland students closer to the national guidelines.

Indian Cycle Fitness & Outdoor's Jayce Powell, whose Ridgeland store is donating the grand prize bikes, said he likes that Highland is encouraging its students to move more.

"Growing up, we were always outdoors. We didn't have Wiis," said Powell, an avid cyclist. "We just want to see some kids get outdoors and have a good time."

Daniel said the program has benefits outside of the physical aspect.

"It teaches them responsibility," he said. "They're going to have to keep up with that log sheet."

An information packet that includes the log will be sent home with the kids Thursday, and they are to begin tracking their activity on Sunday, Daniel said.

He wants the parents to get behind the program and even join in the exercise.

"In the end, they're going to dictate whether their kid is active and eating correctly," Daniel said. "We want them to promote it."

