GREENSBORO — University researchers hope equipping local middle-schoolers with pulse meters, pedometers and other devices will encourage students to maintain fitness plans long after completing health and physical education classes.

In June, the National Institutes of Health awarded UNCG a $1.3 million, five-year grant to create and test a new curriculum that bases exercises on health and science concepts learned in the classroom. The pilot project aims to help students better retain their lessons and increase the amount of activity they get in the school year.

“This is not a sit-in-class type of curriculum,” said Catherine Ennis, a UNCG professor of kinesiology who will oversee the pilot. “This is a curriculum where students will learn principles of healthy living while exercising.”

Teachers in Guilford County Schools, Surry County Schools and Thomasville City Schools will start the new lessons in October. Ten Guilford middle schools either will use the new curriculum or be the control group: the Academy at Lincoln, Kernodle, Northern, Jamestown, Mendenhall, Aycock, Johnson Street Global Studies, Southern, Eastern and Welborn Academy of Science and Technology.

Want to help?
UNCG seeks sponsors of its family science activity nights at schools participating in a pilot of new healthful living curriculum. Contact Catherine Ennis at c_ennis@uncg.edu.

PILOT PROGRAM BY THE NUMBERS
10: Number of middle schools in the Guilford County Schools system
Students at the schools typically rotate between sitting in health class for weeks at a time and learning fitness and sports-based skills in a gym or on a field. The new curriculum will blend the two for part of the semester: Students might create a fitness plan and then use it as a basis for their exercise for the day. Or they might measure and record their heart rates after different exercises.

“Instead of just talking about it, reading about it and looking at pictures about it, they will have the chance to go out and do it,” Ennis said.

Each school will receive $1,500 a year to purchase devices that students and teachers can use to measure physical activity. And students will wear accelerometers that help the university track motion during the day, Ennis said. Schools will hold activity nights where family members calculate their body mass index or sample nutritious foods.

The new curriculum represents a national shift away from physical education that emphasizes sports skills and competition between students to personal fitness. Educators now aim to give students the knowledge they need to take responsibility for their health.

“We’re trying to teach a lifelong appreciation of fitness,” said Amanda Browning, a physical education teacher at Aycock Middle. “Every adult will not want to play soccer or join a basketball team, but they could be more willing to go to a park or gym and walk.”

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