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Students at Hudson Montessori School are all ears as Marita Gore, director of school relations for MOVband LLC, explains a wristband designed to get their generation moving. The Bath Township startup is introducing its product through school fitness challenges.

Entrepreneur encouraging kids to get a MOV on

HUDSON, Ohio – Faces flushed, smiles flashing, 19 first and second-graders joined an unexpected stampede around the Hudson Montessori School gym last Thursday, having begged to sprint before math class. Many broke stride to glance down at their candy-colored wristbands.

Moments before, each child had been handed a MOVband, a kid-friendly pedometer, and told the device would count their steps for the next three weeks and reveal who among them moved the most.

"That did it," said teacher Abbie Wexler. "They said they wanted to start right now."

And so the school's first MOVband Challenge was off and running. It may be coming soon to a school near you.

As children in Hudson log miles, win rewards, and prove that the video game generation still has a snap in its step, the young staffers at MOVband LLC in Bath Township will be watching closely. They hope to roll out their product nationwide this year. The reaction of the early adopters – 140

Hudson Montessori pupils challenged to walk 100 miles in 21 days – will help them decide how to win over the kids.

Many adults are already sold on the idea.

"A more active kid is a better performer and the schools know it," says Blake Squires, a 40-year-old entrepreneur from Rocky River and a creator of MOVband. "All these schools want the blue ribbon. They're also cutting their physical education budgets. We couldn't be entering this space at a better time."

Squires, the chief executive officer at MOVband LLC, knows something about peddling a new idea. He was a co-founder of the Playaway, an audio bookplayer sold around the world.

If the Playaway soothed travelers and book lovers, Squires suspects his latest product could power a crusade. By creating a simple, inexpensive device that tracks movement, he thinks he can light a fire under sedentary children and get them moving. They might even drag along mom and dad.

On the move

Product: The MOVband

Made by: MOVband LLC of Ghent

What is it? A wristwatch-style pedometer designed to get kids moving and competing

What does it do? It detects movement, counts daily steps and tracks lifetime mileage

How much? \$19.99 apiece, cheaper than most

Where can I get one? Not at the store. MOVband is sold directly to schools, companies and wellness programs. You can buy it online, however, at movband.com.



Apple-like in its simplicity, MOVband is operated with two buttons and sells for about one-third the price of popular pedometers, like the Nike+ Sportband.

It was battle-tested in October in Chagrin Falls schools – the first school district to accept the MOVband Challenge. It's drawing praise from gym teachers like Katie Monroe, who brought it to Hudson Montessori.

Squires expects to sell 100,000 MOVbands this year, at \$20 apiece, and maybe a million over next two or three years. By then, he could have another Playaway on his resume, a commercial success that also creates local jobs.

Findaway World, maker of Playaway products, employs about 130 people in Solon.

Allison Carey, The Plain Dealer's selection of MOVbands includes the purple, red and yellow "reward bands" students win for reaching milestones.

MOVband has some distance to travel to reach that status. For now, the MOVband is made wholly in China, where the technology was developed. MOVband LLC employs five people in a renovated century home in the village of Ghent, northwest of Akron.

Still, the local roots are flowering. The band itself was designed by Balance Product Development of Chagrin Falls, which is helping develop a second generation for office workers and wellness programs. Squires expects to quadruple his staff this year, to 20, and he's looking for bigger offices and warehouse space near Cleveland.

Meanwhile, he expects to make more than a profit. He expects to do some good.

The idea was born in early 2010, when Squires and his wife, Michelle, were watching the television show "The Biggest Loser" and lamenting America's growing girth. Michelle Squires, a former school teacher and aerobics

instructor, challenged her husband to do something about childhood obesity.

"She said something like, 'Why don't you do something meaningful instead of selling this book on a string thing?'" Squires recalled.

According to government statistics, about one third of American children are overweight or obese. Michelle Obama's "Let's Move!" initiative reports the numbers are even higher in African American and Hispanic communities.

Squires concluded some type of "activity monitor" was needed, a device that both clocked and compelled movement. Popular pedometers cost \$60 or more, he said, but technology had evolved to allow a cheaper and simpler version.

After a year of effort, his designers came up with a basic, wrist-watch style device that uses the same technology as more expensive pedometers, a 3D accelerometer in a solid state chipset, but with none of the bells or whistles.

MOVband tells the time and records movement. That's it. Kids have only to input their age and the time and start moving. It runs on a lightweight, rechargeable battery.

The most innovative feature may be the marketing strategy.

During three weeks in October, nearly 2,000 students in Chagrin Falls walked a combined 187,000 miles after the school district accepted the MOVband Challenge – a walkathon style fundraiser where children seek pledges for miles tallied on their MOVbands.

The district distributed the bands free and used the fundraiser to pay for them.

With MOVbands on their wrists, students hustled to out-walk teachers. Homerooms competed. Parents reported children requesting to walk the dog.

"It was quite successful. The grade schools embraced it totally. It was

amazing," said schools spokesman Lenny May.

The fitness drive caught the attention of Monroe, who alerted administrators at Hudson Montessori, where the Ohio State University fight song kicked off the MOVband Challenge at a pep rally.

Local businesses covered half the cost of 140 MOVbands and the school asked its students to pay for the other half. Instead of logging miles to raise money, the students are walking toward rewards, like a free T-shirt at 100 miles.

By walking, running and moving more, Monroe said she hopes her students develop the habit of a lifetime.

"We don't have any obese children at our school. But I really want them to learn that this is the right thing to do," she said.

Zach Halawa, age 12, felt the nudge.

"I really don't run much," he said shortly after the rally. "I only do homework. Or play video games."

He glanced down at his wrist and a tiny display screen that read 664 – the number of steps he had resolutely taken in the last 30 minutes.

"I'll probably play outside more," he said.

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