

Cycling to school gains momentum

By Kylie Mohr | Posted: Wednesday, September 28, 2016 4:30 am

Rain or shine, valley students love to bike to school.

“The kids get pretty excited about it; it’s really fun,” said Lauren Dickey, education director for Friends of Pathways. “It’s nice to see so many participate.”

Before 8 a.m. Thursday, the fall morning was undeniably crisp as children grabbed their helmets and started to pedal. The pavement was slick from the night’s rain, and the trees’ color popped against the stormy sky.

Nonetheless, Jackson kids are hardy. And even though the pathways were slightly less busy than on a sunny day earlier in the week, bikes began to pile up in front of the schools.

Friends of Pathways’ annual fall iWalk, iBike, iBus events last week drew attention to alternate methods of transportation. The organization focused on Wilson

Elementary School on Sept. 20, Jackson Elementary on Sept. 21 and Colter Elementary, Jackson Hole Middle School and Summit High School on Thursday.

One kid even rode a horse to school at Wilson Elementary.

However students get to class, if they come under their own steam or in batches it’s better for the Earth.

“Kids coming and going from school has a huge impact on our community,” Dickey said.

Friends of Pathways does an event in the fall and in the spring to encourage different ways of getting to school. The idea began more than 20 years ago.

“We do it at the beginning and end of the year just to remind families and kids that there are other options,” Dickey said. “Biking is fun, and a lot of kids do it, but the bus makes a huge impact as well. The events go a long way for thanking kids and making them realize that they’re doing something good.”

When Friends of Pathways began the tradition, Dickey said, between 20 and 40 bikes could be counted outside the schools on such days. Obviously, the count varies due to weather. But on Sept. 20, almost 100 bikes were parked outside Wilson Elementary. Dickey said she heard reports that only 10 cars were counted dropping students off.



Bike to School

Kayson Jones, 12, locks his bike at Jackson Hole Middle School on Thursday during Friends of Pathways’ fall iWalk, iBike, iBus event.

Friends of Pathways has partnered with Smith’s to provide healthy breakfast options — apples and bananas — along with temporary tattoos and stickers at the front of every school. Kids excitedly grabbed goodies at the table before heading into class just before the bell rang.

Their cheeks were flushed and their eyes were glowing. The cold morning air had definitely woken them up.

Biking to school doesn't just help students.

"I think it puts a little pressure on the parents, too," Dickey said. "Kids expect it. That's kind of neat that kids are encouraging their parents to be active."

Jack Koehler, program director at Friends of Pathways, said biking can give students much-wanted independence.

"They can grow up and become autonomous before they hit the driving age," he said, describing how he'd bike from a young age to get out of the house.

It's all about making the bike commute a regular occurrence. Habits are key.

"Once you make it part of your routine, it's a great way to start your day," Dickey said.