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Local students commute by bike, eat eco-friendly lunches

By [Jeff Goodman](http://smdp.com/author/jeff-goodman) (<http://smdp.com/author/jeff-goodman>) on May 31, 2016 in [Education](http://smdp.com/category/news/education) (<http://smdp.com/category/news/education>)



At McKinley Elementary School, the site of students hopping out of minivan sliding doors in the morning isn't as common as it used to be.

Some ride bikes to the Mid-City campus, often with their parents cycling close behind. Others ride scooters and skateboards. Still others arrive on foot.

Earlier this month the school community put its commitment to alternative transportation in overdrive, earning recognition from the City of Santa Monica for its high levels of participation during the annual Bike It Walk It campaign.

McKinley principal Susan Yakich and teacher Therese Treuenfels led cohorts of bikers as part of the three-day event. Assistant principal Debbie Stern spearheaded a “walking school bus,” wherein a line of children held a 20-foot-long poster that members of the student council had decorated to look like a bus with windows.

“Our students were so enthusiastic to participate and had been waiting for weeks for this event,” said Stephan Corbel, chair of the school’s sustainability and beautification committee. “Our McKinley community and the students definitely want to participate and demonstrate to the entire city that we can live in Santa Monica with alternative, sustainable transportation.”

The event was held amid a transportation transformation in Santa Monica, where City officials are encouraging people to get out of their cars and promoting alternative modes of getting around.

The extension of the Expo Line from Culver City to Santa Monica opened earlier this month, connecting local residents with a transit system that serves the region. Big Blue Bus routes have been tweaked to align with the new light-rail line, which cuts east-west across the city.

And the recently implemented Breeze bikeshare program, which includes a pod near McKinley’s gate, has encouraged cycling around Santa Monica.

With the help of Corbel's committee, McKinley organized Bike It Walk It starting points at three intersections near the Santa Monica Boulevard school. Local police officers participated as well, riding with students and cheering for participants as they arrived on campus. Organizers and volunteers handed out granola bars and other prizes. Raffles facilitated other giveaways.

"This year we encountered some very interesting participants, like some families coming to school with a mix of Breeze bikes, scooters and skateboards," Corbel said. "What is also great is that parents also participated and joined their children in walking or biking."

Parents played key roles in another sustainability initiative at Will Rogers Learning Community, which won \$750 in a competition to reduce trash at lunch, with many sending their kids to school with reusable containers.

For the regional contest, organized by environmental education group Grades of Green, Will Rogers students separated trash from recyclable waste and compostable waste. They also eschewed the traditional spork/napkin packages, instead picking individual items from dispensers.

"Students were thrilled at the chance to work with each other to reduce the amount of trash we produce at Will Rogers so that we can do our part in reducing our carbon footprint," principal Liz Cochran said in a press release. "Many student council members have reported that it's their favorite activity of the year because every student plays a part and every student makes a difference."

jeff@smdp.com (<mailto:jeff@smdp.com>)

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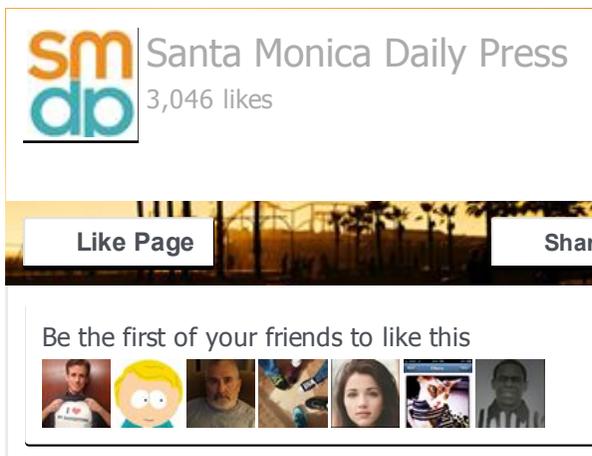
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