

Wish for Wheels

Ponderosa Elementary School

Aurora, CO



On May 28, 2020, outgoing second grade students at Ponderosa Elementary School were the first of the thirteen Title I school students to receive brand new bicycles and helmets from a partnership with Wish for Wheels. Wish for Wheels is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that gives brand new bicycles and helmets to children in low income communities. Founded in 2004, their first giveaway made it clear that not only do bikes bring health and happiness into the students' lives, but the gift of a new bicycle can motivate a student to "do better" in school. Their unique model bundles corporate philanthropy, team building and employee collaboration together through fund raising, bike building to delivering the new bikes and helmets to students.

This initial event started with the Director of Funded Projects being introduced to Brad Appel, the Founder and CEO of Wish for Wheels. Fortunately for Cherry Creek Schools and the students at Ponderosa, Brad and his team had already received some corporate sponsorships and had bicycles purchased prior to the onset of COVID-19.

Leadership at Ponderosa, in partnership with the Cherry Creek Education Foundation, have a goal to raise \$100,000 dollars over the next two years so that every second-grade student in Cherry Creek's Title I schools can receive new bicycles. Ponderosa's principal explains: "Ultimately, we want to use bicycles not only as a means for a student to get to school, increasing his or her attendance, but as a tool for learning about health, safety, pride of ownership, and fun."

Starting in August 2020, Ponderosa staff will begin tracking attendance, discipline, and achievement data of all the students who received bicycles. Staff will survey both parents and students to see if there have been any significant improvements in the student's life after receiving their bicycle.

As is the case with so many well-planned initiatives, COVID-19 threw a little wrench in this activity. In an ideal situation, the staff and volunteers from the corporation who sponsored the school would come together to build the bikes one day and then give them to students the next day. When the students come to get their bikes, the staff and volunteers make sure that the students' helmets and bikes fit properly and there is time for demonstrations and students practicing safe riding techniques. But because of the pandemic, parents drove up, signed a waiver, and a sanitized bicycle and wrapped helmet were loaded in their car.

Ponderosa's principal, Chad Gerity, shared: "If you want to work with Wish for Wheels or try and replicate what they do, it takes corporate sponsorships. To really make it work, the planning needs to happen six months (or more) before each 'give away.' The planning includes not only securing the funding for the bicycles and helmets, identifying dates for the 'build' and 'give away,' but also organizing the staff and volunteers."

Moving forward, the hope is for Ponderosa students to be able to ride their bikes to school, practice riding their bikes in P.E. class and at recess. Staff also want students to use their bicycles to talk about math, as a tool for science, and as a subject for writing.