Problem Statement: In the Healthy School Zone Project, we address a number of tobacco, nutritional, physical activity, and transportation concerns in tandem in order to establish a safe and healthy environment surrounding Seattle area high schools.

Impact of the problem on King County: There are approximately 14,000 high school students in Seattle Public Schools, with the district serving over 51,000 students total. These policy changes further affect the wider neighborhood and community immediately surrounding the 12 public high schools throughout Seattle.

Policy objective: Our policy objectives consist of a number of recommendations to be implemented in tiers with regards to their feasibility and public health impact. To address tobacco use around schools, we propose implementation of zoning ordinances for local tobacco outlets, limiting advertisements using content neutral advertising laws, raising the minimum age to purchase tobacco, and banning all flavored tobacco products from sale in King County. To improve nutrition, we recommend implementation of incentives in Seattle public schools, zoning regulation and restrictions of local restaurants and food vendors, and establishment of standardized nutritional criteria for advertisements surrounding schools and school buses. To promote physical activity around schools, we recommend redistribution of funding for infrastructure changes, improved enforcement of speed-related traffic violations, restrictions for paid parking surrounding schools.

Policy target: The primary governing body for these changes is Public Health – Seattle & King County, although intersectoral collaboration and cooperation of businesses may be necessary for enacting constituent policy recommendations.

Status of County policy in this area: There are currently no analogous policies encompassing the aims and reach of the Healthy School Zone project. State laws are extant restricting alcohol sale within 500 feet of schools, but no such policies exist for other health-related risk factors. While public pedestrian and cycling infrastructure exists in school areas, there are no laws catering to their unique considerations.

How does the proposed policy reduce involuntary exposure to unhealthy influences or expand access to healthy personal choices? The entire premise upon which the Healthy School Zone project is based is to foster a healthier environment for our most vulnerable populations. By limiting sales of tobacco, increasing utilization of pedestrian walkways, and reducing the advertising of unhealthy foods, we hope to create a unique environment where youth can grow and learn, free of the distractions of injurious influence.

Public health rationale: It has been demonstrated that a school’s proximity to unhealthy food options increases students’ average consumption of junk foods. Likewise, the presence of junk foods in vending machines, irrespective of the presence of healthier options, yields continued intake of the unhealthy foods. To limit children’s exposure to noxious agents, there already exist laws to limit alcohol sales near schools, as well as bans on cigarette advertising on television. We simply wish to extend this rationale to other public health arenas to promote a healthier and safer learning environment.
Projected impact of the policy change: A key goal of the Healthy School Zone Project is to remedy current inequities, limiting the unhealthy options that exist disproportionately around high-risk schools. With the proposed plan, businesses and infrastructure in the immediate vicinity of schools will need to make alterations, including changing advertising spaces, creating smoke-free zones, and supporting changes to increase pedestrian and bicycle utilization.

Stakeholder analysis & timing: Given the numerous policies from which the larger Healthy School Zone concept emerges, stakeholder and timing analyses must truly be completed on an individual level. Although more work needs to be conducted to pinpoint timing of constituent policies, it is vital that neighborhoods, communities, and businesses be kept informed and engaged with the project to ensure its success.

Key messages: In order to affect meaningful and lasting environmental change, a truly concerted global approach to policy change is necessary. To promote healthier choices, it is vital to prove not only available healthy options but also a scarcity of noxious influences. Although the concept of a Healthy School Zone is largely untested, several influential informants attested to the utility and were hopeful for the viability of these policy changes.

Anticipated barriers/challenges: A large challenge to the Healthy School Zone concept is the sheer scale of the proposed changes, which will necessitate considerable time and funding. There will likely be pushback from the local businesses that will be affected, as well as larger food and tobacco corporations. In addition, a subset of community members may be opposed to zoning regulations or infrastructure changes.

Related policies under consideration: There are no known current policies that utilize the rationale of the Healthy School Zone.

How the policy change relates to: These policy changes will require revisions to the Public Health Operational Master Plan as well as Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plans. More work must be conducted to elucidate the particular venues required for individual policy alterations.

Policy Proposal Team:
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Consults: Within Public Health Seattle & King County, we consulted with Jim Krieger, Donna Oberg, and Celeste Schoenthaler. We collaborated with members of the University of Washington Center for Public Health Nutrition, and were advised by Donna Johnson. In researching and compiling this policy proposal, numerous confidential informants were consulted within the fields of public health, active transportation, education, and risk assessment, including members of local government, non-profits, special interest and activist groups.

Consultation Checklist
X Division
Government affairs and/or Board of Health Staff Communications (PC2)
APDE (Data, Evidence Base, Policy Research)
Legal
Community partners & impacted communities
Equity Impact Review Tool
Other (see description)