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**Challenges and Opportunities of School Meal Programs in Five
South King County School Districts**

A Capstone Report

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Table of Contents

Chapter I: Introduction	3
Population	
Strategies for Intervention	
Chapter II: History, Mission, and Nutrition-Related Goals of Public Health – Seattle & King County and the Healthy Eating Active Living Unit	5
Chapter III: Demographics and Health Assessment of School-Aged Children in South King County	8
Effects of Socioeconomic Inequities on the Health of School-Aged Children in South King County	
Chapter IV: Food Insecurity and Health Outcomes	12
Food Insecurity in King County	
Impact of Food Insecurity on Health	
Chapter V: Existing Programs and Resources to Address Food Insecurity for School-Aged Children	17
Chapter VI: Assessing the Readiness and Feasibility of Five South King County School Districts to Further Develop their School Food Programs	23
Methods	
Interview Theme Results	
Proposed Strategies	
Chapter VII: Strategic Plan: Proposed Strategies for the Five South King County School Districts to Further Develop their School Food Programs	34
Goals and Objectives	
Implementation of Proposed Strategies	
Chapter VIII: Communication Plan	37
Chapter IX: Project Summary	40
References	41

Chapter I: Introduction

The purpose of this project is to assist Public Health - Seattle & King County in their work towards developing a school food program that grows the local food economy while reducing hunger among youth in King County school districts. This project focuses on increasing local foods and overall school meal participation in five school districts; Auburn, Highline, Federal Way, Seattle, and Tukwila, to address the prevalence of food insecurity and nutrition-related health outcomes among the student population.

Specifically, the objectives for this project were to:

1. Develop a narrative history of farm to school and other nutrition services improvement efforts in each of the five South King County school districts.
2. Conduct a comprehensive assessment regarding readiness and feasibility of the five South King County school districts to increase local food procurement and meal participation.
3. Increase awareness about the opportunities to increase local food procurement and impacts of increasing meal participation.

Population

The target population for this project's efforts is school-aged children in South King County because of the vast economic inequities experienced by communities in the southern part of the county and the high prevalence of food insecurity and diet-related health outcomes. King County is ranked as one of the most affluent counties in the United States, and yet over 2 million people in King County are living below the poverty level as of 2017.¹ These economic disparities can be seen geographically as poverty becomes more concentrated in the more racially and ethnically diverse southern region of the county.^{1,2} Food insecurity is often inextricably tied to economic scarcity, the inability to accommodate basic needs and wants with available economic resources, and when compared to the distribution of racial diversity and income inequity seen in South King County, the distribution of food insecure households in King County follows a similar geographic pattern with some areas of the south reporting up to 31% of the population experiencing food insecurity.^{3,4} With the inequitable distribution of income

and food access in South King County, diminished health status and poor health outcomes have also increased.^{2,5,6}

Strategies for Intervention

Individual health status is often influenced by factors that are beyond an individual's control. The social determinants of health; economic stability, social and community context, built environment, education, and health and healthcare; need to be addressed to make an impact on health outcomes.⁷ This is particularly true in early development, such as in childhood and adolescence, where the harmful effects of childhood food insecurity can impact lifelong diet-related health status.⁸ The Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study found that interventions that focused on improving food access at a neighborhood or community level had more success preventing and overcoming food insecurity than interventions that aimed to improve food access of individual households.⁹ Therefore, interventions that occur at the level of a school district have the potential to influence food insecurity and immediate nutrition-related health needs as well as impact future health outcomes into adulthood for school-aged children.

Chapter II: History, Mission, and Nutrition-Related Goals of Public Health – Seattle & King County and the Healthy Eating Active Living Unit

While King County is ranked as one of the most affluent counties in the United States according to household income, these county-wide metrics do not properly reflect the extreme levels of income and health inequalities seen within the county.¹⁰ King County is a large and diverse county with over 2 million residents spread out in rural, unincorporated, suburban and urban areas, including major cities such as Seattle and Bellevue where the median household income is much greater than the national average.¹¹ However, the more racially and ethnically diverse areas of South King County are often home to high-need communities and those of lower socioeconomic status.

The responsibility of overseeing public health in the Seattle and King County area was originally under the jurisdiction of the City of Seattle. In 1951, Seattle and King County combined to form the joint department Public Health – Seattle & King County (PHSKC) under the administration of the City of Seattle. In 1981, the department was reorganized, and administrative control was placed with King County, though the City of Seattle maintained policy and funding control within city limits.¹² PHSKC is one of ten departments under the administration of King County.

The overarching mission of PHSKC is to “identify and promote the conditions under which all people can live within healthy communities and can achieve optimum health” and its functions include providing health protection, health promotion, and health provision.¹³ Within this mission, King County at large has also identified an Equity and Social Justice Strategic Plan to place a focus on addressing the upstream determinants of inequities within the county to lead to better quality of life and greater prosperity for all communities in King County, particularly in the southern part of the county.¹⁴

There are eight divisions within PHSKC including Chronic Disease and Injury Prevention (CDIP) which houses the Healthy Eating Active Living (HEAL) unit. The HEAL unit’s mission is to prevent chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, and stroke, as well as to support equitable food access and increased physical activity in all communities. The HEAL unit was traditionally more focused on providing direct educational services such as nutrition education, cooking classes, and resource development, however, the unit has shifted over the past decade to take on a policy, systems, and environment (PSE) approach to achieve its mission. The adoption of King County’s Strategic Plan “Working Together for One

King County” cemented this shift, and as the HEAL unit moved away from direct services and more towards focusing on policy, their objectives began to include an increased focus on collaborating with community partners and putting community voices first.¹⁵ This includes thorough community needs assessments, the formation of robust community and organization partnerships, recognizing the interplay of various social determinants of health, and providing and promoting services that are in line with the values and priorities of the people of King County.

Much of the work done by the HEAL unit is based on and supported by King County Executive Dow Constantine’s Local Food Initiative Annual Report, launched in 2014.¹⁶ This report aims to build stronger farm-to-plate relationships by setting targets and taking steps to: better connect local farms to consumers, increase access to healthy, affordable foods in underserved areas, support farmers and protect farmland, and create a sustainable farm-to-plate pipeline more resilient to the effects of climate change.

King County’s 2017 Local Food Initiative annual report included several key strategies to reform the food system of King County so that it better serves the needs of the public, particularly marginalized communities such as low-income and food-insecure communities. One key strategy included improving access to healthy, affordable food by enhancing local school nutrition environments. Another key strategy was to grow the market and increase the institutional demand for local products.¹⁶

The HEAL unit is working on these strategies by focusing on developing local school food programs that address food insecurity by growing the local food economy and reducing hunger among youth in King County school districts. Specifically, HEAL is working towards the following goals:

1. Improve the local food processing, distribution, and marketing infrastructure in King County to increase aggregated food distribution to schools.
2. Increase the number of local foods in King County school districts with an emphasis on school districts and schools serving a high percentage of low-income families.
3. Maximize universal school meals in King County school districts so all children can eat healthy meals.

To achieve these goals, HEAL has joined with other local stakeholders to form the Local Institutional Food Team (LIFT) with farm to school as a key area of interest. Specifically, HEAL is working closely with Ecotrust, an Oregon-based nonprofit organization contracted by PHSKC to assess the current farm to

school landscape in South King County and to develop a strategic plan to increase access and consumption of local produce in schools.

Ecotrust is a key partner and leader in the farm to school movement and has successfully collaborated with communities and organizations across the Northwest to provide innovative solutions to help build a resilient food system. Ecotrust has served eight years as the Western Regional Lead for the National Farm to School Network where they helped to grow farm to school programming in K-12 and pre-K settings in Alaska, California, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, and Washington.¹⁷ Ecotrust's mission is to "inspire fresh thinking that creates economic opportunity, social equity, and environmental well-being. Our goal is to foster a natural model of development that creates more resilient communities, economies, and ecosystems here and around the world".¹⁸

Chapter III: Demographics and Health Assessment of School-Aged Children in South King County

The Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA), a collaborative assessment led by King County Hospitals for a Healthier Community (HHC), has identified people of color within King County as having a greater risk of poor health outcomes and negative social indicators compared to their non-Hispanic white counterparts.² These socioeconomic and health disparities are thus geographically more prevalent in the south part of the county, the most racially and ethnically diverse part of King County. The information in the CHNA was collected over three years with the purpose of identifying community health needs, analyzing King County's growing and changing population, and providing context to preexisting data unveiling the disparities experienced within the county. This needs assessment has helped to inform PHSKC's strategic plan to address the root causes of inequities and to prioritize marginalized communities.

King County is ranked as one of the most affluent counties in the United States according to median household income which has steadily increased over the past few decades.¹ However, as seen in Figure 1, this increase in wealth has not been evenly dispersed throughout the county and has been centralized in neighborhoods located in the greater Seattle area. Parallel to the increase in median household income, the cost of housing has skyrocketed. These economic changes have led to a population shift as people and communities are no longer able to afford the cost of living in the north and east regions of the county. Poverty has become more concentrated in the south, as seen in Figure 2, creating vast economic disparities. Even as one of the most affluent counties in the country, the Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) estimates that as of 2017, 2,160,739 people in King County are living below the poverty level, and that 442,654 of those individuals are under 18 years of age.¹

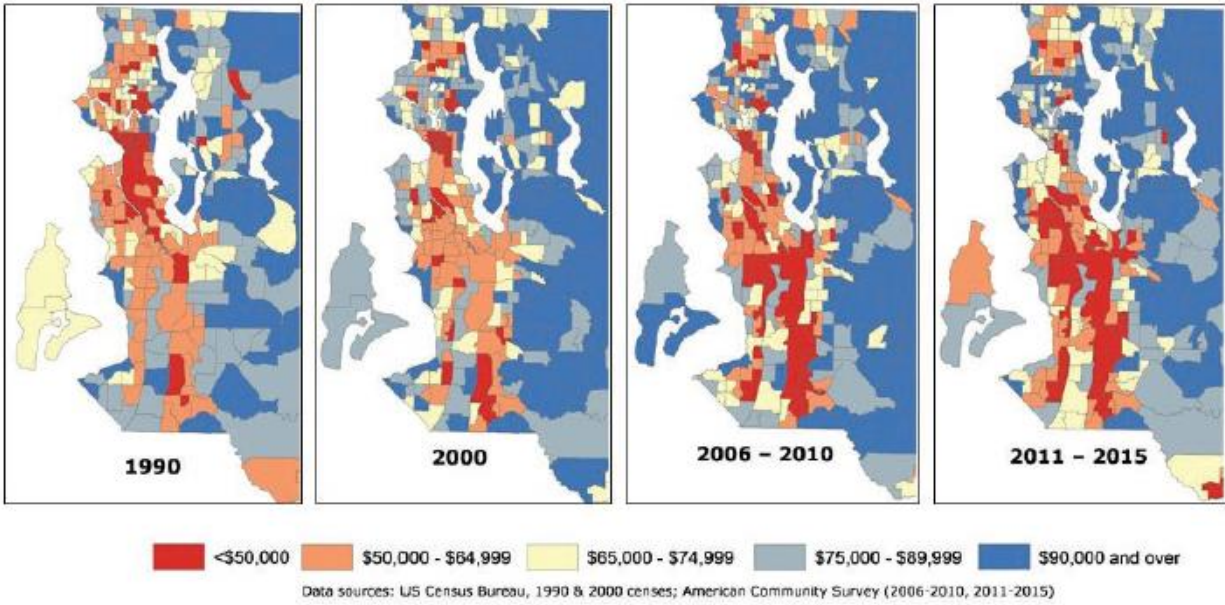


Figure 1. Median household income by King County neighborhood, 1990-2015.¹⁰

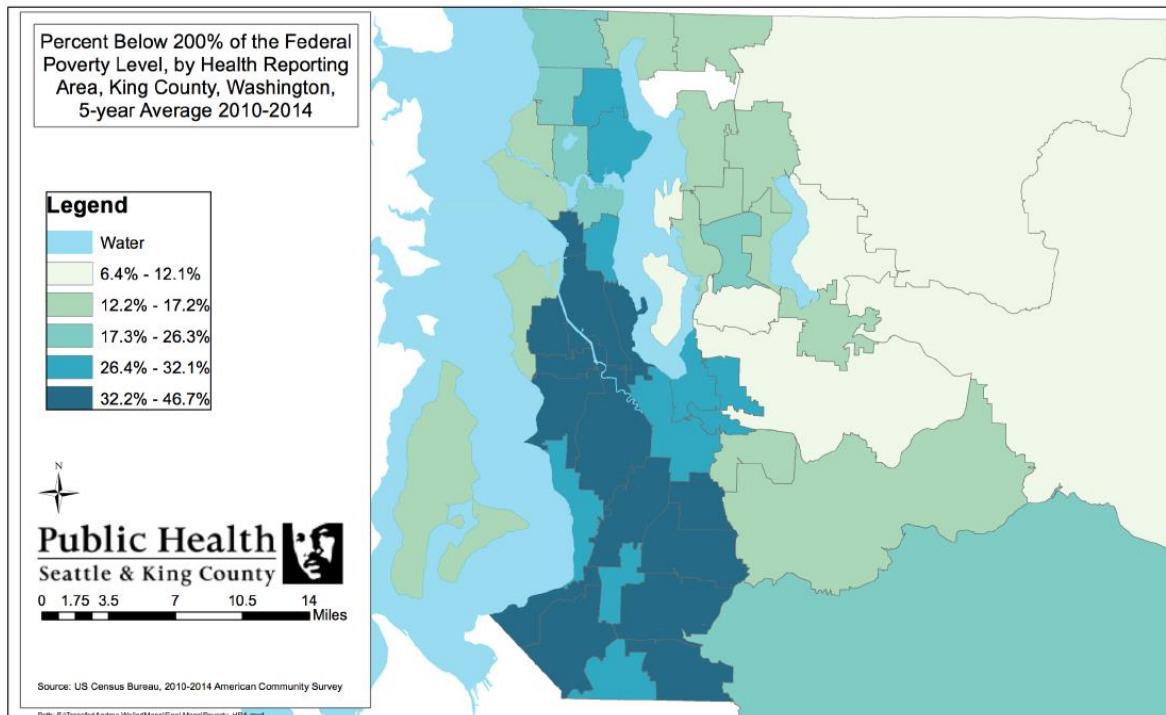


Figure 2. Percent of population below 200% of the federal poverty level in King County, WA 2010-2014.¹⁹

With the rising racial diversity and income inequity seen in South King County, diminished health status and poor health outcomes have also increased.⁵ PHSKC compiles City Health Profiles to provide data on health indicators and social determinants of health per geographic region according to life-expectancy and self-reported health status by resident. Per the City Health Profiles, individuals in Auburn, Federal Way, Burien, and Tukwila, cities that help to make up a substantial region of South King County, all experience lower life expectancy when compared to King County as a whole and to the rest of Washington State, and all cities had lower self-reported mental health, mental distress, physical health, and overall health statuses.⁵

Other health indicators such as alcohol-related deaths, smoking, obesity, and lack of health insurance all show regional patterns of inequity.² South King County residents also have the highest prevalence of diabetes in the county, and those in South Auburn were found to be five times more likely to die of diabetes-related complications compared to residents in West Bellevue, even though only 23 miles separates the two cities.⁶ Due to these vast inequities, PHSKC has identified South King County as the geographic target for this project.

Effects of Socioeconomic Inequities on the Health of School-Aged Children in South King County

These socioeconomic and health inequities are not only affecting adults. According to the Community Health Needs Assessment, escalating housing prices have also increased pre-K to 12th student homelessness in King County, which as of 2016 has more than doubled since 2008 (up to 8,411 individuals, or roughly 3% of enrolled students).² Among these children, more than half were in elementary school or pre-kindergarten.² Over the past two decades, school districts in South King County have accounted for a growing share of school-aged children living in poverty within King County.³ Teenage obesity rates have also gone up in South King County while they simultaneously decreased within the city of Seattle, and obesity rates were highest among marginalized ethnic and racial groups, including Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, Hispanic/Latino, and Black/African American teens.³ The school districts serving K-12th grade students in the cities of Auburn, Federal Way, Burien (Highline), Tukwila, and Seattle have high levels of poverty, as shown in Figure 3, and are the target districts for this project.

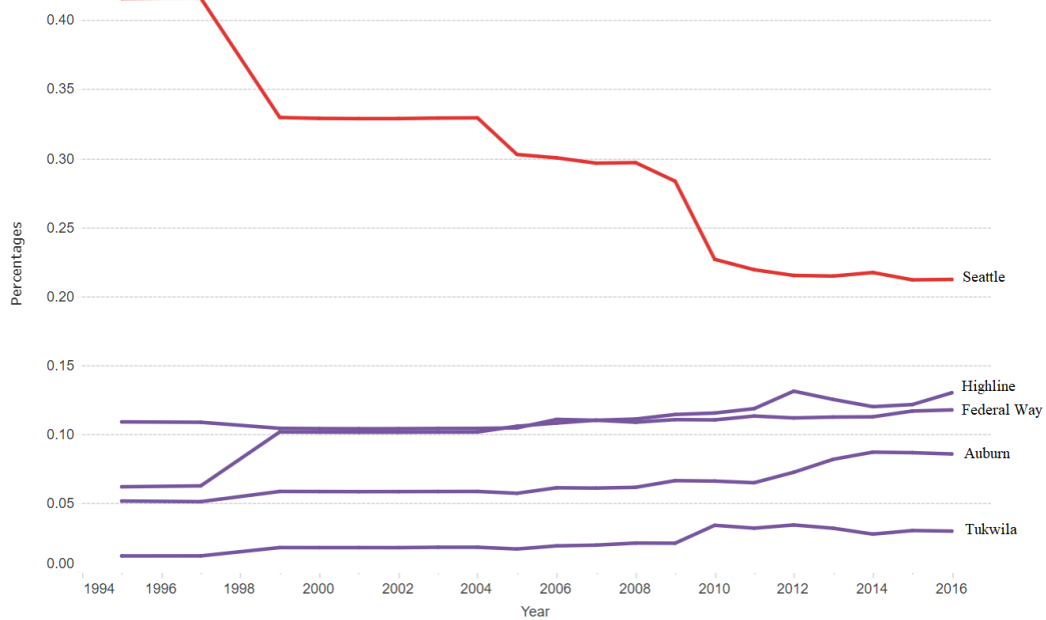


Figure 3. The percentage of school-aged children living in poverty between 1995 and 2016 in South King County cities targeted by project.³

The US Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion acknowledges that individual health status is often influenced by factors that are beyond an individual’s control, stating that social determinants of health; economic stability, social and community context, built environment, education, and health and healthcare; need to be addressed to make an impact on health outcomes.⁷ This is particularly true in early development, such as in childhood and adolescence. Adverse childhood outcomes, such as lower childhood socioeconomic status and poor childhood health, have been shown to be predictors of lifelong health status and health outcomes in adulthood.⁸ Lifelong health status is thus highly influenced by social and economic opportunities during childhood, including access to resources such as healthcare, affordable housing, and adequate nutritious foods. Interventions that occur at the level of a school district for school-aged children therefore have the potential to influence immediate health needs as well as impact future health outcomes into adulthood.

Chapter IV: Food Insecurity and Health Outcomes

Food Insecurity in King County

Food insecurity is a nutrition concern where households do not have access to adequate food due to limited resources, such as money.²⁰ Food insecurity in King County has been measured by the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS), an annual health-focused random telephone survey.⁴ BRFSS measures food insecurity using a one-question query that assesses how often in the last 12 months (never, sometimes, or often) food that was bought did not last and there was no money to purchase more, with responses of “sometimes” or “often” signifying food insecurity.³ Demographic and geographic distribution of food insecurity in King County is shown in Figure 4. The BRFSS data revealed that an average of 48% of households with incomes < \$15,000 in King County experienced running out of food and being unable to afford more between 2010 and 2013, compared to 12% of all households in King County and just 2% of households with incomes ≥ \$75,000.⁴ The percentage of households that identified as food insecure with incomes < \$15,000 increased from 43% in 2010 to 60% in 2013, and 91% of all food insecure households had incomes ≤ \$25,000 in 2013.³

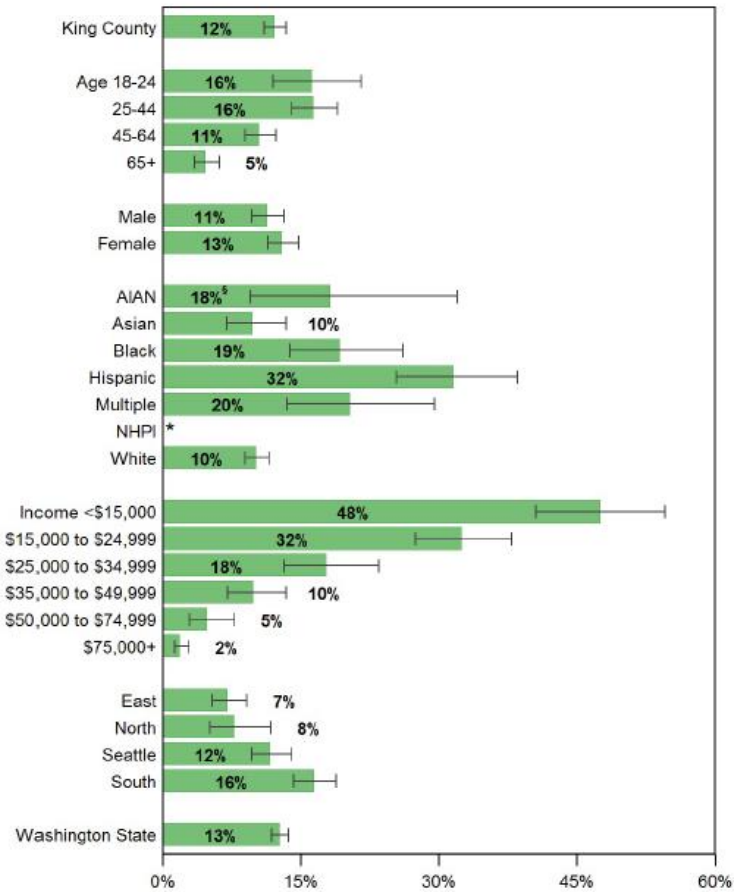


Figure 4. Demographic and geographic distribution of food insecurity in King County, 2010-2013.⁴

Food insecurity is often inextricably tied to economic scarcity, and this is true for the distribution of food insecure households in King County.⁴ Many of the households previously identified as being both low-income and food scarce are in South King County, shown in Figure 5, with some areas reporting up to 31% of the population experiencing food insecurity.⁴

**Food insecurity by health reporting areas
King County, 2010-2013 average**

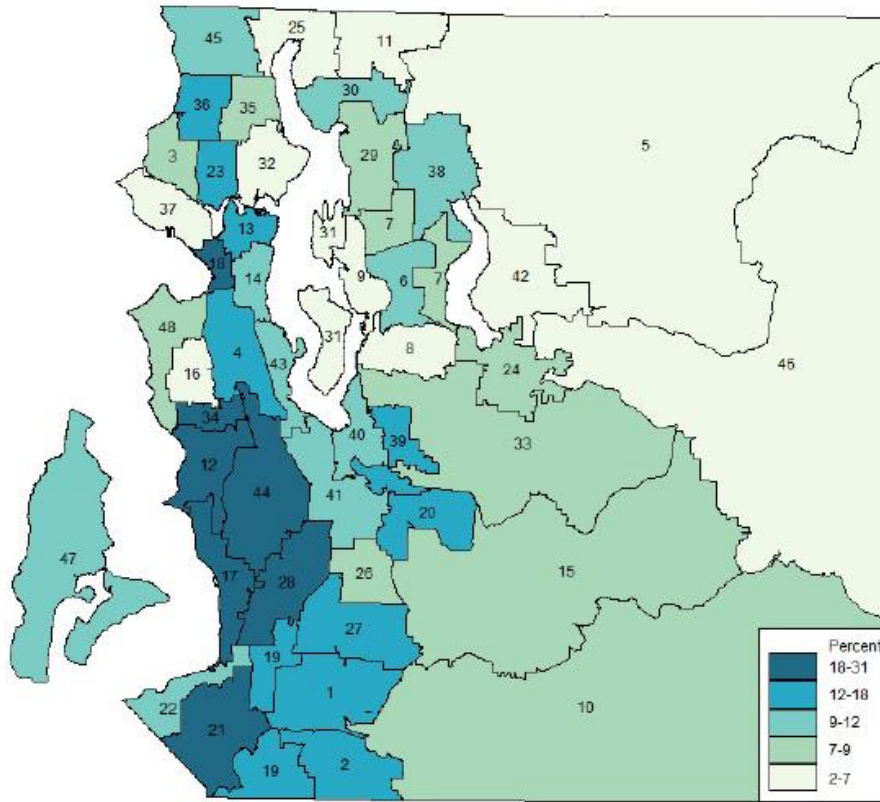
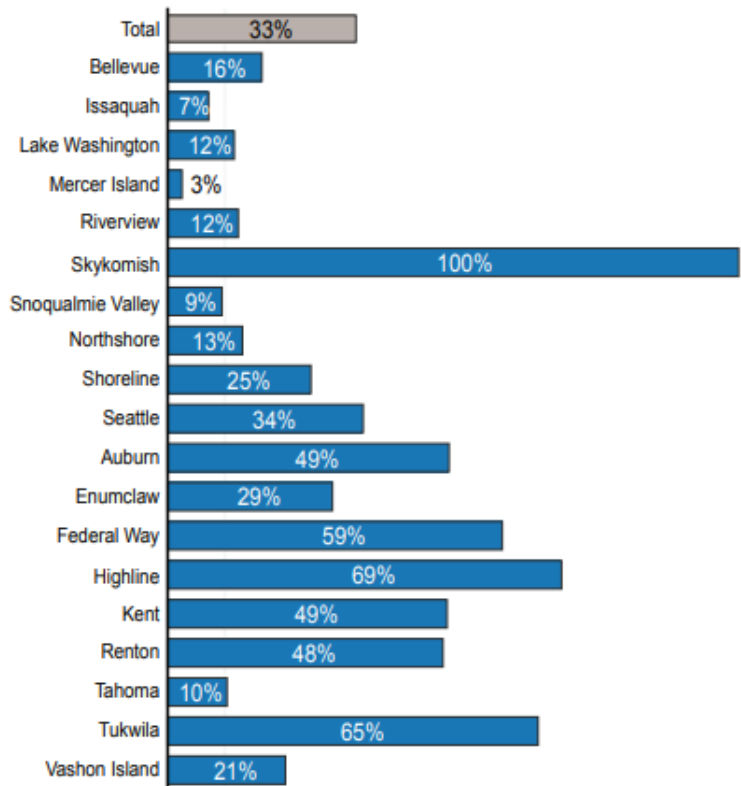


Figure 5. Average food Insecurity in King County by health reporting area, 2010-2013.⁴

While the BRFSS data only consider the prevalence of food insecurity among adults, many of these households also include children. It is estimated that one out of five households with children in South King County are food insecure, and of these families, many have reported that they do not always having enough food to eat.³ The percentage of school-aged students who are eligible for free and reduced price meals can be used as a proxy to measure poverty and food insecurity at the school level, since actual poverty rates are generally not available for this population. Figure 6 shows that in the 2016-2017 school year, Auburn, Tukwila, Federal Way, Highline, and Seattle school districts all had a higher percentage of students eligible for free and reduced price meals compared to King County as a whole. In this same year, over half (51%) of all students in South King County were eligible for free or reduced-price meals.³

**Students eligible for free/
reduced price meal
King County (2016-2017 school year)**



Source: Washington State Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction

Figure 6. Percent of students in King County Washington school districts eligible for free and reduced price meals during the 2016-2017 school year.³

Impact of Food Insecurity on Health

Being food insecure limits the ability to purchase a variety of healthy, nutritious foods. Nutrient-rich, low-energy-dense foods like vegetables, fruits, and whole grains are generally more expensive than energy-dense foods and are therefore less affordable for families who are experiencing economic scarcity.²¹

This inability to purchase nutritious foods further contributes to the health disparities seen among communities of lower socioeconomic status in South King County. The affordability of cheap, energy-dense foods can help to stave off hunger for families who cannot reliably obtain enough food, but this also puts them at increased risk of diet-related health consequences such as such as diabetes, hypertension, and high cholesterol.⁶ Students in South King County were found to be more likely than students in other parts of the county to report daily consumption of soda, a cheap and nutrient-poor option,² and The National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey found an association between food insecurity and an increased risk of obesity for school children ages 6-11.²² Food insecurity may further exacerbate diet-related or other chronic diseases by forcing food-insecure families to choose between food or medication/medical care.²³ Food insecure families are also more likely to experience significant stress and self-reported symptoms indicative of depression and anxiety.²³

Assigning causation to poor health outcomes from food insecurity is difficult since food insecurity cannot be separated from economic scarcity which is also associated with a lack of healthcare, lack of education, lack of transportation, unaffordable housing, and several other barriers that can contribute to poor health outcomes.² Furthermore, food insecurity in children has not been directly measured at the individual level and is instead measured at the household level or at the child level, which applies the same risk of food insecurity to all children in the household.²⁰ While this limits the ability to show causation, studies have been able to show clear associations between food insecurity in school-aged children and several poor health outcomes, including lower nutrient intakes, cognitive and behavioral problems, asthma, aggression and anxiety, and overall poorer health.²⁰

Chapter V: Existing Programs and Resources to Address Food Insecurity among School-aged Children

There are many resources available in King County for families and school-aged children to help increase access to a variety of affordable, nutritious foods, particularly in school settings.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as the Food Stamp Program, is a federal program administered by the United States Department of Agriculture.²⁴ The purpose of the program is to act as a nutrition assistance safety net to reduce food insecurity and improve diet quality by providing low-income individuals and families with funds to purchase food. The amount of SNAP funds an individual or family may receive is primarily based on family size, household income, and citizen status.²⁵ Only US citizens and lawful permanent residents may apply for SNAP benefits. Children who are US citizens may also be eligible for SNAP benefits, regardless of the parents' citizen status.²⁵ In 2016, 1.45 billion dollars in SNAP benefits were issued each month to over 1 million people in Washington state.²⁶ In 2014, a total of 350 million dollars in SNAP benefits was provided to roughly 314,000 eligible households in King County, averaging \$1,118.97 per household.²⁷

National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP)

The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and the National School Breakfast Program (NSBP) are both federally assisted programs authorized through the federal Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act of 2010 (HHFKA) and operating in public and non-profit private schools and child care institutions.²⁸ ²⁹ The programs are federally administered by the United States Department of Agriculture through the Food and Nutrition Service agency, and the Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction administers these programs within the state. The purpose of these programs is to provide nutritionally balanced, low-cost or free lunches and breakfasts to children every school day. Participating schools receive cash subsidies and USDA Foods for every reimbursable lunch or breakfast served, and while schools have the authority to decide what specific foods are prepared and served, all meals must meet

the federal meal pattern requirements. Furthermore, all participating schools must offer lunch and breakfast at a free or reduced price to eligible children.^{28 29} In 2017, a total of 289,865 children were participating in NSLP in King County.³⁰

Free and Reduced Price School Meals

Income Eligibility Guidelines (IEGs) are used by schools and institutions to determine a child’s eligibility for free and reduced price meals, and these IEGs are updated each school year.³¹ Participation in federal assistance programs such as SNAP or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) can automatically qualify a family for free and reduced price meals. Eligibility for unemployment benefits or the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) may also qualify a family for free and reduced price meals.³¹ In 2017, of the 289,865 children participating in NSLP in King County, 31.5% (91,191) were enrolled in Free and Reduced Price meals, and 75,510 were eligible for free meals.³⁰

Overall, school meal participation is generally low and free and reduced meals are often underutilized.³² This could be due to the application process, the stigma of receiving free and reduced meals, the cost of reduced or full price meals, and several other barriers identified by the South King County schools discussed in chapter 6.

Community Eligibility Provision and Special Assistance Alternatives

The Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), authorized under the HHFKA and Provision 2, established under the National School Lunch Act, are alternative approaches for schools providing meals in low-income neighborhoods. CEP allows schools with a high number of low-income students to serve free meals to all students without the need for collecting individual school meal applications.³³ To qualify for CEP, at least 40% of students must be enrolled in specific means-tested programs, as of April 1st of the prior school year. These data are available to districts from the Family Income Survey.³⁴ The formula for CEP eligibility is:

$$\text{Identified Student \%} = \frac{\text{\# of Identified Students}}{\text{Total \# of Enrolled Students}} \times 100$$

The number of enrolled students includes all students with access to at least one meal from either NSLP or NSBP daily, and the number of identified students includes students who were directly certified based on enrollment in SNAP, TANF, WIC, Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR), Head Start, Even Start, the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP), and foster children, migrant children, and homeless children.³³

CEP can help to alleviate food insecurity in low-income areas in several ways. When a school is approved for CEP, all students automatically receive school meals for free, giving all students the same opportunities for a nutritionally balanced meal.³³ It eliminates the application process, decreasing the amount of paperwork for both families and schools and reducing administrative costs that would have gone into the verification process.³³ CEP can also reduce the stigma associated with free and reduced meals and can help to streamline meal services and other duties of the Nutritional Services Department in each district.³² In the 2017-2018 school year, only three of the five districts included in this project (Federal Way, Highline, and Seattle) had some schools that had adopted CEP.³³

Provision 2 has been an option for school districts since 1980 and has the same benefits and similar requirements as CEP except that percentages are based on meal participation of a “base year” rather than the current economic profile of the school, as seen in Table 1.³³ As of the 2017-2018 school year, none of the schools involved in this project were participating in Provision 2.

Table 1. Provision 2 compared to the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP).³³

Provision 2	CEP
No minimum economic profile (free/reduced income level) to participate	Schools must have 40% Directly Certified to participate
Claiming percentages are established in the base year by actual Free, Reduced Price and Paid meals served	Claiming percentages established based on Direct Certification only
Available to schools that serve lunch only	Participating schools must serve both breakfast and lunch
Can separate and select Provision 2 option for Breakfast only, Lunch only or both meals	Both breakfast and lunch meals must be claimed at the established percentage

National Farm to School Network

The National Farm to School Network is an information, advocacy and networking hub with the mission to “increase access to local food and nutrition education to improve children’s health, strengthen family farms, and cultivate vibrant communities.”³⁵ Farm to school generally includes one or more of three central aspects; local procurement, food and health related education, and school gardens. These components of farm to school can help school children in all communities gain access to fresh, healthy, locally-sourced school meals as well as educational opportunities to empower children and their families with the knowledge and self-efficacy to make informed decisions for their health. Farm to school can also help to build community engagement and provide economic opportunities for local farmers.

These benefits of farm to school have the potential to impact health outcomes in low-income communities and school districts with a large enrollment of food insecure families. As previously stated, healthy and nutritionally balanced foods are generally more expensive than energy-dense, nutritionally poor options, and accessing these foods can be particularly difficult for communities experiencing economic scarcity, which also tend to be racially and ethnically diverse communities. The diet-related health consequences of being unable to afford or access healthy, nutritious foods include diabetes, hypertension, and high cholesterol. By leveling the playing field and increasing the quality, variety, and quantity of healthy food options available to low-income children, farm to school has the potential to address the racial, ethnic, economic, and health disparities that exist within our food system in King County.

The 2010 The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act established a \$5 million annual USDA Farm to School Grant Program to provide funding and technical assistance to increase farm to school activities, improving access to local foods in schools across the country.³⁵

Washington State Department of Agriculture’s (WSDA) Farm to School Program

The Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) is dedicated to the mission of the National Farm to School Network and the development of farm to school activities by supporting Washington State farmers and schools.³⁶ The primary role of the organization is to provide education and training, outreach, and technical assistance in three areas of farm to school implementation:

- **Planning**
 - Education of product seasonality and ingredients,
 - Policy and procedure development
 - Assistance with menu planning and finding recipes
 - General farm to school program development
- **Purchasing**
 - Navigating NSLP procurement rules for farm to school
 - Assistance in finding farms and local products from distributors
- **Promotion**
 - Providing marketing templates for posters, signage, and more
 - Helping with farm to school events
 - Establishing connections and partnerships within the farm to school community

A valuable online resource provided by WSDA is the WSDA Farm to School Toolkit.³⁷ Here, schools and communities can access marketing templates, educational materials, grant opportunities, as well as best practices for farm to school activities and success stories from other in-state and national partners.

United Way of King County’s (UWKC) Fuel Your Future Team

United Way of King County is another King County resource, supporting local school districts in several capacities. UWKC is donation and volunteer-driven and provides grant funding to various non-profits in King County. UWKC’s Fuel Your Future team is made up of AmeriCorps members with a goal to help low-income children access nutritious food.³⁸ Fuel Your Future has provided support to King County schools by assisting with summer meal programs. Children and families who rely on the NSLP, NSBP, and free and reduced price meals are affected during the eight to ten weeks of summer when students are not in school and cannot access these resources. UWKC’s AmeriCorps workers help to maintain access to nutritious meals by providing free meals during the summer at various sites in high-need communities, such as parks, libraries, and community centers.

UWKC also provides a school year program, sending AmeriCorps members directly to school sites to help with meal programs from September through July. These AmeriCorps members work with school administrators and nutrition service departments to help maximize the efficiency and quality of

school meal programs so that all students have access to nutritionally balanced meals and nutrition education.³⁸

UWKC subsidized universal breakfasts in two schools in Auburn School District during the 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 school years and provided AmeriCorp workers to support nutrition services staff by helping serve breakfasts. Both participating schools nearly doubled their breakfast participation, with one school increasing from about 380 breakfasts a day to serving over 700. UWKC also subsidizes universal breakfast and provides AmeriCorps workers to several schools in the Seattle School District. UWKC also provided Tukwila School District with donations from local merchants to use as teacher incentives to increase student participation in breakfast in the classroom.

Food Empowerment Education and Sustainability Team (FEEST)

The Food Empowerment Education and Sustainability Team (FEEST) is a King County youth-led food justice organization which receives funding from UWKC.³⁹ FEEST was started as part of the 2008 King County Food and Fitness Initiative to end the health disparities that primarily effect King County's racially and ethnically diverse low-income neighborhoods. FEEST operates out of two high school sites, Seattle Public School's Chief Sealth International High School in Delridge and Highline School District's Evergreen Campus in White Center. FEEST organizes roughly 40-45 local high school youth once a week to help prepare a locally-sourced community dinner using fresh vegetables with the purpose of recruiting students to help develop youth-led food justice initiatives in King County.

FEEST works towards food justice in the King County food system while providing opportunities for several youth-led, policy-driven campaigns. School Foods is one campaign in which FEEST youth leaders worked with the Highline School District Nutrition Services Department to provide feedback for menu planning, marketing, and helping increase the cultural competence and sustainability of school meals being served. Healthy Food Marketing was another campaign through which FEEST youth leaders provided community education workshops and conducted marketing activities such as promotional stickers and bus ads to raise awareness of the systems that limit access to healthy foods.³⁹

Chapter VI: Assessing the Readiness and Feasibility of Five South King County School Districts to Further Develop their School Food Programs

Objectives of this project were to create a narrative of the history of farm-to-school and other nutrition services improvement efforts, including challenges and successes, done in each of the five target school districts, and to conduct a comprehensive assessment of their readiness and feasibility to increase local food procurement and overall school meal participation. The narrative and assessment were then used to provide recommendations for the school districts as well as the HEAL unit for the purpose of addressing food insecurity by helping to grow the local food economy and reduce hunger among youth in the five South King County school districts.

Methods

Semi-Structured Interviews with Nutrition Services Staff

An interview guide was created in conjunction with the HEAL unit and with Ecotrust. Several resources were used to determine the appropriate measures for readiness, feasibility, and self-assessment of school nutrition services departments. These resources were provided by the National Farm to School Network and the Washington State Department of Agriculture. The ideal interview participants were determined to be the school nutrition service directors of each district, given their knowledge and expertise of their own district. Secondary participants were determined to be registered dietitians, central kitchen supervisors, and/or assistant nutrition service directors based on availability and willingness to interview. UW's Human Research Protection Program was consulted, and it was determined that this project did not require IRB review.

The MPH Capstone student arranged and conducted all interviews. Publicly available contact information was used to send an introductory email to 7 potential interviewees from 7 school districts, describing the goals of the interview and project as a whole, and to invite participation in an in-person or telephone interview. A follow up invitation was sent to those who had not responded after two weeks. Of these seven potential interviewees, five agreed to participate. Five additional interview participants were identified by the original participants and the interviewer followed up with them

individually to schedule an interview. A total of eight interviews representing 10 individual participants and five school districts were conducted between June 2018 and August 2018. The interviewer conducted seven interviews over the phone and one interview in person, and interviews lasted between 20 and 45 minutes. The interviewer took notes during the interviews and each interview was audio recorded and transcribed by the interviewer.

Each transcription was coded by the interviewer to identify key patterns and themes for the opportunities and barriers experienced among the five districts. The interviewer used both a deductive and inductive approach to coding. The interviewer initially generated a pre-set of code themes based on concepts that emerged during the literature review to establish the interview questions. These codes were then applied to the data during the coding process and underwent modification as new codes were added or deleted to the pre-set codes based on the data. Clear patterns and themes were identified, as well as impactful participant quotations to help illustrate the identified themes.

Wellness and Procurement Policy Analysis

The author used the Wellness School Assessment Tool (WellSAT 2.0), a validated and standardized method of assessment, to assess the quality of the five school district's wellness policies.⁴⁰ The WellSAT provides a comprehensiveness score, which reflects the extent to which recommended content areas are addressed in the district policy; and a strength score, which reflects how strongly the policy language is stated. Both scores range from 0-100, with lower scores indicating less content and weaker language, and higher scores indicating more content and use of more specific and directive language. The district policies were evaluated for their comprehensiveness and strength in addressing 78 policy items which are categorized into six different areas: Nutrition Education; Standards for USDA Child Nutrition Programs and School Meals; Nutrition Standards for Competitive and Other Foods and Beverages; Physical Education and Activity; Wellness Promotion and Marketing; and Implementation, Evaluation and Communication.

All district wellness policies scored higher for comprehensiveness compared to strength across the six sections, as shown in Figure 7. This indicates that while the wellness policies may address many of the 78 policy items being assessed, the language used in the wellness policies may make individual policy items hard to enforce because statements are vague or unclear, statements are listed merely as suggestions or recommendations, or a plan for action is not concretely specified. Overall, total ratings were low for both comprehensiveness and strength across the five districts.

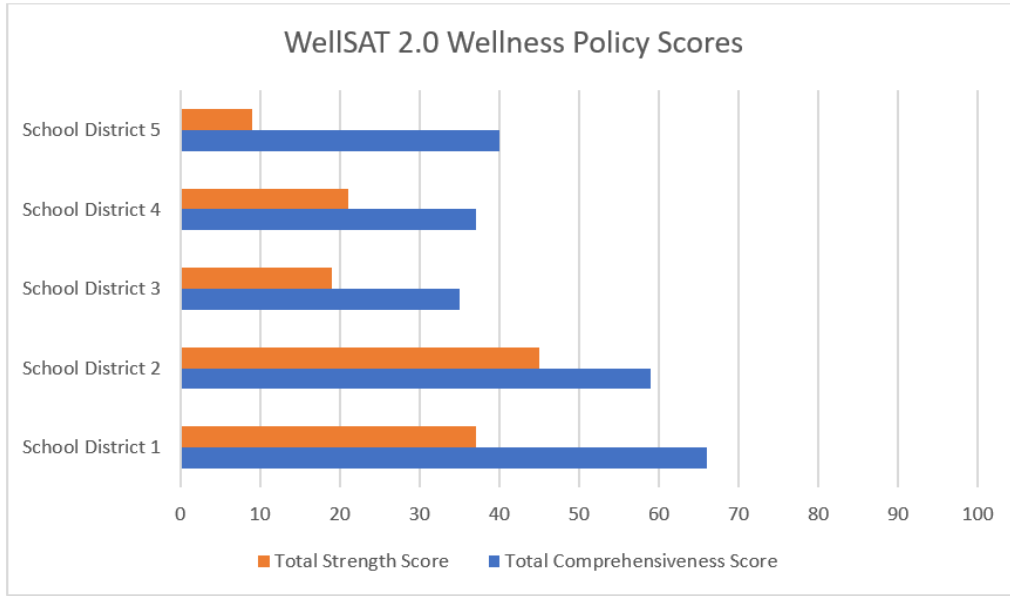


Figure 7. Strength and comprehensiveness scores of the five target school district wellness policies.

WellsAT 2.0 measures the quality of written policies only, and these policies generally do not include procurement practices, so interviewees were also asked questions related to their district’s unwritten procurement policies.

Most of the districts stated they have a geographic preference with their distributors for purchasing locally grown and locally raised unprocessed agricultural products, but that cost is the primary determinant when choosing whether to purchase local products. When asked to define local, most of the districts defined Washington state as their geographic preference, then expanding into Oregon and Idaho (or “the Pacific Northwest”), and one district identified California and Arizona as local produce procurement in December through February.

A few interviewees referenced the OSPI procurement requirements for geographic preference which allow for the purchase of locally grown or raised, unprocessed or minimally processed agricultural products when specific criteria are followed.

Results

The following themes were discussed by the five school districts as either barriers or opportunities in their ability to increase local food procurement or overall school meal participation.

- **Conflicting Produce Volume Requirements of Farms and School Districts**

This was a challenge identified by most of the school districts. One of the smaller districts identified not being able to meet the “minimum criteria” or purchase amount to get produce from a local farm. Conversely, many of the medium and large districts clearly stated that a local farm cannot supply the volume that they would need for their entire district. A couple of the schools also voiced liability issues when a farm could not assure in advance that they would be able to provide the exact volume needed for a later date. Because many of the districts plan their school menus far in advance, working with a local farmer can be difficult because there is not always an assurance that the farm will be able to provide the correct amount of produce they need at the right time to complete the planned menu.

“When talking to other administrators, they voiced that we buy so much product that it’s hard to get it from a local farmer because we are buying in such large quantities. We have been able to work with our vendors really well to get the product that we need when we need it and the quantity that we need when we need it. So, I guess in fear of not being able to meet those, we have not reached out to local farmers.” - SNS3

- **Marketing School Nutrition and Food Services**

Marketing was an opportunity voiced by many of the districts, and nearly all interviewees stated they could be doing more to market the nutrition services department’s successes in offering locally sourced foods or in increasing the appeal of their meals to students, parents, and the public, but they lack the resources to do so. Many of the districts said increasing marketing tactics to let the community know they are sourcing local could be an opportunity for success within the district, and when asked what assistance they would like to have from the county, many identified marketing as a need.

“We try our best, marketing is not our strongest suit. We don’t have a marketing specialist on our team. We try our best to get the message out [that we are sourcing local], but does it actually get out? I don’t know.” - SNS2

Some of the districts identified marketing as a barrier for increasing meal participation and identified an opportunity to communicate with students and the community to potential increase student interest in school meals.

“Definitely marketing [is a barrier]. We don’t have a marketing budget, so we’re always relying on trying to find something that is going to work to bring students in or to market towards students. Sometimes students feel better making a decision over the parents. So, just trying to make sure that we’re trying to target them and trying to figure out what is going to actually have them make that purchase.” - SNS4

A few of the districts also identified marketing their free and reduced meal options and qualification eligibility as a barrier to increasing meal participation.

“It is a barrier and it will continue. We tried several different ways to get the word out for families that they may qualify, but they have to make that effort to actually submit an application. I have gone to homes when there’s a problem... I’ll go out to the house with an application and have them fill it out.” - SNS6

- **Appeal and Perception of School Meals**

Another common theme was the desire to promote participation by increasing the appeal and perception of school meals for students, parents, and the community by educating them about the use of high-quality, local, and nutritious foods in school meals. Districts report that a sometimes persistent negative perception of school meals is a common barrier which makes encouraging meal participation by students and support from parents difficult. Several of the districts stated that purchasing and

providing local, appetizing foods also serves to enhance nutrition staff morale because they have pride in their work. Other reported common challenges to providing appealing food included funding constraints, component requirements (some districts reported less student interest in options that adhered to these requirements, such as brown rice instead of white rice), and competing food options such as student ability to go off campus for lunch. Increasing the appeal of meals and changing the old-school perceptions of school meals can be important goals for marketing strategies. Currently, school districts' inability to properly communicate their successes and market their program is a limitation and an opportunity.

"I think a lot of people, especially in the Seattle area, appreciate local sourcing and the whole foods approach of scratch cooking as much as possible... So, I would say when we do actually get out and are able to have conversations with parents and administrators and things like that, they really change their view on the stereotype of school lunches and they get into the reality that our meals are very high quality." - SNS2

"The teachers notice [when we serve local], I think, and sometimes the kids do too, so I think that is helpful. I think when people who happen to come in and see there's something new and that they are fresh, I think there's that. We haven't really publicized it so we haven't really seen huge benefits." - SNS1

"Students kind of respond to having local food. It has become such a big thing with farm to school, so when students find out it's from around here, it's exciting, and especially for parents. They love to hear that. It's kind of a marketing piece, people want to know that their food is not being shipped from a long ways away, and it's fresher because it hasn't travelled too far." - SNS7

• Staffing Challenges

A staffing shortage or a lack of highly trained and skilled staff was identified as a barrier in nearly every district. Many of these school districts are experiencing a staff shortage and simply do not have enough staff working in the schools to be able to serve meals. This causes staff in higher management positions (such as the registered dietitians, directors, and kitchen managers) to add on to their duties by

helping with day-to-day jobs such as delivering, preparing, and serving meals in the schools. This has made it difficult to focus on additional opportunities to increase local food procurement or meal participation.

“Staffing is always a situation. Last year we had a lot of open school sites that had open positions, so we had to send people from here [the central kitchen] out there, so that tends to keep us from producing a lot of things that we would like to do from scratch.” - SNS9

“The other things that have been mentioned to us from our kitchens are sometimes when we purchase directly from farms, you know, they are grown out of the dirt and they are sometimes not clean when they come into the kitchens. Then of course there is the additional labor and having to wash them and clean them up and get them ready to use. So that can be a challenge at times.” - SNS1

“Every district in the region is suffering from staff shortages.” - SNS10

• **Insufficient Funding and Constraints**

Several of the districts brought up challenges that stemmed from either insufficient funding or funding constraints. Insufficient funding was referenced as a challenge that led to other barriers previously noted; lack of marketing activities, staffing shortages (labor costs), and the inability to provide universal meals to increase meal participation. Insufficient funding was also referenced in relation to a district’s free and reduced percentages since higher percentages leads to more federal funding. Funding constraints were also referenced as a barrier in increasing the appeal of school meals. In order to be eligible to receive cash subsidies and USDA Foods for reimbursable meals, the nutrition service department must provide meals that meet the federal meal pattern requirements. Several districts stated that this limited their ability to provide meals that attracted students. Furthermore, many districts plan their menus out in advance and purchase foods in bulk, sometimes serving the same type of food or meal multiple times. Due to funding constraints, they must adhere to the menu as planned and serve the food that has been purchased, regardless of any poor feedback from students.

“Well since we are seeing a little drop in numbers, that will affect our meals-per-labor hours, so like how much time each of our staff members gets to work in the kitchen. So we definitely need to next year see if we can get our numbers up so they can keep their time.” - SNS7

“Our district has changed our charged meal process to reduce food shaming, we really want to make sure all our scholars feel comfortable at school and realize they are not the ones who would have to be held accountable for paying for their meals. [This has led to] a decrease in payment in meals, so we are observing a larger charged meal debt that is not being covered. That means less free and reduced rates, so lower reimbursement. Less funding overall, and then you are trying to cut your cost because you are trying to meet that lower funding, that makes you cut some of the most expensive items.” - SNS3

“Sustainable funding is always a challenge, and budgeting... The biggest impact here would be if we could get universal meals. It’s a challenge on that though because the current government programs like CEP or Provision 2, they both have challenges as far as funding goes because a lot of the federal title money comes... Or that districts receive... Is based on free and reduced percentages. They use that as a benchmark in determining federal dollars that are allocated.” - SNS5

Many of the nutrition services departments identified being fiscally responsible and cost-effective as one of their main priorities as a department, and therefore finding competitive pricing may be prioritized over sourcing local.

“Sometimes with local products there is not a ton of them and so there is a higher demand and it’s more costly... So, when I’m thinking about our department, I tend to think about cost. We obviously recognize that it’s best for our community if we can source locally grown foods, not only for the truck driving and the air pollution but also for the local economy and farmers and being able to support them. We recognize it’s a great opportunity to be able to partner with them. However, we want to be fiscally responsible with the funds we’re receiving from USDA, we want to make sure that we’re choosing to purchase foods that are going to be the best quality and best support for our scholars.” - SNS3

- **Produce Delivery, Processing, and Distribution Requirements of Districts**

The foodservice model of each district influenced whether delivery and equipment were barriers in their ability to procure local foods or for operations in general. Delivering foods or meals to every school is a challenge for some districts while others did not specify this as a concern. Similarly, having the equipment and storage space to accommodate foods and meals was identified as a challenge for only a few of the districts.

“When I get a price from a farmer, I have to add delivery charges because no farmer will deliver to each of my schools. It comes into my warehouse and then I have to get it out that day, that adds to my cost onto that product, so it’s not always the less expensive way to go. It’s not always cost-effective to buy from a farmer.” - SNS6

“We are not in a farming community, so if you find something, a lot of times delivery is a challenge. Delivering to every one of my schools is a barrier. I don’t think equipment is generally an issue, I think it’s more of the logistics of obtaining the quantity that is needed, and you know, not having a central delivery option or a central processing option. So like let’s say we get a raw product that we need to do something with, we have limited ability to take that on.” - SNS4

Proposed Strategies

Strategies that advance farm to school efforts in South King County have the potential to impact health outcomes in low-income communities and school districts with a large enrollment of food insecure families by increasing the quality, variety, and quantity of healthy food options available to low-income children. The following strategies were developed in conjunction with PHSKC and Ecotrust to address commonly reported barriers to local food procurement and school meal participation.

- **Increase marketing efforts and build momentum with events**

As stated by several of the districts, overcoming negative perceptions of school meals is difficult because of the inability to properly market the successes and communicate the limitations of the nutrition services department. This has made it difficult to overcome any negative perceptions and gain the understanding of parents and the public. Many of the districts stated that when they are able to have these conversations, they see an increase in understanding of the barriers faced by the nutrition services department. Furthermore, many of the districts have seen excitement generated by local food procurement and increased willingness to participate in school meals. Using farm to school as a marketing effort, such as with events or campaigns like Taste Washington Day, Farm to School Month, and Harvest of the Month, therefore has the potential to generate more enthusiasm for local food procurement within the district as well as shifting the negative perception of school meals, leading to an increase in school meal participation. Many school districts and local farmers are already familiar with these farm to school events and campaigns, and the WSDA Farm to School Toolkit provides a variety of resources to help districts sign up, receive educational materials and best-practices, and identify farms that are willing to participate in these events.

- **Hire a shared value-chain coordinator for the South King County districts**

This strategy was put forth to address the shortage of staff and increase in responsibilities for higher management positions identified by several of the districts. Many of the districts stated they did not have the capacity to incorporate additional opportunities for increasing local food procurement or meal participation due to labor-intensive day-to-day activities. It is important to consider implementing strategies that do not add responsibilities to existing employees, but sustainability must also be considered. Using grant funds to hire a new position or to pay for a portion of an existing employee's time is not sustainable because it inevitably decreases the amount of funding that a district will allocate to the nutrition services department in the future. Collaboration among the districts with the hiring of a shared value-chain coordinator with the ability to meet the needs of each individual district has the potential to encourage relationships among the districts and with local farmers without adding to the responsibilities of the nutrition services department. This value-chain coordinator could have the responsibilities of taking on marketing and event coordination as well as local procurement-focused

work for all the districts. WSDA and Ecotrust have some expertise in the implementation of a value-chain coordinator and may be able to aid in the hiring of such a role.

- **Work with existing supply chains to preference locally sourced foods**

All of the districts identified sourcing some or all of their produce from Duck Delivery Produce and Charlie's Produce. All of the districts stated that these vendors were providing a fair amount of locally sourced foods, and most of the districts acknowledged that they had a good relationship with these vendors. Many of the interviewees stated they have a good relationship with their vendor account rep who provides adequate information about what produce is available, where it is from, and prioritize the district's geographic preference for the purchase of locally sourced foods while also taking into consideration the cost. A strategy in which PHSKC and Ecotrust work with existing supply chains to provide technical assistance and build relationships between vendors and local farmers could increase procurement of local foods for the districts without increasing the duties of the nutrition services department. This strategy could also include working with districts to incorporate more local procurement language into their bids and contracts.

- **Partner with existing community based organizations**

As previously mentioned, there are several existing community based organizations, such as UWKC, FEEST, and WSDA, that have had success working with school districts to increase local food procurement and school meal participation. These organizations provide assistance to the nutrition services department by aiding in menu planning and marketing to increase the sustainability of school meals being served as well as day-to-day responsibilities such as the cashiering and serving of meals. A strategy in which PHSKC and Ecotrust build up the capacity of these partner organizations could be a holistic intervention that leverages the existing work being done with the school districts.

Chapter VII: Strategic Plan: Proposed Strategies for South King County School Districts to Further Develop their School Food Programs

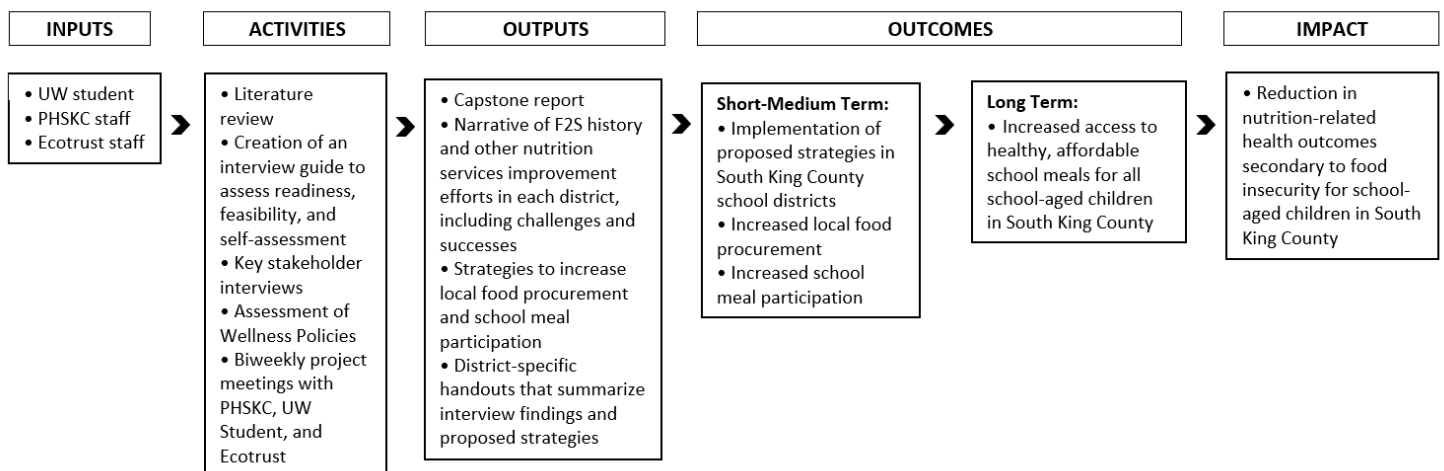
Goals and Objectives

The HEAL unit is working towards the goals outlined by the King County 2017 Local Food Initiative annual report by developing local school food programs that grow the local food economy and reduce hunger among youth in King County school districts. The purpose of this project is to assist HEAL in these efforts by working towards the goals of increasing local foods and overall school meal participation in five districts; Auburn, Highline, Federal Way, Seattle, and Tukwila; to address the prevalence of food insecurity and nutrition-related health outcomes among the student population.

Specifically, the objectives for this project were to:

1. Develop a narrative history of farm to school and other nutrition services improvement efforts in each of the five South King County school districts.
2. Conduct a comprehensive assessment regarding readiness and feasibility of the five South King County school districts to increase local food procurement and meal participation.
3. Increase awareness about the opportunities to increase local food procurement and impacts of increasing meal participation.

Logic Model



Implementation of Proposed Strategies

The strategies proposed in Chapter VI were created in response to the barriers or opportunities expressed by the South King County school districts in their ability to increase local food procurement or overall school meal participation. These strategies are not mutually exclusive and each works to complement the other proposed strategies.

In order to ensure the feasibility of each strategy, and to assure the strategy is responsive to the culture and needs of each district, feedback should be collected from each district to further assess barriers and to prioritize implementation. The ideal person to provide this feedback would be the school nutrition service directors of each district given their knowledge and expertise of their own district. Feedback from registered dietitians, central kitchen supervisors, and other nutrition service staff would be beneficial to provide a complete assessment of the feasibility of each strategy, as would feedback from school boards and administrative staff. If a strategy is implemented, feedback from each district involved should be obtained annually to ensure the long-term sustainability of each strategy and to confirm continual buy-in from stakeholders.

Once implemented, short to medium-term outcomes of the proposed strategies should be evaluated one of two ways:

1. To evaluate any increases in local food procurement, evaluation should be based on the annual percentage of the district's total food budget spent on local foods, as classified by the individual district's geographic preference for locally sourced foods compared to this same percentage prior to implementation. This evaluation may be difficult to implement considering many of the districts were only able to provide estimations of this percentage and this could add on one more responsibility to the nutrition services department.

2. To evaluate any increases in school meal participation, evaluation should be based on the percentage of the enrolled student body in each district participating in school-provided breakfast and/or lunch. An additional focus can be on the percentage of the enrolled student body eligible for free and reduced meals who are taking part in these meals. Many of the districts were able to describe how their meal participation levels for breakfast and lunch have trended over the last 3 years, but this description did not always factor in enrollment changes. For example, many of the districts had small increases in lunch participation parallel to large increases in student enrollment, meaning the percentage of the student body taking part in school lunch had decreased. This information should be

readily available to partners conducting evaluations outside of the districts, such as PHSKC, as each district provides annual enrollment and school meal participation data to The Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. This information is public on the OSPI website.

3. The long term outcome of increased access to healthy, affordable school meals can be evaluated by assessing both of these evaluation measures and using the school meals price reports found on the OSPI website to determine whether more local foods are being offered in school meals and if this has had any effect on the costs per meal as well as the number of free and reduced meals being served.

Overall impact of these strategies will be the most difficult to directly evaluate, however, numerous agencies and reports are continuously evaluating the social determinants of health of those in King County. Reports such as the Local Food Initiative, King County Community Health Needs Assessment, King County City Health Profile reports, and the Washington State Healthy Youth Surveys can all be used as proxy evaluation tools to assess over time if there are any reductions in nutrition-related health outcomes secondary to food insecurity for children in South King County.

Chapter VIII: Communication Plan

The interviews conducted with the five South King County school districts addressed the first two objectives of this project by providing a narrative history of farm to school and other nutrition services improvement efforts as well as an assessment of the readiness and feasibility to increase local food procurement and meal participation within each district. The final objective of this project is to increase awareness about opportunities to increase local food procurement and meal participation with PHSKC, partner organizations, and the districts themselves. The W.K. Kellogg Foundation's eight step communication plan template was used to determine how, when, and where to communicate the findings of the narrative history and comprehensive assessment gathered from the district interviews.⁴¹

1. Determine Goal

The goal of this communication plan is to increase awareness of the opportunities and barriers experienced among the five districts in increasing local food procurement and meal participation from the perspective of the school districts.

2. Identify and Profile Audience

The target audience for this information includes PHSKC's HEAL unit and other local stakeholders within LIFT, such as Ecotrust and WSDA. LIFT includes a network of resource providers and "farm to institution experts" that provide technical assistance for the purchasing of products from local farms. LIFT aims to identify and distribute helpful resources to support existing projects and programs that purchase local food, as well as help support individuals or institutions that would like to begin or expand their purchasing of local food.

The five school districts involved in this project should also be included in this audience, specifically the nutrition services department and potentially administration and school boards. Lastly, there are several outside community partners that could benefit from knowing this information, including existing supply chains such as Duck Delivery Produce and Charlie's Produce as well as local farmers.

3. Develop Messages

The main messages included in this communication plan should be the major interview theme results identified by the districts as well as individual district perspectives. In order to provide relevant and sustainable support to the school districts, it is vital to know the opportunities and barriers experienced from their perspective. The information provided by the school districts is invaluable to the efforts made by PHSKC and community partners, so the priority of this messaging is to disseminate the insights provided by each district at the benefit of all South King County districts.

4. Select Communications Channels

Bi-monthly meetings were held throughout the duration of this project with the HEAL unit and Ecotrust to provide consistent communication and up to date information with the partners directly involved in the project's overall goals. Moving forward, this communication should be extended to other stakeholders within LIFT. LIFT holds monthly meetings, either in-person or over the phone, and this would be an ideal time to communicate the main findings of this project. The school districts were also followed up with via e-mail, specifically with the stakeholder(s) involved in the original interviews, to share the messages developed by this project and to allow for additional comment.

5. Choose Activities and Materials

A one-page infographic/fact sheet has been created for each school district that summarizes the findings from the individual district interview as well as overall themes among all the districts involved. These one-page sheets can also be distributed to school boards or be used to provide testimony at a school board meeting. These one-page sheets will also be shared with LIFT and can be used to guide a presentation to the LIFT stakeholders of the opportunities and barriers faced by each district.

6. Establish Partnerships

The partnership formed with the HEAL unit and Ecotrust was integral in the development of this project. Moving forward, this partnership should be continued and extended to all stakeholders within LIFT. Outside supply chains and organizations identified in this project, including but not limited to; WSDA, UWKC, FEEST, Duck Delivery Produce, Charlie's Produce; are essential partners that would help to move the proposed strategies forward. By identifying and sharing common opportunities and barriers faced by each district, this project also hopes to help build a greater relationship among the individual school districts for the shared benefit of all school-aged children in South King County.

7. Implement the Plan

May 2018: Developed a workplan for project in collaboration with HEAL and established ongoing communication plan

June 2018: Developed an interview guide in collaboration with HEAL and Ecotrust

June-August 2018: Independently conducted interviews with school district staff which were then transcribed, coded, and provided to HEAL

July 2018- Assessed each school district's wellness policy using WellSAT 2.0

August 2018: Established contact with Chris Iberle of WSDA to determine plan for communicating findings with WSDA and LIFT

August 2018: High-level findings from interviews were presented to HEAL and Ecotrust

October 2018: One-page infographic/fact sheets were created and disseminated to the school districts

January 2018: LIFT meeting scheduled to discuss district-level findings of the project

8. Evaluate

Evaluation of the messaging disbursed in this communication plan should be ongoing and based on the feedback and insight provided by the school districts involved.

Chapter IX: Project Summary

This project is centered on the public health nutrition issue of food insecurity among school-aged children in South King County. Strategies that advance local food procurement efforts and school meal participation have the potential to impact health outcomes in low-income communities and school districts with a large enrollment of food insecure families by increasing the quality, variety, and quantity of healthy food options available to low-income children. To understand the challenges and opportunities faced by each school district in advancing towards these goals, individual qualitative assessments were conducted with each of the five South King County school districts involved in this project; Auburn, Federal Way, Highline, Tukwila, and Seattle.

To honor the mission of PHSKC's HEAL unit, the strategies informed by this project involve the formation of community and organization partnerships, recognize the interplay of social determinants of health, and aim to be in line with the values and priorities of the communities and people being served by the project. These strategies include:

1. Increasing marketing efforts within the nutrition services department and building momentum with events such as Taste of Washington and Harvest of the Month
2. Hiring a shared value-chain coordinator to promote collaboration among the South King County districts and help further relationships with local farmers
3. Working with existing supply chains to preference locally sourced foods
4. Partnering with existing community based organizations that have had success working with school districts

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