

Putting Prevention to Work for Students in Island, Snohomish, and Skagit Counties

Chronic diseases such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and lung disease are the leading causes of death in Washington State. These diseases are often preventable. Being physically active, eating healthy foods, and not using tobacco reduces the likelihood of getting one of these diseases. Healthy environments give Washington residents the opportunity to make healthy choices.

In March 2010, Communities Putting Prevention to Work provided federal stimulus dollars to make changes that would encourage people to eat healthier, get more physical activity, and stop using tobacco. These are examples of how stimulus funds changed communities in Island, Snohomish, and Skagit counties.

ISLAND, SNOHOMISH, and SKAGIT

38 percent of kids in Island County, 41 percent of kids in Snohomish County, and 44 percent of kids in Skagit County don't get enough physical activity.¹

Walking or biking to school is an easy and low-cost way to get kids moving on a daily basis. Yet these weren't safe options for the students at Crescent Harbor Elementary in Island County, Hawthorne Elementary in Snohomish County, or the Mount Vernon School District in Skagit County. In each of these counties, students wanting to walk or bike to school faced busy roads and traffic congestion.

Creating safe routes to walk or bike to school

Both schools gave their students new opportunities for daily physical activity.

- Hawthorne Elementary School worked with the Snohomish Health District to conduct a "walking audit" around their school. They identified broken sidewalks, busy streets, and areas needing crosswalks or other improvements.
- Both schools formed "walking school buses" where parents and school staff walk with groups of students to and from school. Crescent Harbor Elementary identified "hubs" for parents to drop off and pick up their kids. This meant that even students living far away could participate in the "walking school bus."
- Crescent Harbor also formed a jump rope club and a running club.

The Mount Vernon School District changed an administrative system to get students walking, improve safety, and save money. In 2011, the district changed their morning "bell time" schedule so schools start sequentially. This reduced the district's bus fleet from 27 to 12 and cut down on traffic congestion near schools. In 2012, the district plans to implement a student transportation policy and designated a one-mile walk zone around each school.

Impact

Hundreds of students in these counties are walking and biking to school more regularly. At Crescent Harbor Elementary, the use of the "hubs" reduced traffic congestion around the school and the running club is up to 40 members. The Mount Vernon School District estimates it will save \$260,000 per year with their bell time policy, not counting fuel and bus maintenance savings. The one-mile walk zone is anticipated to get 600 kids walking to school and save another \$260,000 in busing costs.

Data source:

¹ Data for 6th grade students, Healthy Youth Survey, 2010

