



Private Enterprise in Public Schools: Communicating School Commercialization

A FrameWorks Message Memo

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Introduction/Research Question

This memo interprets findings from the FrameWorks Institute’s research on how Kansas residents think about commercialism in public schools, and suggests a strategy for reframing that conversation. FrameWorks was asked by Kansas Action for Children (KAC) to develop framing recommendations to support its long-term strategic goal of making schools commercial-free zones.

Prior to FrameWorks’ research, the organization had articulated the following key position: there is increasing evidence that children’s exposure to hyper-commercialized culture has negative effects on their physical and emotional health, as well as their education and ability to become successful players in the economic field. KAC indicated they would like to see schools become “commercial free zones,” but recognized that long-term policy strategies that include federal policy advocacy will be required to reach that ultimate goal. KAC leadership sees the greatest challenge and opportunity in focusing on state-level policy changes that reduce commercialism in schools. KAC believes their past work on healthy choices in vending machines has created a context ripe for advancing other state-level policy goals, such as eliminating branded fast foods as a choice in school lunch programs, and prohibiting “pouring rights” contracts for vending machines, etc.

While the issue of school commercialization was the catalyst for initiating new research on the question of advertising in schools, that issue represents a new and supporting endeavor in a multi-faceted organizational agenda to build the public will in support of policies that support children and families. To that end, FrameWorks’ research task was to situate the research question on commercialism in broader concerns about children and families, and about the public and private environments affecting children’s lives. The desired reframes would thus be those that will help engage KAC and its policy allies to broaden public support for higher quality public environments for children.

Methods

To initiate this research phase, the FrameWorks Institute conducted a cognitive media analysis of more than 40 relevant newspaper articles that appeared between January 2005 and December 2006 in newspapers throughout the state and region, from Dodge City and Colby to Kansas City, and from Salina to Wichita to Lawrence, as well as AP Newswire articles that appeared in newspapers throughout Kansas. Subsequently, 21 cognitive interviews were conducted in November and December 2006 with Kansans in 5 different communities around the state, as well as ethnographic research including shorter conversations with community members, visits to schools, and participation in school events and fundraisers. Finally, six focus groups with engaged citizens (i.e., people who say they are registered to vote, read the newspaper frequently, are involved in community organizations, and have contacted a public official or spoken out on behalf of an issue) were conducted April 24-26, 2007 in three geographically dispersed Kansas cities (Wichita, Salina and Kansas City). This demographic was selected to mirror those who often serve as the primary message receivers and transmitters in communities. In addition to these core screening requirements, the parents whose children attend(ed) public schools and those whose children attend(ed) in private schools were split into separate groups; adults without children were split evenly among the groups.

Each of the three methods employed in this research investigation offers essential but varied insight into the public's thinking on social problems, as explained below. This multi-method approach is consistent with the FrameWorks Institute's approach to framing investigations, or Strategic Frame Analysis™.

We began our investigation with a *Cognitive Media Analysis* of frames in the news. This allowed us to ground our work in an understanding of how commercialization is currently being framed for the public by the media. Cognitive media analyses deepen our understanding of what the dominant media scripts are, how they are likely to affect public thinking, what solutions are prominent, and whether any of the coverage yields patterns of thinking supportive of, in this case, KAC's policy goals. We find the media analysis a critical first step as it essentially delivers the answer to "what established patterns of thinking are we up against in introducing new frames to engaged, news-attentive citizens?" It is imperative that we understand the models these first generation communicators bring to the issue in order to redirect attention and change the frame to one more suited to public understanding

Second, we conducted a series of 25 *Cognitive Interviews* with members of various key constituencies — PTA-involved parents, plus other non-parent members of the community — to discern how they think about school commercialization and related issues. During cognitive interviews, the researchers are looking for the way people think about a topic, the pattern of reasoning, the connections they make to other issues, and the devices they use to resist new information. In-depth interviews conducted from this perspective allow the researchers to map the cultural models that guide people's thinking about abstract issues.

Because commercialization is related to so many different areas of American life, we believed including an *Ethnography* in addition to the cognitive interviews would offer a more complete sense of people's understandings of the causes, impacts and problems associated with commercialization in schools and of the influence of such related issues as school funding and

budgets. In ethnography, the researcher spends time with subject groups, attends meetings where relevant issues are discussed, and is able to discern via observation of key contexts the values and deep beliefs that ordinary people bring to the issue.

Finally, after having determined in this descriptive phase of our research how various groups are inclined to think about school commercialization, we then set about testing some of our hypotheses about what kinds of narratives or reframing will produce more constructive public discourse to align public understanding with KAC's expert understanding and policy preferences. As outlined above, we conducted six *Focus Groups* in three geographic locations. Each group tested three potential reframes that the prior research had suggested might be promising.

The questions that the research addressed are:

- How is commercialism in schools portrayed by the media?
- What does the public understand about the topic of “commercialism in schools”?
- How do the public's default frames influence or constrain thinking about children's developmental contexts (family, school, broader culture) and the public policies that KAC believes are necessary to improve children's health and well-being?
- What frame elements can be used to advance public thinking to align with expert perspectives on healthy contexts for children's development and to advance public policies necessary to improve children's health and well-being?
- What are the push-backs that absolutely must be addressed in seeking to advance acceptance of schools as commercial-free zones?
- What current communications practices, as represented in existing organizational materials and strategies, should be changed, refined or emphasized?

It should also be noted that we have interpreted the observations from this research investigation in the context of FrameWorks' multi-year investigations into public opinion on children's issues,¹ as well as its recent investigations into community health, food and fitness, and government.² In this document, we focus on those findings that seem most important to absorb in moving forward with a campaign to elevate the negative impact of commercialism in public schools, but also interpret those findings in light of the broader context of FrameWorks' research on these related issues. This Memo is written from the perspective of Strategic Frame Analysis™, an approach to communications research and practice developed by the FrameWorks Institute. We urge readers to acquaint themselves with this perspective in order to fully appreciate the following observations and recommendations.³

Mapping the dominant frames: Cognitive Media Analysis, Cognitive Interviews and Ethnography

Cognitive Media Analysis:

In probing the primary patterns of new coverage relevant to the issue of school commercialization, a number of themes emerged. In general, the narratives put forward by the news media tended to be narrow in focus and obscured contextual factors that would be important for the public to understand when considering potential problems with the influence of commercialism in schools. The primary patterns discovered in the media analysis are summarized in the research report⁴ and condensed below (emphasis added to the original):

- *The creative search for funding.* The serious problem of school funding is treated as a given in much of the news coverage, and schools are portrayed as being on a journey to secure creative solutions to their financial needs. Further, securing corporate funding is treated as a success and not as potentially controversial. Very little connection was made to the underlying reasons for public investments falling short of educational needs.
- *Companies as good citizens.* Another theme in the coverage is that, in light of school funding shortages, businesses are seen as responsible, good citizens in generously contributing to schools. In fact, companies are often grouped with civic and religious organizations as among those from whom donations are solicited. Further, most coverage was framed to suggest that businesses are helping at the edges of the school-funding problem, by donating “extras.” The language of the coverage frames companies as *assisting, donating, rewarding, adopting* schools, etc. Given the emotional appeal of the good corporate citizen, this frame is likely to have traction. The coverage all but ignored the question of whether corporations may have something to gain from their participation. In other words, the frame obscures any consideration of the marketing *motives* of businesses.
- *Schools as Businesses:* Underlying the Schools as Businesses frame is the failure to distinguish between public and private sectors as potentially having different goals, functions and responsibilities. When schools are measured by business standards, themes that are reinforced include the creation and marketing of *product*, thinking how to *grow the business*, weighing *cost and benefits*, considering *investments* by sponsors, etc. From this commercial perspective, funding shortages are something schools themselves should take responsibility for redressing via creative means modeled by the private sector. More subtly, although we did find mention of advertising in schools being “frowned upon,” or “considered objectionable,” or being a “trade-off”, there was never a concrete explanation of why people might object. That left us to conclude that while many might feel there is something a little jarring about the marriage of schools to advertising, without further explication or contextualization (i.e. a public institution as sponsor or endorser of commercial goods and products), this problem remains situated in a relativistic choice frame. Thus, the language of “cost and benefits” and “trade-offs”.
- *Schools as promoters of obesity?* There was some critical coverage of marketing in schools, but it clustered around the topic of junk food and children’s health. Unfortunately, because of the powerful default frame of health individualism⁵, the

seemingly commonsense notion that schools should not promote harmful products is trumped by the notion of *individual choice* -- not only on the part of students, but also parents and schools. It is also important to note that we did not find that the coverage of junk food in schools was likely to advance the broader issue of commercialism in schools. Even if the case could be made that junk food should be banned from schools— i.e. because it is a clear illustration of a) marketers not having the best interest of children in mind, and b) schools entering into financial relationships with corporations to the detriment of students – it is not likely to extend to the broader issue of commercialization in schools. Other things being marketed to students – logos on school uniforms – are not perceived as harmful in and of themselves *and* do not entail the same apparent hypocrisy as schools that teach health and fitness while profiting from the sale of junk food within their walls.

While we did find some review in Kansas papers of recent national research showing the harmful effects of marketing on children, the frames in these stories did not address school commercialization specifically. These articles focused on advertising age-inappropriate content to children, which is not the type of advertising likely to appear in schools. Further, even within this context, the harms of advertising to children were often trumped in the reporting by a frame of parental responsibility to protect children.

In sum, the frames on issues related to school commercialization offered by newspaper coverage reinforce dominant frames of freedom of choice, individual responsibility, and pro-business perspectives. It is not surprising, then, that cognitive interviews and ethnography revealed that the broad topic of commercial activity in public schools is simply *not a topic in Kansans' minds*.⁶ While this may at first seem to present a great challenge to communicators on the issue, it can, in fact, provide an opportunity. Because the public does not currently think about the issue as such and has no organizing frame from which to approach the issue, communicators have the opportunity to set the stage for a productive discussion.

Cognitive Interviews:

As our second step towards identifying the relevant cognitive and cultural patterns that shape Kansans' thinking about an issue, we conducted cognitive interviews and ethnography to assess the cultural models and frames Kansans employ when presented with the topic of commercialism in schools. This “mapping exercise” revealed several patterns that guide Kansans' thinking on the issue; two of these observed patterns do not lead to productive thinking on the issue, but several create opportunities to move the issue forward.

The directions explored in the cognitive interviews and ethnography are outlined and commented upon below, highlighting communication trip wires and opportunities, respectively.

Trip Wires:

1. Local Sponsorship, or “School-Raising” Frame

One of the problematic frames that guide Kansans' thinking when they are presented with the topic of commercial activity in schools is that of a natural partnership between two important

community institutions. Schools create the community of workers that businesses depend on, and so it seems natural and appropriate that business provide support to these important community institutions. The relationship of mutual support is seen as so natural and commonsensical that the relationship does not call out for scrutiny, even when businesses benefit from partnership or sponsorship. In fact, when business is portrayed as the Decent Merchant or Iconic Citizen⁷, any benefit to a business for its contribution or sponsorship to a local school is seen as a key component in this “win-win” situation. There are several counterproductive effects of this pattern of thinking.

First, the natural and familiar idea of schools and businesses working together for the betterment of the local community is often overextended and applied to more complex or sophisticated commercial partnerships in schools. For example:

The [local] schools had Coca-Cola-bought billboards and stuff like that and it really made an impact on our sport stadiums . . . And then I know another district that does stuff with CiCi's Pizza, which is more local . . . For districts that don't have that deal with Coca-Cola or don't have that opportunity, they're still dealing with their antiquated stuff. - Coach with school-age children⁸

This quote from an interview subject attests to the general finding that Kansans tend not to distinguish between local and national corporations when considering commercial activity in schools. In other words, the Decent Merchant frame is extended to multi-national corporations. This certainly has distorting effects, particularly as it appoints corporations to the role of “levelers of inequity” – so that forming relationships with multi-national corporations may be better than with local businesses because they have more resources to make available to strapped schools.

Second, because schools are thought of as foundations of communities, thinking about schools in general is approached from a quite localized vantage point. As mentioned, this has implications for thinking about business-school partnerships, but it has other distorting effects as well. Thinking in this frame obscures the role of any non-community actors or larger contextual forces that may impact the educational experience of students and the success or failure of local schools. In short, the roles of non-local government and larger socioeconomic trends are missing.

Third, when businesses are considered Iconic Citizens and Decent Merchants, essentially idealized pillars of the community, the profit motive at work in any business activity is ignored. There is, in other words, blindness to corporate intentions.⁹

In sum, the strongly held and idealized notion of schools and businesses as partners in community life reinforces patterns of thinking that make it difficult for Kansans to understand problems associated with commercial activity in schools. Communicators should take note, therefore, that any narratives dependent on the public's critical regard of business will violate this frame and be rejected out of hand.

2. Ubiquity of Advertising Frame

The key elements of this frame are a triumvirate of basic “truths” related to commercial culture and applied to thinking about the impact of commercialization in schools.¹⁰

- Marketing and advertising is essentially unavoidable. It pervades the “real world.”

- Schools cannot and should not try to be shelters from the real world.
- Insofar as negative influences of marketing to children are considered, parents are responsible for countering that influence, not schools

Not only do people feel helpless in the face of unavoidable advertising, but the ubiquity of the advertising frame leads them to conclude that it is unnatural for schools to attempt to be commercial-free zones, or to essentially bar the doors against the influences of modern life. The mere suggestion of schools as commercial-free zones was met with assessments of the notion as “fantastical”, “pointless”, “inconceivable”, and even “harmful” to kids:

*(T)hey’ve got to know life. Outside of school, what do they know? I mean, if the school’s going to shelter them to where they don’t know what **real life** is, then they’re not going to make it. They have to be aware of what’s out there to prepare them for the rest of the world.*

Mother of pre-schooler¹¹

Interestingly, the ubiquity of advertising frame also gives way to questions of advertising’s effectiveness. For example:

We’re so programmed for commercials anyway. You know, you’re either going to watch them or you’re not and they were the same ones seen on TV, so I never saw any conflict between the news and the advertisement on Channel One.

School administrator¹²

Coupled with the earlier finding of a strong Local Sponsorship frame that obscures consideration of the ulterior motives of business, the omnipresence of advertising may render it harmless in the public’s mind. Advertising is seen as simply part of the landscape of modern life, and needs nothing beyond common sense and good judgment to negotiate. Therefore, communicators who attempt to tackle the culture of commercialism writ large will be on a fool’s errand in the eyes of the public, as that would entail changing the entirety of the culture. Attempting to isolate children from this essential learning experience of negotiating real world demands will, it is reasoned, hurt children. Therefore, schools have no responsibility beyond providing choices, e.g., having some fruit juice in the vending machine so that the “solution” of choosing well can be realized.

Reasoning within that frame, the only solution conceivable to lessening the impact of commercial culture, if that is desired, is for parents to ensure that children learn to make good choices. In other words, if children fall prey to advertising’s effects, responsibility lies with parents, not advertisers, and certainly not schools. Prior research by the Frameworks Institute aligns with this tendency to assign responsibility to parents for many problems in community culture and public policies. Across children’s issues, we have found that barriers to systemic thinking are driven by the dominant frame on children’s issues – that of the Family Bubble as the unique province for all child outcomes. Reasoning in this frame, both the origin and course of children’s development are positioned within the confines of the private environment of the family. Considerations of the impact of public environments and extra-familial actors on a child’s development are not easily accessible when reasoning within this frame. Further, negative child outcomes are explained with reference to the widely available stereotype of the Deficient Parent.¹³

Opportunities:

This stage of the research did produce two potential directions for shifting the public dialogue in advocates' favor, as it revealed some promising but salient frames in the public's current thinking about the issue. We refer to these as the *Unwanted Influences* and the *Schools as Protective Space* frames. These two frames are summarized below, but are developed in more detail in the discussion of tested reframes in the section that follows.

As mentioned previously, most Kansans simply do not see the harm in school commercialization. Establishing the consequences of commercialism appears to be an important prerequisite for policy thinking. Indeed, analysis of the cognitive interviews suggested that, in order for communicators to motivate the public to support restrictions on commercial activity in schools, it will be important to raise people's awareness of the harm that can result from children's exposure to marketing in school. How might that be accomplished? One might imagine that the popular debate about vending machines in schools would offer traction here, given it opened a window of opportunity to discuss the presence of harmful products in an environment that promotes health (schools). We found, however, that the topic of vending machines is likely to lead people to think that as long as schools aren't promoting harmful products, then that is sufficient.

Findings from the cognitive interviews suggest that one of the most promising avenues is to show how commercialism in schools may be in conflict with widely held Kansas values. In other words, Kansans were often willing to see that advertising and market forces increase materialism by equating status with products. Kansans were also concerned about advertising's influence on children's self-image, particularly via the sexualization of girls' fashions. When thinking from this perspective of Unwanted Influences, Kansans are able to speak at some length about the negative aspects of marketing and advertising to children, and the Ubiquity and Harmlessness of Advertising frame begins to break down.

Once in this mindset, people are able to focus on ways to potentially limit advertising exposure on children. They think most readily about limiting television, blocking access to inappropriate web content, etc., but this message could be extended to apply to commercial exposure in schools. In fact, several subjects identified a contradiction between schools' mission of teaching students critical thinking and healthy living, and the reality of bombarding them with advertising. From this perspective, it is easier to see the intentions of business as, at least in part, unacceptable targeting of children for profit. The "win-win" thinking regarding school-business partnerships breaks down due to the consideration that some forms of advertising may be one-sided, profit-driven Unwanted Influences on kids in the Protective Space of our schools.

When people are sensitized to the potential harm of commercial marketing, it is possible for them to consider that, like other potentially harmful influences, marketing ought to be excluded from school grounds. When thinking along these lines, Kansans were able to see that school is not just another place where children are exposed to advertising, but could understand schools as a specific marketplace for corporate aims. In this way the issue of commercialism gets concretized in a very helpful way. No longer are people thinking there is nothing to be done because consumerism infuses every aspect of our culture. Instead, they are able to consider that marketing to children in schools may, in fact, be a betrayal of the special mission of schools to keep children safe and encourage their healthy development.

In sum, this early round of research strongly recommended that any effective reframe would need to further develop and refine these notions of Unwanted Influences and Schools as Protective Space.

Reframing Experiments: Focus Groups

Focus Groups

In the focus group phase of this research, FrameWorks operationalized and tested three alternative frames derived both from the earlier qualitative work on this project, and from extensive FrameWorks research on other relevant social issues (early childhood development, government, food and fitness, to name a few). Focus groups allow us to test what is possible in group discussion, i.e., which frames may have emerged in cognitive interviews that cannot be sustained within the more rigorous requirements of public discourse. For example, we adapted a number of metaphorical models¹⁴ from previous research to help concretize school commercialization as a potential problem for Kansas communities. These included: (1) *Brain Architecture*, or the idea that early experiences shape the developing brain and lay down either a sturdy or weak foundation for all subsequent learning and skills; and (2) *Public Structures*, or the idea that America's success is a result of the effectiveness of our civic institutions, such as laws, highways, health and safety agencies, and schools and colleges, the machinery that produces American success and quality of life.

Further, we identified several additional frame elements¹⁵ that were incorporated into the test frames that sought to provide a new narrative from which to consider the impact of commercial activity in schools. These included a number of potentially salient Values (Opportunity, Future, Responsible Management and Protection), Simplifying Models (noted above), Policy Solutions, and Messengers (scientist, businesswoman, pediatrician). These and other frame elements were combined into three distinct narrative reframes, and are designated as (1) the Unwanted Influences/Toxic Influences Frame; (2) the Schools as Protective Space Frame; and (3) the Harmful Marketing Frame.¹⁶ These test reframes, developed in the form of op/eds, are summarized below:

- (1) *Unwanted/Toxic Influences*: The new narrative tested here is about the toxicity of advertising given children's developmental vulnerabilities. It addressed both young children's vulnerability as regards their cognitive limitations in discerning the content from the persuasive nature of ads, and also adolescents' vulnerability as regards the impact of advertising on self-image and identity formation. This frame comprises the following elements: *Values* of Future and Opportunity for Healthy Development; *Issue Category* of Child Development; the *Simplifying Model* of Brain Architecture; *Policy Solutions* are to limit exposure to commercial messages in school, e.g., disallow reading or competitive programs that are sponsored by corporations and linked to product rewards; and, finally, the *Messenger* is a Scientist.
- (2) *Schools as Protective Space*: The new narrative explored in this frame focuses on marketing as a betrayal of the mission of the public school, i.e. it is a violation of the American value of public education to have schools act as captive marketplaces for business. This frame comprises the following elements: *Values* of Responsible Management; *Issue Category* is Public School Environment; the *Simplifying Model* of Public Structures; *Policy Solutions* are to set and enforce parameters or standards for business' influence in schools; the *Messenger* is a businesswoman/parent.

(3) *Harmful Marketing*: The new narrative explored in this frame is the notion that society relies on its public institutions to set and enforce the regulations that will protect citizens from physical harm. When we learned the negative health effects of tobacco on kids, for example, we required industry to stop marketing to kids. This frame comprises the following elements: *Values* of Protection; *Issue Category* is Public Health; the *Analogy* of Tobacco Regulation; *Policy Solutions* are to require lunch and snack menus at school to eliminate junk food; the *Messenger* is a pediatrician.

These three frames were presented to focus group participants in the form of newspaper op-ed articles and were titled, respectively, “How Advertising in Schools Hurts Our Kids,” “When Business is a Bad Strategy for Schools,” and “Protect America’s Most Captive Audience: School Children.” The results we address here highlight which aspects of the frames, as executed, were found to work well and which aspects may be in need of further refinement. We address each article in turn (note that the sequence of article presentation was rotated by focus group to avoid possible order effect). The articles in their entirety are provided at the end of this MessageMemo, and can also be found, along with a complete review of responses to the various frame elements, in the focus group research report.¹⁷

(1) *Unwanted/Toxic Influences Frame*

Extensive research by the FrameWorks Institute on early childhood issues has revealed that the public lacks an understanding of the mechanism of child development.¹⁸ FrameWorks established that a critical element of any frame for communicating early childhood issues is a simplifying model¹⁹ of the “how” of child development. In other words, the simplifying model for child development is a distillation of the scientific expertise on child development that is communicated in a metaphorical form that the public can easily understand. That simplifying model is the notion that early experiences affect the developing *architecture* of the maturing brain. **In the case of the Unwanted Influences Frame, we attempted to show how exposure to advertising at key stages in the formation of that brain architecture could have problematic consequences.**

Several elements of this execution of the Unwanted Influences frame appeared to work well. First, when exposed to this frame, focus group participants were able to consider and articulate the business motives operable in advertising to children in schools. Second, the frame engendered thinking that because parents teach children to be attentive in the school environment, what happens within school walls might be particularly persuasive to children. Given that the earlier stages of the research identified how difficult it would be to sensitize Kansans to the ulterior motives of business activity in schools (due to the salience of the Local Sponsorship frame), it is no small feat that this frame was able to break through that dominant pattern of thinking. Further, there was overwhelming support for the scientist’s credibility as a messenger in explaining the interaction of market influences and developmental vulnerabilities of children.

This frame is, however, not without its obstacles, all of which were identified as such in earlier stages of the research, but which are certainly capable of being addressed in refined executions

of the frame. First, the fact that commercialization is *not a topic* in Kansans' minds had an impact on receptivity to this frame. Low awareness of the existence of commercial activity in schools led some focus group participants to suggest that it is not happening in their schools.

I don't recall seeing any corporate logos or anything like that in gymnasiums, or along the playing fields. As far as I thought, advertising wasn't allowed in school –Male, Public School Group, Wichita.²⁰

I didn't know the schools could make a deal to include advertising. I guess I need to find out what my school is doing. –Female, Public School Group, Wichita.²¹

This suggests that Kansans will need to be shown concrete examples of commercial activity in schools. In fact, the focus group participants themselves called out for clear examples at the local level (e.g., uniform logos, corporate-sponsored programs such as book drives, pouring rights/vending machines, etc). This adds another important pre-requisite to the reframing task: both prevalence and consequence are necessary to public thinking before school commercialism can be readily understood as a public problem.

Second, analysis of the focus group findings revealed that there was a good deal of push back on the assertion that older children are susceptible, though in qualitatively different ways than younger children, to manipulation by advertisers. Given the public's lack of awareness of the cognitive and social developmental capacities of adolescents, we did not find this surprising and feel that it can be resolved in further executions of the frame by providing more concrete examples of the degree of cognitive and emotional susceptibility in older children. The frame, as executed here, referred only to the domain of decision-making during adolescence, which may have not been sufficiently demonstrable.

(2) Schools as Protective Space Frame

The rationale for the Schools as Protective Space frame is grounded in two specific ideas. The first is based on prior research by the FrameWorks Institute that revealed a widely held public belief that schools are environments in which children should be kept physically safe. The second idea was generated by findings from the cognitive interviews that suggest that, once Kansans are sensitized to potential harmful effects of commercial activity in schools, protecting children from such influences during school time becomes much “easier to think”. A strategic decision was made in the application of this frame to offer a policy solution that would not run up against the obstacle of the dominant Local Sponsorship frame. To that effect, we did not suggest that all corporate influence in school be removed via regulation, but that corporate involvement in schools should be the purview of responsible managers. **The Schools as Protective Space frame attempted to invigorate notions of schools as places of learning with goals of producing a competent citizenry, and that captive marketing in this environment may be a betrayal of both children and the mission of public schools.**

Analyses of the frame's effects point to its success in moving the public beyond acceptance of the dominant frame of the Ubiquity of Advertising, and also proved to inoculate against the distorting effects of the Local Sponsorship frame. The Schools as Protective Space frame

stimulated conversations in which participants a) expressed concern about the presence of advertising in schools, b) showed interest in drawing a line for marketing in schools at the point of allowing only “positive” products (e.g., healthy foods and educational products and services), and c) accepted the notion that responsible managers should be monitoring the market activity in schools. For example:

I think that schools need to stop taking money from places like pop companies, chip companies, and vending companies, even if it does give them the money to build things. The cost is too high. Schools do have a captive audience, especially when you have an eight year old that sees a Coke machine outside her classroom every day. You tell your kids that pop is not good for you, but then they see that Coke machine sitting outside right their classrooms. –Female, Private School Group, Salina²².

There should be a standards committee in the schools that is going to say, “Our kids can watch this or that.” It has to be on the local level. – Male, Public School Group, Wichita²³

In other words, the frame succeeded in trumping the dominant notions that, because advertising is a fact of life in the “real world,” nothing beyond parental guidance about healthy and productive choices is possible or required. This frame was able to move Kansans beyond seeing the solution in individual choice alone; by contrast, cognitive interview subjects had argued that the solution to the “problem” of marketing in school was to ensure positive or healthy choices were among the offerings - not just colas, but fruit juices in vending machines. Further, cognitive interview subjects argued that it would be harmful to kids to eliminate unhealthy choices altogether because then, “How could they learn to choose well?” In the focus groups, however, the Schools as Protective Space frame overcame perceptions that individual and parental responsibility are the only solutions to negotiating commercialization.

If schools have this advertisement, then our kids will think that this is okay also, and that it is what they should believe in. – Male, Public School Group, Wichita²⁴.

In addition, by including a concrete example of for-profit, commercial influence in the classroom (in the form of Channel One programming in classrooms), participants were able to weigh the pros and cons of the conceptual price tag of this kind of school-business partnership. Participants were highly concerned with the amount of instructional time lost due to advertising segments required by the Channel One programming partnership. Finally, putting forward a parent-businesswoman as the messenger of this narrative proved effective. Focus group participants found his messenger informed, objective, and able to offer insight into the ramifications of confounding the goals of the marketplace with the mission of public schools.

We again found that the fact that commercialization is *not a topic* in Kansans’ minds had an impact on receptivity to this frame. It is important to note, however, that after exposure to this frame, participants began to generate ideas and ask questions about whether certain familiar instances of school-business partnerships represented “advertising” as defined, albeit implicitly, in the article. It is clear that communicators should offer concrete examples of what activities and relationships do, in fact, represent profit-driven marketing to a captive audience, and how public

solutions map on to that problem of advertising in schools. Participants in the focus groups did not readily recognize corporate donations and school-business workforce development programs as corporate advertising activities. We suggest offering more traditional forms of advertising as examples (e.g., logos on school uniforms, ads on school buses or books, corporate signage on school grounds, product giveaways and incentives, etc). This will be necessary to remove the obstacle created by the public's receptivity to the notion of schools' creative, entrepreneurial efforts to secure funding by appealing to business sponsorship – a notion that often works to obscure the potential adverse effects of corporate influence in schools. Thus, a third reframing pre-requisite emerges from the focus group research: concrete examples must be used to define the broader category of advertising and commercialization.

(3) Harmful Marketing Frame

We learned from the cognitive elicitations that the topic of vending machines in schools was unlikely to extend to the issue of school commercialization more broadly. The increasing public concern, however, regarding junk food sales in schools and schools' roles in the rising obesity epidemic, suggested that there may be benefit in crafting a frame that could leverage these compelling health concerns in a way that connects the influence of harmful marketing in schools to the larger “junk food problem.” Some advocates had suggested a compelling analogy via the successful framing of tobacco as a dangerous product from which children should be protected, and we decided to test its power by incorporating it into the frame. **The Harmful Marketing frame suggests that schools, as public institutions on which we depend to set and enforce health standards, should eliminate the promotion of products known to be harmful to our children's health.**

As we found with the other two frames presented to focus group participants, many Kansans simply do not see advertising as a problem in their schools. This was also the case with the Harmful Marketing Frame regarding the specific case of junk food; many participants did not see junk food as a problem in their local schools. What was interesting, however, was that the focus in this frame on junk food allowed participants a tangible example of commercial activity in schools, and here led to discussions of the topic of school commercialization more broadly. This is, clearly, in contrast to what the cognitive interviews revealed regarding the problem with the narrowness of scope in the vending machine problem. One possible explanation for this apparent contradiction is that the cognitive interview subjects were not exposed to a fully developed frame, simply “topics” related to the broader issue of school commercialization. In the case of the focus group research, the participants were dealing with the arguably narrow topic of junk food within the context of a larger frame and other salient frame elements, such as the tobacco analogy, the value of Protection, and the expression of concern from a pediatrician Messenger. It is also possible that the group dynamic of the focus group itself drew from the pervasiveness of news coverage on junk food to create and reinforce this topic as common ground.

There were many examples from the discussions that indicate the salience of the tobacco analogy. Tobacco companies are large corporations with a history of manipulative advertising practices, including those targeting children. The iteration of this idea in the tested frame was as such:

When we learned the negative health effects of tobacco, we required the tobacco industry to stop marketing to children. If the tobacco industry proposed placing ads for cigarettes on school buses or book covers, there would be an immediate protest, because such advertising sends a message to children that smoking is acceptable. Advertisements from junk food companies, whose products also harm children's health, should not be held to a lower standard.

With this case in mind, it becomes easy for Kansans to think that the negative health consequences of junk food may require similarly stringent marketing parameters from its corporate producers. The dominance of the Local Sponsorship frame, which, in part, includes an idealized notion of business as iconic citizens, is overcome by the commercialization exemplar of Big Tobacco:

For one thing, I agree with this statement "advertisements from junk food companies, whose products also harm children's health, should not be held to a lower standard." Look where the tobacco people were put at! The junk food companies need to be held to the same type of standards to help our children. –Female, Private School Group, Salina.²⁵

It wasn't new but it was powerful. He made some good points that made me think. Why not do with food what we did with the tobacco? –Female, Public School Group, Kansas City.²⁶

The Harmful Marketing frame encouraged participants to consider the role schools should play in the healthy development of their children. Nonetheless, given the strong dominant frame of the Family Bubble, communicators will have to be strategic in elevating the public contours of the problem so that the public does not default to parental guidance as the lone solution to the problem of marketing to children. This will require drawing connections between concrete examples, such as the presence of unhealthy foods in school meals, and policy solutions that can be shown to contribute to healthier outcomes for kids.

A final note on this frame regards one of the policy solutions included for consideration, that of schools instituting "health literacy" programs that would teach children about the health dangers of junk food and help them discern when they are being manipulated by advertisers. Although Kansans were receptive to the idea of such educational programs, the terminology of "health literacy" proved difficult for focus group participants to grasp without further explication by the focus group moderator. We would urge communicators to steer clear of jargon that may be typical in the discourse among policy experts and advocates but which may require a more vernacular description for the public.

Recommendations for Reframing

Our research in Kansas suggests a number of strategies that, if effectively deployed, can encourage critical thinking about the impact of commercial activity in schools on both children and on school environments. Effective frames can take a variety of narrative forms, but should accomplish the following five objectives:

- 1. Establish commercial activity in schools *as an issue* by showing its prevalence, impact, and by offering concrete examples of what constitutes commercialism. These are the three “pre-requisites” to policy thinking.**

Examples:

- *Promotion of junk food in schools is more prevalent today than ever before. Advertising practices such as corporate-sponsored book covers and meal plans designed by fast-food companies are now common. Nearly 20 percent of schools offer brand-name fast food, and vending machines filled with junk dominate school hallways.*
 - *A range of for-profit, commercial influences is greeting Kansas children in their classrooms. [One example is ChannelOne, a soft “news” television program that, in return for leasing schools a satellite dish, VCRs, and TV sets, requires that schools air their daily twelve-minute broadcasts. A full two minutes of each daily broadcast is devoted to product advertising - mostly junk food and video games - that must be shown under the terms of the contract. The price tag for these advertising spots rivals those sold during the Super Bowl]. Companies are spending lots of money to advertise their products to the captive audience of our kids at school. Not only is our children’s school time being traded for product marketing, but new research shows that this actually costs taxpayers money. [The Economic Policy Institute found that Channel One costs taxpayers \$1.8 billion annually in lost instructional time.]* We realize Channel One, per se, may not be a viable example in all communities, but insert this here as an example of how to draw the links between purposeful advertising to children and the potential costs to children and schools*
- 2. Do not assume the public has developed critical skills with respect to corporate influences on public life. To the contrary, communicators should redirect attention away from the Local Sponsorship Frame by expressly highlighting the fact that companies have specific profit-oriented motives for pursuing in-school advertising and they are not just being *good citizens* by “supporting” schools.”²⁷**

Examples:

- *In order to ensure that the education our children receive is of the highest value, we must be vigilant about defining and enforcing exactly what should constitute a legitimate contribution from the for-profit sector. When you confuse the goals of the marketplace with the common good goals of a public structure like our school system, it’s a bad strategy for everyone.*
- *We can all agree that we want the best for our children. High-quality education takes a commitment to maintaining our schools as a place of learning, not of consumer profit.*

- *Blatant commercialism such as advertisements on buses and book covers, or logos on school uniforms don't improve achievement test scores, and they don't teach our children the values they need to learn.*
- 3. Challenge people's tendency to think that the ubiquity of advertising in our culture limits advertising's effectiveness. Explain the developmental vulnerabilities in both young children and adolescents that make children particular prey to the wiles of clever marketers at different stages of development.**

Examples:

- *Recent research on the impact of advertising on children's development suggests that we put our children's healthy development at risk when we allow them to be bombarded with product advertising during key stages in the formation of their brain architecture. Children under roughly age 8 are not yet able to understand the motives of commercial advertising, yet billions of dollars are spent in marketing products to very young kids. And every day, a great deal of this is happening in our public schools.*
 - *By design, advertising manipulates children into equating materialism with success, and products with status. In fact, a new report from the American Psychological Association indicates that the media's sexualization of young women has been intensifying, with a number of negative consequences. The study concluded that this image marketing contributes to eating disorders, body dissatisfaction, low self-esteem, depressive mood, and even physical health problems.*
- 4. Provide a powerful new organizing principle that emphasizes the mission of public schools:**
- a) To overcome the perceived impenetrability of advertising's effects one must explain how corporate messages can have particular influence in school environments, as children are more attentive in places they rightfully believe to be *safe and protected* learning environments.**

Example:

- *When young children are exposed to a corporate marketing message in school, they learn that message in the same way they learn their educational lesson. An ad telling kids that the latest videogame is necessary for their happiness has the same formative effect on a young child's brain development as a school poster teaching them their ABCs.*

b) Emphasize the “contradiction between schools’ *mission* of teaching students critical thinking and healthy living on the one hand, and the reality of bombarding students with advertising and surrounding them with temptations (many of them unhealthy) on the other.”²⁸

Examples:

- *We may not be able to control how companies market to children outside of schools, but what we can and should do is eliminate the promotion of harmful products within our public educational system. Children need to be taught that good health matters. When*

schools allow corporations to market unhealthy food to students, they learn just the opposite. We should work together to eliminate junk food promotion in our schools, by requiring that corporate sponsors of any food program in schools meet a specific and uniform health standard.

- *Advertising in our schools that promotes consumerism and unhealthy behavior should be replaced with messages that promote physical, psychological and academic well-being. Only then will children be able to clearly distinguish positive messages - those that come from people who care about their healthy development - from those that are designed to build brand loyalty.*
- 5. Offer a practical, reasonable solution rather than advocating a complete elimination of corporate involvement in schools (i.e., the local *responsible manager* approach).**

Example:

It is our duty as responsible managers of our schools to ask what direct and measurable impact corporate deals have on our children's learning. That doesn't mean shutting all business out of schools entirely. In fact, there are many creative partnerships between business and schools that contribute to student's growth and development

Given these findings, the outline for a new narrative emerges, one that is distinctly different from the way the media have been framing the issue, and one that will require the following strategies for effective reframing on the issue of school commercialization:
(Table, next page)

The Story Being Told	The Story You Need to Tell
Commercialism is not a topic	Show concrete examples of commercial activity in schools
Companies are good citizens – Decent Merchant/Iconic Citizens	Companies have different motives from schools – profit/brand and consumer loyalty
Schools are Businesses	Schools and business have different goals and responsibilities
Children aren't susceptible to advertising's effects, or children become desensitized over time	Exposure to advertising at key stages in the formation of the brain's architecture can have problematic consequences
Marketing is harmless	Raise people's awareness of harm/Marketing conflicts with basic Kansas values
Marketing is unavoidable/Advertising is a fact of life	Schools as Protective Space/Schools can and should draw lines for marketers who have a captive audience in students
Schools shouldn't shelter children from real world	Schools as Protective Space
Parents are the solution	Responsible management of public structures by all citizens is the solution
Values of Choice/Freedom	Values of Protection/Responsible Management

Lynn Davey
FrameWorks Institute

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Lynn Davey, Ph.D. is Vice President for Field Building at the FrameWorks Institute. The FrameWorks Institute is a nonprofit organization whose purpose is to advance the nonprofit sector's communications capacity by identifying, translating and modeling relevant scholarly research for framing the public discourse about social problems. FrameWorks designs, commissions, manages and publishes communications research to prepare nonprofit organizations to expand their constituency base, to build public will, and to further public understanding of specific social issues. In addition to working closely with social policy experts familiar with the specific issue, its work is informed by a team of communications scholars and practitioners who are convened to discuss the research problem, and to work together in outlining potential strategies for advancing remedial policies. Its work is based on an approach

called Strategic Frame Analysis™, a multi-method, iterative approach to the study of public opinion. FrameWorks also critiques, designs, conducts and evaluate communications campaigns on social issues from this perspective. Recent projects focus on such diverse issues as early child development, youth development, health care reform, race, government, global education, children's oral health, global warming, the health of oceans, and transitional work. * * *

¹ Since, its establishment in 1999, FrameWorks has conducted the following major studies on issues related to children and families:

- A summary and analysis of recent survey research related to the public's attitudes toward adolescents, and six related issue areas: education, sex, substance abuse, violence, the influence of media, and juvenile justice (2000)
- 10 cognitive interviews with ordinary people to determine how they think about adolescents and adolescence (2000)
- A content analysis of the representations of adolescents in entertainment television (2000)
- A content analysis of local news about children's issues in six cities, assessing approximately 11,000 stories (2000)
- 6 focus groups with parents in three cities to probe their attitudes to youth (2000)
- A news content analysis of depictions of youth in TV news programming nationally and in six cities (2000)
- Media effects experiments to test hypotheses about the portrayal of youth at risk and exceptional teens (2001)
- 10 cognitive interviews with business leaders, exploring how they think about early child development and school readiness (2001)
- A national priming survey of 4,000 respondents to test the impact of potential reframes on the public's attitudes to youth and support for related policies (2002)
- 40 cognitive interviews with civically active adults in four states (AZ, KY, RI, WI), exploring how they think about school readiness in specific and early child development and learning in general (2002)
- 12 focus groups in AZ, CA, MA, KS/MO, NJ, VA, exploring understanding of school readiness and child development, and testing reframes (2002)
- Three comprehensive reviews of materials provided by child-focused organizations, on ECD, pre-K and school readiness, child abuse and neglect, in 2002, 2003, and 2004.
- Two meta-analyses of existing public opinion on school readiness and early child development (2002), followed by a focus on parents and parenting, children, development, discipline, child abuse, child sexual abuse and the political context for these issues, based on an exhaustive review of more than 100 surveys and focus group reports conducted within the past six years, as well as long-term trends (2003)
- "Talk Back Testing" of more than 400 informants to identify more powerful conceptual models for distilling the science of child development (2003)
- 22 cognitive interviews with parents, probing understanding of child abuse and neglect in Seattle and Philadelphia (2003)
- 6 focus groups in NH, GA and IL on children's issues, prevention and community responsibility (2003)
- 20 cognitive interviews with average citizens exploring their thinking about youth and after-school programs in MN (2004)
- 8 focus groups in MN with engaged citizens to retest attitudes to youth, and probe support for after-school programs in that state (2004)
- 2 focus groups in AZ on early child development and investment (2004)
- 2 focus groups in CT on early child development and prevention (2005)
- 2 focus groups with state legislators/executive staff in AZ (2005)
- Cognitive analysis of interviews conducted with OH state legislators (2005)
- 20 Cognitive elicitations and ethnographic micro-studies with legislators and staff in NH, ME, CT and RI (2005)
- 2 focus groups with state legislators in SC (2006)

- 2 focus groups with state legislators in KS (2006)
- “Talk Back Testing” of 72 informants nationwide to convey the idea of Interaction (2007)

² For more on these investigations, see research posted at www.frameworksinstitute.org

³ Bales, S. “Framing Public Issues: The FrameWorks Toolkit.” (2002). Washington, D.C. FrameWorks Institute (2002) at www.frameworksinstitute.org.

⁴ Aubrun, A, Brown, A., Grady, J. (2007). Patterns in Newspaper Coverage of School Commercialization: A FrameWorks Research Report. Washington DC: FrameWorks Institute.

⁵ For more on this frame, see “Talking Health Care in Arizona” CD-Rom published by FrameWorks Institute.

⁶ Aubrun, A, Brown, A., Grady, J. (2007). Patterns in Newspaper Coverage of School Commercialization: A FrameWorks Research Report. Washington DC: FrameWorks Institute.

⁷ Aubrun, A, Brown, A., Grady, J., Scull, C. (2007). Keeping Our Schools Afloat: Findings from Cognitive Elicitations on School Commercialization in Kansas. A FrameWorks Research Report. Washington DC: FrameWorks Institute.

⁸ *ibid*

⁹ *ibid*

¹⁰ *ibid*

¹¹ *ibid*

¹² *ibid*

¹³ For more on these frames, see “Talking Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention,” CD-Rom published by FrameWorks Institute for Prevent Child Abuse America (2004).

¹⁴ For more on simplifying models as an element of the frame, see FrameWorks eZine # 19: <http://www.frameworksinstitute.org/products/issue19framing.shtml>

¹⁵ For a fuller explanation of elements of the frame, see “A Five Minute Refresher Course in Framing” (FrameWorks Ezine #8) at <http://www.frameworksinstitute.org/products/issue8framing.shtml> or “Framing Public Issues,” also at this website.

¹⁶ Bovitz Research Group (2007). Discussion School Commercialization: A Focus Group Report about Kansans’ Views of Corporate Advertising in Public and Private Schools. A FrameWorks Research Report. Washington, DC: FrameWorks Institute.

¹⁷ *ibid*

¹⁸ For more on the Early Childhood Research, see a full list of FrameWorks Institute research reports at: <http://www.frameworksinstitute.org/products/ecdreports.shtml>

¹⁹ For more on simplifying models as an element of the frame, see FrameWorks eZine #19: <http://www.frameworksinstitute.org/products/issue19framing.shtml>

²⁰ Bovitz Research Group (2007). Discussion School Commercialization: A Focus Group Report about Kansans’ Views of Corporate Advertising in Public and Private Schools. A FrameWorks Research Report. Washington, DC: FrameWorks Institute.

²¹ *ibid*

²² *ibid*

²³ *ibid*

²⁴ *ibid*

²⁵ *ibid*

²⁶ *ibid*

²⁷ *ibid*

²⁸ Aubrun, A, Brown, A., Grady, J., Scull, C. (2007). Keeping Our Schools Afloat: Findings from Cognitive Elicitations on School Commercialization in Kansas. A FrameWorks Research Report. Washington DC: FrameWorks Institute.

How Advertising in Schools Hurts Our Kids

A sound investment in our society's future requires that all children have the opportunity to develop intellectually, socially and emotionally. And science now tells us that children's physical, social and learning experiences all affect the developing architecture of the maturing brain. Because child development is the foundation for community development, we all have a stake in providing our kids with the relationships and experiences that literally wire the brain for all future learning and development.

Recent research on the impact of advertising on children's development suggests that we put our children's healthy development at risk when we allow them to be bombarded with product advertising during key stages in the formation of this brain architecture. Children under roughly age 8 are not yet able to understand the motives of commercial advertising, yet billions of dollars are spent in marketing products to very young kids. And every day, a great deal of this is happening in our public schools.

When young children are exposed to a corporate marketing message in school, they learn that message in the same way they learn their educational lesson. An ad telling kids that the latest videogame is necessary for their happiness has the same formative effect on a young child's brain development as a school poster teaching them their ABCs.

Marketing campaigns also have negative effects on older children, even if those children are able to understand an ad's true intention. That's because a host of structural changes in the architecture of the human brain also occur during the critical years of adolescence. The last area of the brain to mature is the part capable of sound decision-making, "I'll finish my homework, I'll save my allowance, etc." The parts of the brain responsible for things like thrill seeking and impulsive behavior are getting turned on in big ways around the time of puberty, but the parts for exercising judgment are still maturing throughout the course of adolescence.

By design, advertising manipulates viewers into accepting a certain image of cool and material success as they weave messages of empowerment and liberation around their hustling of commodities on our kids. In fact, a new report from the American Psychological Association indicates that the media's sexualization of young women has been intensifying, with a number of negative consequences. The study concluded that this image marketing actually impairs cognitive performance in young women, contributes to eating disorders, body dissatisfaction, low self-esteem, depressive mood, and even physical health problems.

We must do a better job of protecting children from these harmful influences, because it is an unequal contest: adept, money-laden adult marketing experts against intellectually naïve, unformed children still developing the skills needed to cope with a grown up world. What can we do? We can start by keeping corporate marketing out of our schools. We could prevent schools from engaging in programs sponsored by corporations that are linked to product rewards from the company. We could disallow showing television news programs in our classroom that

require schools agree to including advertising segments during the programs. We should be able to depend on schools to promote, not undermine, children's healthy development. Advertising that promotes consumerism and unhealthy behavior should be replaced with messages that promote physical, psychological and academic well being. Only then will children be able to clearly distinguish positive messages - those that come from people who care about their healthy development - from those that are designed solely to take their money. .

Catherine Kelly, Ph.D. is the John D. and Alic T. Morrison Professor of Brain Science at Kansas State University.

Schools as Protective Space Frame:

When Business is a Bad Strategy for Schools

American public schools today have a more challenging job than in any other period of history. With high-stakes testing a norm in every district, and with the high expectations that come from an information-rich, technology savvy society, our children have significantly different challenges than their counterparts in earlier decades. As the main public structure tasked with stewarding the next generation in America, the public school system is entrusted with public funds to help young people learn the skills that will eventually enable them to contribute to the economy and strengthen their communities.

That requires schools, as public entities, to act as counterpoints to commercial culture, not as subsidiaries. Unfortunately, in classrooms across America, children are being greeted by a range of for-profit, commercial influences. One example is ChannelOne, a soft "news" television program that, in return for leasing schools a satellite dish, VCRs, and TV sets, requires that schools air their daily twelve minute broadcasts. A full two minutes of each daily broadcast is devoted to product advertising - mostly junk food and video games - that must be shown under the terms of the contract. The price tag for these advertising spots rivals those sold during the Super Bowl. Companies are spending lots of money to advertise their products to the captive audience of our kids at school. Not only is our children's school time being traded for product marketing, but new research shows that this actually costs taxpayers money. The Economic Policy Institute found that Channel One costs taxpayers \$1.8 billion annually in lost instructional time.

It is our duty as responsible managers of our schools to ask what direct and measurable impact corporate deals have on our children's learning. Blatant commercialism such as Channel One, or advertisements on buses and book covers, or logos on school uniforms don't improve achievement test scores, and they don't teach our children the values they need to learn.

That doesn't mean shutting all business out of schools entirely. In fact, there are many creative partnerships between business and schools that contribute to student's growth and development.

For example, in Cincinnati, businesses provide volunteers for service-oriented projects and charitable contributions toward earmarked projects promoting educational excellence. In Seattle, the business community identifies labor and skill shortages that are hampering their city's economic health and then crafts education and workforce initiatives to fill those shortages. The result is a win-win situation. Employers develop the workforce they need and Seattle residents gain access to career opportunities and higher incomes.

We can all agree that we want the best for our children. High-quality education takes a commitment to maintaining our schools as a place of learning, not of consumer profit. As a business owner, I believe that in order to ensure that the education our children receive is of the highest value, we must be vigilant about defining and enforcing exactly what should constitute a legitimate contribution from the for-profit sector. When you confuse the goals of the marketplace with the common good goals of a public structure like our school system, it's a bad strategy for everyone.

Deborah Whitney is a mother with children in the Kansas City public schools and CEO of Hammond Lumber and Builders.

Harmful Marketing Frame:

Protect America's Most Captive Audience: Schoolchildren

It's hardly news that kids and teens have become targets of corporate marketing. But a disturbing trend is that our children are increasingly inundated not just with toys and games, but with products that harm their health. And unfortunately, schools have become a preferred marketing outlet. We need to get on top of this trend before it harms the health of our kids. Promotion of junk food in schools is more prevalent today than ever before. Advertising practices such as corporate-sponsored book covers and meal plans designed by fast-food companies are now common. Nearly 20 percent of schools offer brand-name fast food, and vending machines filled with junk dominate school hallways.

As a result of these in-school marketing campaigns, about one-third of an average child's diet consists of junk food. So, it should come as no surprise that childhood obesity has more than doubled over the past twenty years, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Even when junk food does not cause any weight gain, it can lead to other health problems, including dental decay and osteoporosis. In the long term, poor nutrition can also lead to heart disease, liver disease, Type 2 diabetes and hypertension. Given the medical evidence, why are we still allowing the junk food industry to advertise to children in the very place they should be most protected – their schools?

When we learned the negative health effects of tobacco, we required the tobacco industry to stop marketing to children. If the tobacco industry proposed placing ads for cigarettes on school buses or book covers, there would be an immediate protest, because such advertising sends a message

to children that smoking is acceptable. Advertisements from junk food companies, whose products also harm children's health, should not be held to a lower standard.

We may not be able to control how companies market to children outside of schools, although there are some efforts to do so in Congress right now. But what we can and should do is eliminate the promotion of harmful products within our public educational system. Children need to be taught that good health matters. When schools allow corporations to market unhealthy food to students, they learn just the opposite.

At a time when physical education and nutrition education are being cut from school budgets, due to the demands of high-stakes testing, the effects can be even more profound. So we should work together to eliminate junk food promotion in our schools, by requiring that corporate sponsors of any food program in schools meet a specific and uniform health standard. And we should educate kids on how to decipher when they're being marketed to. Just as health classes in schools often include modules on the health dangers of smoking, so could they include broader "health literacy" programs that teach children about the health dangers of junk food, as well, and help kids discern when they are being manipulated by marketing campaigns. Protecting our schools from unhealthy intrusion would be a very productive step toward protecting the health of our children.

John Marsden, M.D, is a practicing pediatrician in Topeka.