

Baldwin

Name: James Baldwin Elementary School	Enrollment: 213
Address: 11725 1st Avenue NE	Nickname: Eagles
Configuration: K-5	Colors: Blue and white



Northgate, 2000 c.Mary Randlett SPSA 257-6

After World War II, as the economy boomed and growth in suburban Seattle accelerated, a new concept emerged to change the face of North America: the suburban shopping mall. America's first shopping center to be defined as a mall, Northgate Shopping Mall, opened in 1950 on the fringes of north Seattle. Northgate, a cluster of stores surrounded by ample parking with nearby highway access, became the model for regional shopping centers across the country. Northgate was an immediate success and led directly to growth in the surrounding area, both in terms of other businesses and new homes.

The rapid growth led to overcrowding at Haller Lake, Pinehurst, and Oak Lake, and forced the Shoreline School District to acquire a new elementary site in the Northgate area. The area was annexed into the City of Seattle in 1952. During summer 1953, the Seattle School District set up an all-portable school known as South Haller Lake School on the Shoreline District's site, known as Orr Park, at (N)E 120th and 1st Avenue NE. When the school opened in September 1953, it consisted of 14 portables and served 388 students.

The permanent name of Northgate School was chosen by the vast majority of the school's families, because of the school's proximity to the shopping center. It was officially named by the Seattle School Board on April 19, 1954. By September 1954, the school had grown to 465 students and three more portables were added.

Details:

Name: **Northgate Elementary School**
Location: 11725 1st Avenue NE
Building: 18-room concrete
Architect: Paul Thiry
Site: 5.8 acres

1956: Opened in June
1957-58: Site increased to 5.77 acres
1976: Closed June 9; reopened in September
2020: Name change to James Baldwin Elementary approved
2021: Construction began on replacement building (NAC Architects, BEX V)
2023: New school opened as James Baldwin Elementary School

During construction of a permanent building, a playground area stood between the portable school and the new building, which was located on the south half of the site. The new building, designed by noted architect Paul Thiry, had many modern architectural features, including a low-slung concrete roofline, generous overhang, aluminum windows, and precast siding. The kindergartners enjoyed their own private patio or schoolyard that was out of bounds to older children. In January 1958, Northgate became part of a pilot program that provided a reading-improvement librarian with time to work with select students. Thus, the library “became the heart of the school.”

During a March 25, 1966, ceremony, 25 Norway maples were planted around the upper playfield. With construction of the I-5 freeway just east of the school, and increasing commercial development around the shopping center, enrollment at Northgate had declined. In September 1966, Northgate received 25 pupils from the Central Area as part of the Voluntary Transfer Program. That number doubled by 1968. An accelerated program for high-achieving students also began in the mid-1960s. Children from surrounding schools entered at the beginning of the 2nd grade and took 2nd and 3rd grade in one year. In 1972-73, the enrollment totaled 335, including two

special education classes which were integrated into the student body for certain activities.

Faced with budget restrictions and declining attendance district wide, in 1973 the school board labeled Northgate for “possible closure” should the upcoming levy fail. The levy passed, but by spring 1973 the school again faced closure, and discussions continued through the next summer. After a subsequent double levy failure, in February 1976 the school board voted to close Northgate for one year and disperse its students to Haller Lake and Pinehurst. Northgate closed in June 1976 but reopened the following September after a court ruling (see Fairview). In accordance with the district’s desegregation plan, from 1978-88 Northgate was paired with Graham Hill and became K, 4-6 with the south-end school, which housed grades K-3.

In 2019, Seattle voters approved the BEX V capital levy, which included funds to replace the aging Northgate building with a new, two-story, 95,000-square-foot school building with space for up to 650 students. A collaborative process resulted in a sleek and attractive building designed to fit into the neighborhood. The NAC Architecture firm was selected to design the building. Construction began in 2021 and was completed in 2023. Most of the mature maple trees, planted in 1966, were protected and preserved as part of the project.



Northgate, 1960 SPSA 257-3

The new school is situated on the former playfields on the north side of the school property, allowing Northgate students to remain in the original building during the construction phase. The old building will be razed and replaced by an athletics field, play area, and commons upon completion of the new school.

In December 2020, Seattle Public Schools approved a proposal to rename the school James Baldwin Elementary School after completion of the new building. According to an SPS report, “Naming a building is a small gesture ... but it is significant. James Baldwin was not only one of the greatest American writers of all time, but he was also a person of color and a member of the LGBTQ+ community — for students who identify with either or both of these traditionally marginalized communities, this gesture brings a song to the school’s heart.”

Multicultural events are hosted throughout the year at Northgate to celebrate their diversity with 20 home languages spoken.