

## Eckstein

Name: Nathan Eckstein Middle School	Enrollment: 1,118
Address: 3003 NE 75th Street	Nickname: Eagles
Configuration: 6-8	Colors: Blue and white



Eckstein, 2000 ©Mary Randlett SPSA 104-6

Until the late 1930s, the northeastern Seattle area, which developed into the neighborhoods of View Ridge, Wedgwood, and Hawthorne Hills, was characterized by scattered farms and forested land. When the city's population began spreading to the suburbs, this area became a prime location for new homes, parks, and schools. With an eye to the future, the Seattle School Board in 1927 purchased five acres of property at NE 75th Street and 32nd Avenue NE from homesteader John Bloomquist. As late as 1944, the property was leased as horse pasture. The school was not built until 1950 because of the 1930 economic slowdown and the diversion of materials associated with World War II in the 1940s.

The original homestead claimant of the Eckstein site was Captain DeWitt Kenyon, a Civil War veteran. Many Civil War veterans moved west for available land grants. On the census of 1880 in Seattle, Kenyon's wife, Viola Kenyon, listed herself as a schoolteacher, which was notable for a married woman at the time. She taught the children of other homesteaders in a cabin on the claim property of William Weedon. The Weedon School, as it was called, is considered the predecessor to Bryant Elementary School (see Bryant).

Finally, in 1948, the site was expanded in preparation for construction, which began in March 1949. Selecting a name for the school, it seemed appropriate to honor Nathan Eckstein, who had died in 1945. He was a civic leader and longtime supporter of public education in Seattle who had emigrated with his parents from Germany. The family was among Seattle's earliest Jewish residents. Eckstein began working in a grocery store at the age of

## Details:

Name: **Nathan Eckstein Junior High School**

Location: 3015 NE 75th Street

Building: 38-room brick

Architect: William Mallis

Site: 14.1 acres

1950: Opened on September 6

1968: Addition (n.a.)

1971: Renamed Nathan Eckstein Middle School

1981: 1950 building designated City of Seattle landmark on June 17

2020: Seismic updates

14 when Klondike Gold Rush fever struck the city. He worked his way up to become Chief Executive Officer of Schwabacher and Co., a large grocery business, and eventually was named a trustee of the Seattle Chamber of Commerce. Eckstein served on the school board for seven years beginning in 1914, and in 1926 was named Seattle's "most useful citizen" by service clubs and community organizations for his civic contributions. The trophy given for this award is in the school district archives.

Nathan Eckstein Junior High School, designed in a Modernistic International Style, opened in September 1950 to 790 students. Nathan Eckstein's daughter, Joanna, was an honored guest when the school was dedicated on November 1, 1950.

Eckstein Junior High was equipped with modern features that distinguished it from older junior highs built in the late 1920s. Most striking was its curved, two-story facade with large windows and walls of glass bricks. The building contained a double gymnasium, spacious library, cafeteria, a large auditorium, and a "little theater."

Subsequent modifications to the site and use of space were based on changes in enrollment. Between 1950 and 1960, enrollment increased from 790 to a peak of 1,990. Some specialized rooms, such as the "little theater" and the stock room, were converted for classroom use. The playfield sacrificed space to portables, totaling 20 by 1960.

During this decade of growth, several pilot curriculum programs were developed at Eckstein in cooperation with the University of Washington's College of Education. Classes in mathematics, language arts, and social studies provided students with opportunities to learn at their own level. Foreign languages taught at this time were French, Spanish, German, and Latin (later replaced by Russian). Because of its extensive language program, Eckstein became the first junior high school in the district to have a completely equipped language lab, installed in 1960.

In March 1965, Eckstein received national publicity when an article on the school was published in an *Atlantic Monthly* series on outstanding American public schools. In 1968 a "modulux unit," a modular building with six classrooms, was installed at Eckstein.

In September 1971, Eckstein became a middle school along with Hamilton, Wilson, and Meany-Madrona, housing grades 6-8. As part of the district's middle school desegregation plan and Voluntary Racial Transfer program, groups of students from the Meany-Madrona area were bused to



Eckstein, 1960 SPSA 104-5

Eckstein. Sixty students came from Leschi and 143 from Madrona. Children from the Eckstein attendance area were transported to Meany-Madrona.

When the grade configuration changed, other changes were also made. A new roadrunner mascot was adopted, later replaced by the eagle, and the name of the newspaper changed from the N. E. News to the Eckstein Eye. Since the mid-1970s, American Sign Language was taught periodically. Eckstein was also home to the district school for deaf and hard-of-hearing middle school students until 2014, when the program moved to TOPS.

In 2001, the Eckstein playfield was upgraded with artificial turf, which is used extensively by the community.

For over 35 years, Eckstein has consistently had a thriving and award-winning music program. In 1998, the jazz band took second place at the Lionel Hampton Jazz Festival, a competition against high school students. More recently, the program won first place in the band category and the vocal jazz category at the 2019 Oak Park Music Festival. Cuauhtemoc Escobedo, a band teacher at Eckstein since 1994, has also been honored with multiple awards, including the 2019 Tenuto Award presented by the DeMiero Jazz Festival and the 2018 Jazz Education Achievement Award from Downbeat Magazine.

In 2019, sunshades were installed on the south-facing windows of the landmarked building, with funding from a Washington State Distressed Schools Grant.

Stanley Ann Dunham, President Barack Obama's mother, is a notable alum of Eckstein. She attended Eckstein before transferring to a neighboring district for high school.



Eckstein, 1965 SPSA 104-3