

Historical Overview

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This brief overview is designed to help readers place the history of individual schools within the larger context of Seattle School District history. Beginning in 1854, the years are divided into eras that reflect the changing profile of public education in Seattle.

Early Schooling in Pioneer Seattle, 1854-1861

The earliest period of education for American settlers in the town of Seattle consisted of a series of single-classroom schools. Teachers received a salary by collecting tuition from the students' families.

Catharine P. Blaine taught the first school session in Seattle at Bachelor's Hall in 1854 (see Blaine). Classes then moved to the Blaine home. After a brief period at Strickler Cottage, which was donated for use as a school, a succession of five teachers once again taught at Bachelor's Hall. In 1861, Asa Mercer taught a session at the new Territorial University Building.

The Early Years, 1862-1882

Seattle's public education was at first administered by a three-member board of directors elected by the town's residents at annual meetings held each November. Under the school board was a head teacher in charge of instruction. Although many of the earliest district records have not survived, available information suggests the initial school board formed in 1861 or 1862.

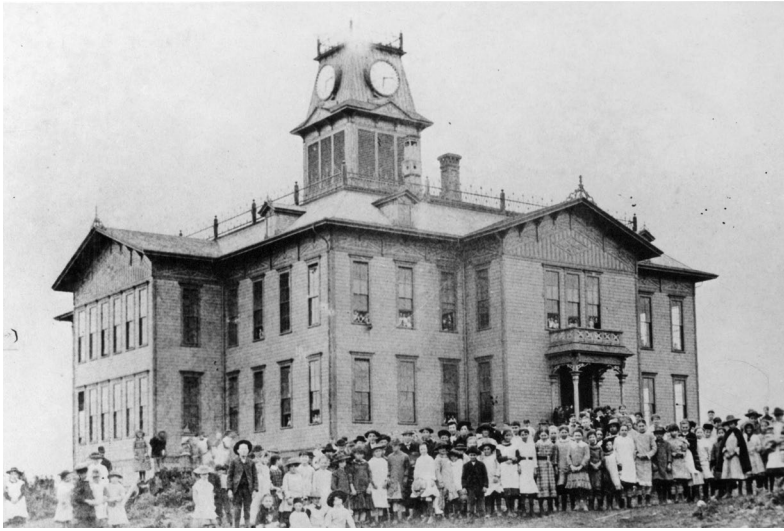
Beginning in 1862, the first public funds used for education in Seattle went to pay teacher salaries. All 23 of the community's school-age children are said to have attended that first summer term. Tuition-free classes were not offered until 1866. Early classes began at the Territorial University, shifted to another rental site, and then moved to a temporary building erected by the school board (see University and Central I).

In January 1869, the same year Seattle was granted a city charter by the legislature, residents approved a tax to fund the building of a schoolhouse, and property was purchased in April. Central School, Seattle's first real schoolhouse, was a simple two-story frame building with two classrooms opened in 1870. Enrollment rose to more than 100 students in the first week. Within the next few years, more classroom space was needed. Several tax levies provided funds to build four additional schools of two rooms each. Each of these "shack" schools was small and makeshift, and failed to present an architectural statement in line with the growing prosperity of the new city.

The School District Grows, 1882-1900

Edward S. Ingraham came to Seattle in 1875 as head teacher at the Central School. In 1882 he was named the first superintendent of the Seattle School District, a position he held until 1888. When Ingraham's replacement resigned shortly after having been elected, the school board chose Julia Kennedy, an educator who was visiting Seattle, to fill the position. She served a two-year term as superintendent.

As the city grew, its residents were no longer content with "shack" schools. A new 12-room building that became known as the second Central School opened in 1883, followed in 1884 by Denny School in the north end. When district enrollment jumped from nearly 1,500 pupils in 1885 to 6,647 in 1893, a major school construction program began.



Central School opening day, 1883 SPSA 094b-7



First Graduating Class, 1886 SPSA 008-1

homes clustered in the Duwamish Head area in West Seattle, the separate town of Ballard, in Columbia City, and the Duwamish Valley. Homes were scattered across the largely timbered or cutover land that made up the rest of what is now the City of Seattle. In 1901, the school system recorded an average daily attendance of nearly 9,000 pupils.

As residential areas developed, school construction followed. School board members represented the growing business and professional leadership in the city, and they wanted school buildings to reflect their vision of a modern progressive community. In 1901, they settled on a plan to build a series of standard wood-frame elementary buildings of a common design, with potential for standard additions in the future. James Stephen, who became the school architect and director of construction in 1903, first designed these “model” schools. The model set forth was a rectangular, two-story, eight-classroom school building with four classrooms flanking a central entry hall and staircase on each floor. One of the benefits was the ability to increase the number of classrooms by constructing additions. Until 1909, most new elementary school buildings followed this design.

Sixteen buildings opened between 1890 and 1900. Most were four- to eight-room elementary schools of wood-frame or brick construction. One new school building, the Main Street School, became the district’s first kindergarten. High school students were housed on the second floor of Central School during this period. The first high school commencement was held in 1886 for 12 graduates. Efforts to convince legislators and voters to approve construction of a separate high school building were unsuccessful until the late 1890s, when the school board was able to purchase land for that purpose.

The Establishment of a Modern School District, 1901-1922

Seattle’s population was 80,000 in 1900 and mainly clustered within what are now downtown, First Hill, and the Denny Regrade areas. Homes circled Lake Union and were filling in the south slope of Queen Anne Hill. Green Lake, Wallingford, and the University District were expanding to the northern city limits. The central district to Madison Park, Madrona, and Leschi was also becoming urbanized. Outside of the city limits, a modest number of

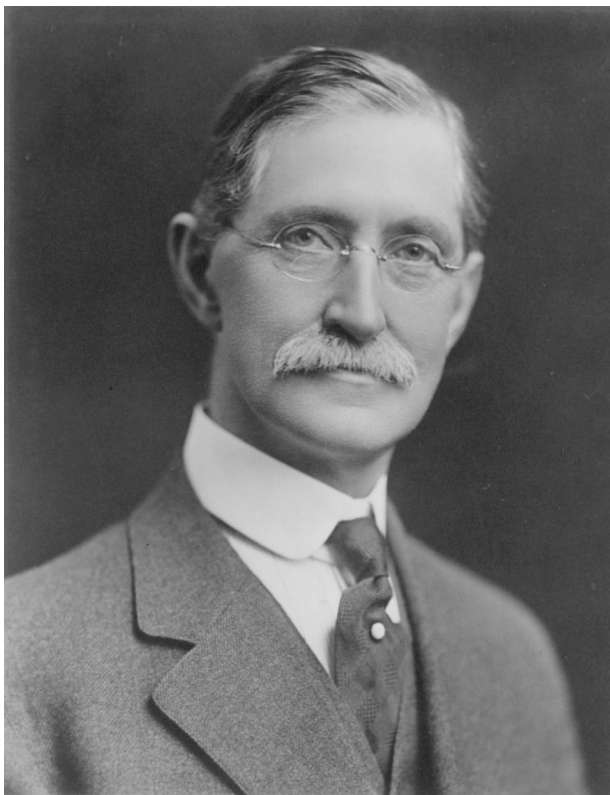
While Superintendent Frank Cooper (1901-1922) and the school board believed firmly in smaller, neighborhood elementary schools, they were also committed to building comprehensive high schools with distinctive architectural design. The first high school building, Broadway, opened in 1902. Lincoln and Queen Anne followed later that decade. Franklin, Ballard, and West Seattle opened the following decade.



Burbank, boys playing ball, ca. early 1900s SPSA 391-16

By 1910, newcomers to the area and annexations that incorporated much of the land of southeast Seattle, Ballard, and West Seattle had swelled the city's population to nearly 240,000. The average daily attendance in the public schools had grown to 24,758 students. More elementary buildings were needed. Responding to concerns about fires both in the schools and in the city (the Seattle Great Fire happened only two decades earlier), the school board endorsed a new elementary school plan using brick construction.

By the latter half of the decade of the 1910s, the designs of Edgar Blair, the school architect who succeeded Stephen, were evident in the new schools. The board continued to advocate for space dedicated to playgrounds.



Frank Cooper, ca. early 1900s SPSA 008-6

The student population increased rapidly to nearly 39,000 by 1919. The June 1919 issue of the Seattle School Bulletin detailed needs at both the elementary and high school levels and urged the passage of the first major post-war bond issue. While conservative critics raised questions about the scope and cost of the instructional program, the building levy passed, and the stage was set for another decade of growth. The bond provided for the construction of Roosevelt and Garfield high schools and major additions to Broadway and Lincoln. Three new elementary schools were built, and additions to seven more were completed by 1922. A modern administration and facilities building was constructed at 810 Dexter Avenue N. Floyd A. Naramore, who replaced Blair as school architect in 1919, and who left a lasting design legacy in the schools built in the 1920s.

Under Cooper, Seattle School District made a commitment to educating children with special needs, and programs serving this population were introduced to regular schools. The parental school (see Burbank) opened in 1905 as a residential facility for children

with delinquency problems. The Broadway Annex (see Edison) was built in 1921 to support a district-wide vocational program.

Growth, Consolidation, and Wartime Challenges, 1922-1945

This period was marked by significant shifts in school enrollment. The K-12 average daily attendance in 1922 was 42,441 students; 11 years later, it reached 57,551. The birth rate slowed in the latter part of the 1920s, even before the Great Depression. Enrollment began a decline that dropped attendance to about 50,000 students by 1940.

In 1923, a bond issue provided the first funds for an intermediate school, Alexander Hamilton, planned for students in grades 7-9. The school board's move toward an intermediate school organizational pattern reflected a national trend toward creating junior high schools and intended to help accommodate enrollment growth without building additional smaller elementary schools, favored during the Cooper era. The school board formally adopted the term junior high school for intermediate schools in 1929.

Between 1923 and 1929, three bond issues passed. Cleveland High School, with facilities for intermediate students, and three separate intermediate schools were built with specialized facilities for science, art, physical education, industrial arts, and home economics. Six new elementary schools opened during this period, and additions were built at Ballard, Franklin, and West Seattle high schools.

While newer buildings had been designed to accommodate these developments, space renovations were required in older structures. Elementary schools that would continue to house K-8 programs were enlarged and remodeled to provide some limited specialized facilities. The kindergarten program was gradually expanded to all elementary school programs by 1935. Lunchroom service was also gradually added to elementary schools.

During the 1930s, the building program's emphasis shifted from new construction to consolidation and rehabilitation. Commercial growth was impacting residential areas, thus affecting attendance. Some older wooden buildings and temporary or portable buildings provided during previous rapid growth periods had become obsolete. Up until this time, bond issue votes were required to fund school construction, and school elections were held separately from general elections. It was in the 1930s that the percentage requirement for voter turnout was introduced.

A gradual enrollment decline, particularly at the elementary level, made consolidation of student populations necessary and educationally sound. Sixteen older buildings were closed during this period and, as part of a 1939 bond issue, temporary structures were scheduled for removal. The bond called for minor classroom additions and improvements at 11 schools, a new building on the T. T. Minor site, and an addition and remodeling to convert Longfellow Elementary School into a 7th and 8th grade center renamed for Edmond S. Meany.

School planners saw the potential for another growth spurt in attendance in the mid-1940s but were unable to



Bagley Lunchroom, ca. 1940 SPSA 204-05

predict the immediate dramatic changes brought on by World War II (1941-1945). The district lost students when the families of 1,456 Japanese American students were removed and incarcerated in spring 1942.

Seattle became a center for aircraft production, shipbuilding, and other work to support the war effort. Newcomers poured into the area from across the country. The vocational program at Edison played a major role in training workers during these war years.

New federal projects for housing workers and their families

were, for the most part, built on vacant land in less-populated areas where existing school facilities were inadequate or nonexistent. The enrollment jumped at Van Asselt School from 173 pupils in early 1942 to 643 students in 1944, which typified this phenomenon. According to a ruling by the War Production Board in 1942, all new school construction had to be of a temporary nature in order to conserve critical material for war needs. As a result, complete temporary schools were built at Duwamish Bend (see Holgate) and High Point. At existing schools, such as Van Asselt, portable buildings were added to accommodate the increased enrollment.



Edison Boat Shop, ca. 1940 SPSA 500-36

Rapid Postwar Growth, 1945-1965

The period 1945-1965 was marked by a dramatic growth in enrollment from nearly 50,000 students in 1945 to almost 100,000 for a brief time during the early 1960s. The growth was due to many factors, including the baby boom of the early postwar years and the northward expansion of Seattle city limits to NE 145th Street, which added considerable open land for residential development. The accompanying 1954 annexation of the southern half of Shoreline School District to Seattle School District brought in nine elementary schools and two junior high school buildings.

New schools were needed to accommodate this growth. Between 1946 and 1958, six separate bond issues were approved for school construction. In 1945, a building planning committee reaffirmed the junior high school organization plan adopted in the 1920s.

With enrollment increasing, one of the district's first priorities was building junior high schools, as K-8 elementary schools and several high schools housing all or a portion of junior high-aged students were severely overcrowded. From 1945 to 1965, ten completely new junior high schools were constructed, and another was extensively rebuilt. During this same period, 17 elementary schools were built. Planning for new high schools commenced, and four were built: Two in the newly annexed north area, one in the southeast, and one in the southwest. In 1949, an earthquake damaged several elementary schools beyond repair.

During this period of rapid growth, Seattle School District leadership remained committed to quality buildings, providing specific direction to architects for educational use of space but without controlling the overall design and use of construction materials that marked the eras of Stephen, Blair, and Naramore. Except for several elementary schools that shared a common plan, each new building was designed independently.



Memorial Stadium under construction, 1947 SPSA 031-24

In new elementary schools, a separate gymnasium and an auditorium/lunchroom were the norm at a time when other districts made do with a multipurpose room, which encompassed all three functions. The older high schools gained additions, including modern gymnasiums and additional specialized classroom space. At some secondary schools, joint-use facilities, shared by the district and the Seattle Parks Department, were included in building plans.

Despite this extensive construction program, portable classrooms were still built to accommodate growing enrollment. As proven in earlier growth periods, temporary buildings provided a quick and flexible solution to overcrowding, and fully portable buildings were now common features on school grounds across the district. In 1958, for example, portable classrooms served an estimated 20 percent of district enrollment. Many of the new elementary schools were made up entirely of portables until a new building was needed and built. Portables were then trucked to meet classroom needs in other parts of the district.

The portable structures of this period are a unique memory for many students and teachers. The oil stove heating systems, lack of plumbing, and distances across playgrounds to basic school facilities stood in stark contrast to the amenities of the modern buildings to which some portables were assigned.

Two other significant building projects completed in the late 1940s included a new Administrative and Service Center on the old Mercer School site in 1949 (see Mercer) and High School Memorial Stadium in 1947 on land located on what is now Seattle Center grounds. The former administrative building on Dexter Avenue remained as the primary facilities support center until it was sold, and a District Logistics Center was created at the old Ford Motor Company parts-and-accessories plant at 4141 4th Avenue South in 1989.



Fairmount Park portables, ca. 1958 SPSA 222-1

The Challenges of Social Change, 1965-1984

Superintendents and school board members faced remarkable challenges during this period. Vibrant social change and innovations in education characterized the 1960s and early 1970s. A decline in enrollment from more than 93,000 students in 1965 to 43,500 in 1984, coupled with increasing dependence on tax levies to fund school operations, made management planning difficult.

With the passage of a building bond issued in 1966, significant school construction and renovation unique to this period took place. Nationwide, there was interest in elementary school teachers teaming up in larger instructional spaces and in multi-aged student groupings. Educators also believed that opening instructional spaces would create a synergy for better learning and social development. These ideas were reflected in the educational specifications and architectural design of new schools.

Five new elementary schools on Beacon Hill were built according to an open concept design with separate areas housing three or four classes each, and a central open learning resource center. Three of the schools were built using one design, and two used another, thus resembling the “model” school approach from earlier in the century. At the same time, South Shore Middle School (i.e., The Model Middle School) and Sanislo Elementary were built with even larger learning areas. The bond issue also supplied funds for substantial renovations in schools across the district. By removing walls between standard classroom spaces and making significant changes or additions in older buildings, expanded libraries were transformed into learning resource centers and team-teaching areas were created.

During this period, the district again restructured the intermediate program by gradually moving away from junior high schools serving grades 7-9 to what was believed to be a more appropriate learning and social environment — a middle school with either a 5-8 or 6-8 grade configuration. The shift of 9th grade to high school buildings allowed for stronger program offerings and better use of space in high schools. Except for the new South Shore Middle School, newly created middle schools used existing junior high school buildings.

This period was also remarkable for introducing new programs that broadened the role of public education and required additional space in schools. Federal initiatives were launched, inaugurating Head Start classes, Title I remedial services, and programs for secondary school dropouts, among others. Special classes within regular schools and at specific sites such as Pacific and Lowell were essential parts of the district program in the postwar years. Now, however, new mandates from the Washington State Legislature and later from the federal government expanded the number of students served in special education and required renovating facilities to better accommodate the inclusion of those with special needs within regular programs. Transitional bilingual programs were mandated to serve the growing population of students whose primary language was not English.

The progressive nature of Seattle Schools was evident in the district’s response to the need for alternative educational opportunities expressed by some parents, students, and teachers. Starting within existing schools in



Lincoln students on street, ca. 1974 SPSA 015-505



South Shore (aka Model Middle School), 1974 SPSA 130-2

unused space or other redundant facilities, remarkably diverse elementary and secondary programs were introduced.

By the mid-1960s, de facto racial segregation in schools was of increasing concern. The school board first tried voluntary programs for school desegregation although without providing transportation. Then, in 1971, a mandatory assignment program with transportation involving four middle schools and the elementary schools feeding into them was initiated. The limited nature of this program did not substantially correct the increasing racial imbalance. In 1977, the school board adopted a sweeping mandatory plan called The Seattle Plan that affected more than half of the district's schools, exempting only kindergarten children. Transportation

was provided for students reassigned throughout the district, and special magnet programs were established to encourage enrollment at certain schools and programs. This desegregation plan impacted school building use by changing enrollment numbers within clusters, shifting feeder patterns, altering grade configurations, and requiring the development of space for magnet programs.

A 50-percent decline in enrollment, caused primarily by the dramatic drop in birthrate that ended the postwar baby boom, left the Seattle School District with too many school buildings operating far under enrollment capacity. Although some schools had been closed and the number of excess portable units significantly reduced, the cost and inefficiency of operating and maintaining under-utilized facilities no longer made sense. In 1980, the school board enacted a comprehensive and far-reaching school closure plan.

Two high schools, seven intermediate (middle or junior high) schools, and 20 elementary schools were selected for closure over the next two to three years. The major closures affected the north and north-central areas of the city, Queen Anne/Magnolia, and West Seattle. The southeast and central areas were least affected by enrollment decline and school closures.

Rebuilding, 1984-2000

After the 1980 school closure plan was implemented, a comprehensive assessment of school facilities showed many of the remaining buildings were in serious need of upgrading or replacement. In 1984, a construction bond issue was approved for the Capital Improvement Program I (CIP I) that called for renovating or rebuilding 13 elementary schools, upgrading Ballard High School, and constructing a new building for Franklin High School. Prolonged community discussions debated whether to construct new high school buildings or to renovate and upgrade. It was clear the community wanted to restore and modernize the existing Franklin building, but the Ballard project was delayed until an agreement was reached to build a new school. Additionally, the state provided funding to replace the old Colman building on a new site, accomplished as part of CIP I.

In fall of 1989, six school buildings were closed — University Heights, Cooper, Sand Point, Decatur, Columbia, and Genesee Hill. Some of these schools' programs were shuttered permanently, while some of the buildings then continued in operation but used for other relocated programs. Two school programs were re-opened in newly constructed CIP I buildings after their earlier closures several years prior (Colman and Hawthorne).

Discussions on Franklin High School spurred new community interest in the preservation of historic structures. A self-nomination process in which the district submitted nominations for schools more than 25 years old to the City Landmarks Preservation Board helped avoid unnecessary delays. During this period, collaboration between the district and preservation groups resulted in the restoration of several school buildings. Three of the nineteenth-century elementary school buildings survived in 2000: the original portion of West Queen Anne School, now condominiums; the original section of B. F. Day School, remodeled in 1991; and the pavilion known as Denny-Fuhrman School, renovated in 1999 as part of the Seward School complex.

Expressing a strong community need, voters approved a \$5 million levy in 1985 to build dedicated daycare centers in or near each new or improved elementary school. In 1990, Seattle's mayor was a strong advocate for education, and with his leadership a joint City of Seattle-Seattle School District seven-year Families and Education levy was passed providing financial support for the operation of daycare and activity programs, both before and after school in elementary and middle schools. Voters renewed this program in 1997.

In 1987, a two-year capital levy, known as the Capital Levy Program (CLP), was approved to address aging major building systems, such as roof replacements, seismic upgrades, window replacements, playground improvements and more. This program was continued and later changed to a six-year capital levy known as the Building Technology and Athletics/Academics (BTA) levy.

Enrollment dropped to a low of 41,000 in 1989 but rose throughout the 1990s to more than 47,000 by 2000. Continuing to work toward modern, computer-ready facilities, the school board proposed another construction levy in 1995. The passage of this Building Excellence Levy (BEX I) provided funds for renovation, additions, or new construction at 16 elementary schools and three high schools by 2002.

Several programs continued to impact the use of school facilities. The 1977 desegregation plan did not include all district schools, so disparities in enrollment created under-utilized schools, often near schools that were overcrowded. Also, the lack of standardization of grade-level organization in middle schools was confusing to parents and students. In 1988, the board adopted a plan called Controlled Choice that created a standard K-5, 6-8 and 9-12 organization (with some allowance for K-8 programs in certain schools). The district was divided into eight school clusters, and parents could choose from schools in their cluster. This plan was modified in 1995 when the school board chose to move to open enrollment in the secondary level and modified clusters for choice at the elementary level.



Concord, 1997 SPSA 215-308



King, ca. 1988 SPSA 232-144

Providing space in buildings for special programs continued to be a priority. The Transitional Bilingual Program mandated in the 1970s expanded as the number of students receiving assistance increased in 2000 to 16 percent of the district's population. Special education enrollment totaled 13 percent of the district's population that same year. Six buildings not needed for regular education housed unique elementary and secondary alternative programs.

Throughout the history of the school district, excess prop-

erties were usually sold, and many of the earliest sites were folded into the fabric of commercial areas. Some sites had become parks or playfields, such as the former Martha Washington and Luther Burbank parental school properties. In the late 1970s and 1980s, properties not needed for alternative schools, other special programs, or as interim school housing, were viewed as opportunities for the district rather than liabilities. Several were sold, but many were retained and leased, which generated revenue for capital purposes. Some were remodeled as condominiums or apartments, and one building was repurposed for mixed use as housing and business. A number were leased to neighborhood associations and one to a museum group. Three schools were demolished, and the sites were then leased. Eventually, some of the sites with long-term leases were sold to their current tenant (e.g. Allen and Crown Hill) while other sites were re-opened as schools to accommodate enrollment growth (e.g. Genesee Hill and Webster).

Entering the 21st Century, 2000-2022

Passage of the Buildings, Technology and Academics (BTA I) capital levy (1998-2004, \$150M) helped Seattle schools enter the new millennium with the expansion of technology that transformed instruction, enhanced curriculum content, and empowered teaching and learning. Within six years, 100 schools were wired for both local and wide-area networks, and computers were made available at the rate of one for every five students.

Continuing the district's major capital-construction program was the Building Excellence II (BEX II) capital levy (2001-2007, \$398M), which funded the renovation or replacement of 15 school buildings, including landmarked high schools Garfield, Cleveland, and Roosevelt. Nathan Hale got a new auditorium, the library at Ingraham was completely overhauled, and additions to five elementary schools in the city's south end were completed. Funds from BEX III (2007-2013, \$490M) helped renovate or replace additional school buildings, including Denny and Sealth, both built in the 1950s. Denny had seen few updates in its first five decades, and Sealth, only modest improvements. A plan to combine the two campuses created a pathway for grades 6-12 and allowed for more resource sharing, a win for students and teachers alike.

Infrastructure improvements and technology enhancements continued with passage of the Buildings, Technology, and Academics/Athletics II (BTA II) capital levy (2004-2010, \$178M) and BTA III capital levy

(2010-2016, \$270M). These levies provided sweeping capital improvements that touched every school in the district, from new roofs, plumbing, safety, and seismic upgrades to innovative technology tools and more science and math labs.

As in previous years, enrollment numbers during this period varied. Several school buildings or programs closed in 2008 because of declining enrollment. In cases like Minor and Mann, the buildings were closed, and the programs relocated to other buildings. For example, Nova Alternative program moved into the Meany building along with SBOC/World School option school. These programs relocated from Mann and the original John Hay respectively. In other cases, like Whitworth and Cooper, the buildings and the programs were closed.



Boren, 2016 c.Stephen Brashear SPSA 119-152

After the worldwide financial crisis of 2008, enrollment steadily increased and the district was again in a position where it needed to open more schools. The BEX IV capital levy (2013-2019, \$694.9M) made much of this work possible. In cases like Meany (2017) and Addams (2014), the schools were renovated and reopened to programs of the same name, but other buildings that were remodeled became home to other programs. For example, in 2016 after a complete remodel, Minor became home to the Seattle World School. Even buildings that were closed long ago, like Lincoln, were renovated and reopened. New schools also opened, such as Cascadia and Robert Eagle Staff. This work continued with the BTA IV capital levy (2016-2022, \$475.3M). Deploying portables on existing sites helped accommodate the significant increase in enrollment.

In 2019, Seattle voters approved the BEX V capital levy (2019-2025, \$1.4B), which included funds to replace seven school buildings — five elementary schools (Alki, Rogers, Kimball, Northgate, and Viewlands), Mercer International Middle School, and Rainier Beach High School. Funds from BEX V will eventually touch every school from playground upgrades and additions to technology enhancements and security measures.

Self Help projects have also impacted every school. The program, begun in the 1970s, was spurred by parental and community interest and pressure. Most of the projects, initiated and carried out by PTAs with broad community participation, helped supplement dwindling general-fund budgets and enabled improvements while ensuring building code and safety requirements were met such as the painting of interior rooms, play equipment upgrades, and grounds cleanup. Since the program's inception, more than 10,000 Self Help projects have been completed, each ranging in value from \$100 to more than \$500,000 in both monetary contributions and volunteer hours.

As the district took on new construction and modernization projects, it prioritized its commitment to environmental stewardship and sustainable building practices. In 2017, the district outlined its long-term resource conservation management plan, codifying existing operational practices and setting goals for the future. Long before this policy was implemented, the district had been incorporating geothermal heating and cooling wells, solar arrays, and high-efficiency boilers into school-building designs. In 2005, Madison Middle School was the first school in the district with ground-source heat pumps. Sustainable practices, such as repurposing hardwood floors, installing energy-efficient bathroom fixtures, and creating landscaping that uses less water, were also implemented. In 2021, Seattle became the first district in the state to commit to transitioning from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources, a move that will protect student health and create more sustainable and equitable



Hazel Wolf green wall, 2016 ©Benjamin Benschneider SPSA 263-362

communities. This commitment aligns with the City of Seattle and its policy banning the use of fossil fuels in new public buildings.

The new century also ushered in several significant safety and security challenges. In February 2001, the 6.8 magnitude Nisqually earthquake hit the region, causing billions of dollars in damage throughout Western Washington. Although seismic mitigation efforts in the district date back to the mid-1980s, the Nisqually earthquake reinforced the importance of ongoing seismic mitigation efforts. By 2020, all schools that needed seismic upgrades had received them, but since standards change regularly, this effort is ongoing.

The aftermath of the September 11, 2001, World Trade Center terrorist attacks, the surge in school shootings nationwide, and area gang activity necessitated the installation of security devices. Badge readers, entryway video cameras, and controlled access entryways have become standard features in all school renovation and replacement projects, along with new safety procedures and protocols.

Supporting student diversity, including cultural heritage, gender identity, language, and ethnicity, continued to be a priority. In 2000, the African American Academy school building was constructed, housing the program of the same name. The program started in 1991 and focused on eliminating disproportionality and increasing academic achievement specifically for African American males. In 2016, the African American Male Advisory Committee was formed to review the issues within the system surrounding African American male achievement and provide guidance on ensuring educational excellence for all students, particularly African American males. Three years later, the district created the Office of African American Male Achievement to better serve Black male youth — the first office in Washington devoted to this task and one of just a handful in the nation. The office developed instructional approaches grounded in identity affirmation, built strong relationships between educators and students, and sought insights from families and community members.

Promoting respect for cultural heritage and preparing students to become productive global citizens have never been more important, resulting in the development of many unique programs. For example, Pathfinder, created as an option school, used Native American cultures as the foundation from which students were taught about other cultures, providing opportunities for students to make their own cultural connections. In 2004, a Native advisory board was formed to support a cohesive Native American culture education as part of Pathfinder's core teaching.



Latona, ca. 2000 SPSA 241-100

By the early 2000s, nearly 12 percent of students claimed a first language other than English, necessitating the expansion of the district's English Language Learner program from 65 schools to 98, serving more than 135 languages and dialects. When the landmarked Latona School reopened in 2000 after extensive renovation, the program was renamed the John Stanford International Elementary School at Latona, becoming the centerpiece for Seattle's language immersion program. Initially offering classes taught in Spanish, the school added Japanese as a second language option in 2001. The concept was so popular it expanded to McDonald and a few other schools starting in 2010. By 2022, the district's 9 international schools reflect the dual realities of globalization and the increase in students with home languages other than English.

The Seattle World School, established in 2009, evolved out of the Secondary Bilingual Orientation Center (SBOC) and was designed to support multilingual learners. Students were immersed in a multilingual, multicultural environment with college and career pathways geared toward specific student interests. The Seattle World School became an accredited high school in 2015.

To ensure a safe and supportive school environment for all students, regardless of gender orientation, the district laid out policies to address the use of names and pronouns, locker-room use and accessibility, sports and physical education, and student dress. Seattle is incorporating gender-neutral restrooms into schools. In 2012, the district established non-discrimination and affirmative action procedures that address the rights of and support for transgender and



First Graders, 2018 ©Phillipa Dugaw SPSA 003-332

gender-expansive students. In 2020, a gender-inclusive school policy was adopted to increase awareness of the rights and support provided for all students.

In early 2020, Seattle schools were interrupted by the accelerated pace of the COVID-19 pandemic. On March 12, 2020, Washington Governor Jay Inslee ordered schools to close statewide. Teachers had to pivot quickly to provide educational content online, and the district was charged with the herculean task of distributing laptops and ensuring Wi-Fi service was available to tens of thousands of students. Local companies, such as Microsoft and Amazon, assisted with computer donations.



Students being welcomed to school on first day, 2021 SPSA 003-333

More than a year was spent in virtual classrooms before families were given the option to return to in-person learning or stay virtual starting April 19, 2021. Schools fully reopened September 1, 2021, for in-person learning, though a virtual-learning pilot program was open to a limited number of students. Virtual students in grades K-5 were assigned to Queen Anne Elementary while grades 6-12 were assigned to Cascade Option at North Queen Anne. The virtual school option fully transitioned to Cascade in 2022.

COVID-19 vaccinations were available at in-school clinics, and as of April 2022, 83 percent of students had received at least one dose. In-school mask requirements were lifted in March 2022, and sporting events, proms, assemblies, and concerts returned. Pandemic challenges continued on many fronts, both large and small. School transportation, a concern even pre-pandemic, was dramatically affected as 50 school bus routes were canceled because of driver shortages. Students had their own challenges. After spending months isolated from their classmates, they returned to try to re-establish friendships and muster school spirit. As with students nationwide, some struggled with mental-health issues.

During the two years of the pandemic, the district lost more than 3,000 students. The bulk of the decline was in the district's 62 elementary schools. The reasons cited were diverse: parents choosing private schools or home schooling, new schools opening, elementary school boundary lines changing, or the shortage of affordable housing in Seattle, leading many families to relocate.

In 2023, Seattle Public Schools sat at a crossroads. The district was balancing the momentum and lessons learned during the previous two decades while emerging from a pandemic shutdown, racial reckoning, and ongoing uncertainty. The goal remained as always to reimagine and revolutionize education in the innovative and progressive City of Seattle.