

Asa Mercer

Name: Asa Mercer International Middle School	Enrollment: 1,173
Address: 1600 S Columbian Way	Nickname: Mustangs
Configuration: 6-8	Colors: White, blue and black



Asa Mercer, 1960 SPSA 110-4

Located in the Jefferson Park area of Beacon Hill, Asa Mercer Junior High School was named for Asa Shinn Mercer, who at age 22 became president and sole teacher of the newly founded Territorial University. Asa was the younger brother of Thomas Mercer, for whom Mercer School on lower Queen Anne was named.

In 1864, Asa Mercer aided development of the young city of Seattle when he convinced 11 women to come west as prospective brides. In 1866, he again went east and convinced 34 more young women to come to Seattle. These women came to be known as the Mercer Girls. They were intended to work as teachers and served to increase the number of single women in a territory teeming with bachelors. Lizzie Ordway, the oldest of the Mercer Girls, was the first teacher at the first school constructed by Seattle (see Central School).

The land for the new junior high was the property of the city until 1949, when it was deeded to the Veterans Administration for a hospital as part of a larger building tract. In 1954, the Seattle City Planning Commission identified a portion of that tract to be ideal for a junior high school. The Veterans Administration, the school district, and the parks department, as well as other groups, including the Beacon Hill Community Club and representatives of local golfing interests, were all amenable to this proposal. The land was deeded to the school

Details:

Name: **Asa Mercer Junior High School**
Location: 1600 S Columbian Way
Building: 40-station brick
Architect: John W. Maloney
Site: 8.4 acres

1957: Named on May 3; opened on September 4, 1958
1982: Became Asa Mercer Middle School in September
2012: Construction of School Based Health Center
2014: Renamed Asa Mercer International Middle School
2023: School closed for demolition and construction; Students relocated to Van Asselt as interim site
[2025]: New school opens (Bassetti Architects; BEX V)

district in 1955 and a joint-use agreement was signed that year with the parks department. To accommodate the plans for the new school grounds, a few fairways of the Jefferson Park Golf Course and other parks facilities had to be relocated. The cost for this work was borne by the district.

The school was built with an 800-seat auditorium. When Mercer opened in fall 1957, its 1,093 students came from several south-end schools. The 8th and 9th graders had previously attended Cleveland and Sharples, while the 7th graders came from Beacon Hill, Columbia, Concord, Georgetown, Maple, Muir, and Van Asselt.

Despite careful planning based on population surveys and other data, the building soon proved to be too small to house the growing secondary school population in the area. The following September two portables were placed on the grounds. Additionally, from 1958 to 1962, about 250 9th graders were housed at Cleveland High School. An additional 16 portables were added as enrollment topped 1,500 in 1963-64.

To meet the needs of its students, a number of programs have been pioneered at Mercer. In 1981-82, a computer-assisted learning program called Prescriptive Learning was piloted, resulting in significant improvement in skills for students previously reading below grade level. The Belief Academy started at Mercer in 1991. An experimental

program for learning-disabled and behaviorally disordered students, it was funded by the federal government and was a cooperative effort of the district and the University of Washington. The school also featured the teaching of occupations as an introductory course in career planning. A partnership with its neighbor, the Veterans Administration Hospital, allowed 8th graders to perform volunteer work. At least 19 students were later hired there. Additionally, environmental education was part of the regular science curriculum.

From 1997 through 2005, teachers Anne Fitzpatrick and Gretchen Coe organized and led the Ports Project at Mercer in partnership with the Port of Seattle, University of Washington, and World Affairs Council. The project used a 40-foot cargo container decorated by students that shipped goods across the Pacific to offer students a global perspective through the study of world trade. The project won numerous awards and its founding teachers, Coe and Fitzpatrick, won the World Educator Award in 1999. Through this project, students participated in the construction of what was then the only known Sichuan-style Chinese garden outside of China at South Seattle Community College in 2001.

The Seahawks Academy was a special program that was funded in part by the Seattle Seahawks and focused primarily on students who had not been successful in traditional middle schools. The program was housed in portables at Mercer from 1998 until 2007, when it closed.

After an enrollment high of 833 students in 2000, enrollment gradually declined to a low of 699 in 2008. Student achievement also declined during this period. To reverse this trend in student achievement, new Principal Andhra Lutz implemented a fresh system of instruction starting in 2004. The school made use of data to identify struggling students earlier. It also grouped faculty into teams to meet regularly to discuss individual students and coordinate lesson plans tailored to student needs. By 2011, Mercer students were outperforming the city average in test scores on almost every measure and the school had been recognized as a School of Distinction in Washington and had earned the Washington State Achievement Award every year from 2009 to 2014.



Asa Mercer, 1960 SPSA 110-3

Following these successes, Seattle-based Neighborcare Health donated funds for the construction of a School Based Health Center at Mercer in 2012. Two years later, the district renamed the school Asa Mercer International Middle School. As an international school, Mercer offers students a global perspective and focuses on the study of the Mandarin and Spanish languages.

In 2019, funds for a new building for Mercer on the school's existing site were approved through the BEX V levy. However, even though the city declined the landmark nomination of the Mercer Middle School building, the State of Washington Department of Archeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP) determined that the school was eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Preservation (NRHP) in 2011. To mitigate the conflict resulting from this determination and the district's intention to replace the school, the district agreed to carry out a number of measures, including the installation of an interpretative display in the new building that showcases the 1957 building.

The new construction, scheduled to begin in 2023 and finish in 2025, will focus on sustainability and renewable energy usage. The capacity for the new school is 1,000 students. During the construction period, students will be relocated to Van Asselt as their interim site, which was expanded specifically to accommodate middle school programs.