

Rainier Beach

Name: Rainier Beach High School	Enrollment: 781
Address: 8815 Seward Park Avenue S	Nickname: Vikings
Configuration: 9-12	Colors: Blue and orange
Newspaper: <i>The Viking Shield</i>	Annual: <i>Valhalla</i>



Rainier Beach, 2011 SPSA 021-135

Plans for a combined junior and senior high school in the southeast section of the city were initiated in 1957. A portion of the site was purchased from the City of Seattle in August 1958. During the planning stages, the school was known as Southeast Seattle Junior-Senior High School. It was to be named after Samuel Gompers, a noted pioneer in the labor movement, but that name was given to a trade school instead (see Rainier). The architectural plans submitted in 1959 showed two alternatives for the building, with or without an auditorium and gymnasium. After much controversy, the auditorium was dropped from the plans for financial reasons.

At that time, it was felt that a combined facility for grades 7-12 would be adequate for many years to come. Rainier Beach Junior-Senior High School opened in September 1960 with 845 students in the junior high level and 412 high school students. As was the practice when opening new high schools in Seattle, there was no senior class and only a small junior class entered the first year.

By 1967, the school was overcrowded, with 2,159 students housed in a building designed for 1,500. The principal, Don Means, urged the school district to establish a separate facility for the younger students. The Model Middle School began in portables on the grounds of Rainier Beach in September 1970. The first year only 7th graders attended the middle school; the next year it comprised grades 7-8. The middle school moved

Details:

Name: **Rainier Beach Junior-Senior High School**
Location: 8815 Seward Park Avenue S
Building: 2-story brick
Architect: John W. Maloney
Site: 21.6 acres

1960: Named on March 9; opened on September 7
1972: Became Rainier Beach High School
1998: Performing Arts Center Opened. Renamed Paul Robeson Performing Arts Center in 2004
2001: Field and track renovated as the Southeast Athletic Complex
2003: Seismic Upgrades
2005: Crawford Court dedicated December 6
2013: Rainier Beach offers International Baccalaureate program
2019: Planning began for a replacement school
2022: April, Construction began for new school & Southeast Athletic Complex
[2025]: Construction complete (Bassetti Architects / Moody Nolan Architects; BEX V)



Rainier Beach, 1965 SPSA 021-1

to a new permanent building directly across Rainier Avenue S called South Shore in December 1973. The following September, American Indian Heritage School moved in from the Georgetown School to the portables at Rainier Beach.

In 1968, Rainier Beach and its feeder elementary schools (Dunlap, Emerson, Rainier View, Wing Luke, and Model Middle School) developed a K-12 individualized program that became a model for students furthest from educational justice. The Southeast Education Center program, later known as the Rainier Beach Consortium, included ungraded curriculum in some subjects; small groups of teachers, counselors, and students who monitored individual progress; and an alternative program. In 1969, Rainier Beach was selected to participate in the international Model Schools project.

There was also a community component to the Southeast Education Center program. The playfields, the community center, and the library were all developed in the Rainier Beach neighborhood with the intention of creating a complete educational and support system for students in this attendance area.

Student activities including clubs and athletics became part of the school's evolving tradition. Over the years, the boys' basketball team has done exceptionally well, winning nine state championships. The Vikings first won in the 1987-88 season led by captain Doug Christie, who went on to be a first-round NBA draft pick and spent 15 years in the league before becoming assistant coach of the Sacramento Kings. Under Mike Bethea, a 1974 Franklin High graduate who started as head coach in the 1993-94 season, Rainier Beach's boys team became the top ranked in the nation in 2002 and won another eight state titles through 2022, including three straight championships from 2012-14.

During the 1980s and 1990s, a district policy limiting the percentage of minority enrollment in any one school meant that some neighborhood residents were not able to attend the school. These guidelines, which were put into effect to qualify for federal benefits, were relaxed in the early 2000s to allow more local participation in the school.

Several innovative programs originated at Rainier Beach. From 1975 to 1983, students in an aviation class built an experimental plane that was eventually auctioned off for over \$3,000. The Boeing Company was an active partner in this and many subsequent technology programs. The fall of 1990 marked the inception of a Model Teaching Academy that prepared students for college and a career in education, one of five such academies in the country. In the early 2000s, the DECA program in marketing education was the premier business program in the district, with students winning both state and national awards. Also at Rainier Beach, the Belief Academy for students with learning and behavioral disabilities used integrated teaching techniques to create a positive learning environment. Rainier Beach was also the first school in the district with a Teen Health Center, established in 1988.

Almost 40 years after the original auditorium had been dropped from the plans for the school, a long-awaited Performing Arts Center opened in Fall 1998. This school, which had a strong visual and performing arts program, finally got a first-class facility. The new auditorium provided a state-of-the-art stage and comfortable seating. An exterior canopy and entry plaza enhanced the appearance of the center's curved blue walls.

In 2001, the field and track were replaced and expanded to make up the Southeast Athletic Complex. The new complex included a synthetic turf field with stadium seating and a concession/restroom facility, rubberized running track, and two additional synthetic turf playfields. The complex was designed by DA Hogan & Associates. Rainier Beach played day games there for two seasons awaiting city permits for the lights. Seattle Public Schools and the Seattle City Parks Department have joint-use agreements for the facilities.

Rainier Beach had an additional \$1.2 million in renovations in 2003, including arts and science improvements, library upgrades, and seismic upgrades.

In 2004, the Performing Arts Center was renamed the Paul Robeson Performing Arts Center after the civil rights activist, scholar, actor, and athlete. Three years later, the center started hosting community theatre productions. That teaming of community art partnerships continued with the Rainier Beach High School Theater Coalition. Partners in the coalition included the Seattle Children's Theatre, the Seattle Theatre Group, Seattle Repertory Theatre, the Seattle Shakespeare Company, and Northwest Tap Connection, among others.

On December 6, 2005, Jamal Crawford, who led the Vikings to the 1997-98 state basketball title, returned for an all-school assembly where he unveiled the remodeled Crawford Court—a court made possible by his \$100,000 donation. Crawford, who was an All-American and Washington State Player of the Year, went on to play 20 years in the NBA, earning the NBA's Sixth Man of the Year award three times. Crawford spoke at the court dedication with Nate Robinson, another Rainier Beach alum and NBA star. Both of these former students were inducted into the Seattle Public Schools' Athletic Hall of Fame and have their numbers retired at Rainier Beach (Crawford's No. 23 in 2018; Robinson's No. 2 in 2017).

After school enrollment numbers dipped in 2008, there was a district proposal to close Rainier Beach and merge the remaining students with Cleveland High. However, then-superintendent Dr. Goodloe-Johnson withdrew the proposal in December 2008.

In 2013, after a two-year application process, Rainier Beach became one of three schools in the district that offer



Rainier Beach, 2000, entrance to Performing Arts Center ©Mary Randlett
SPSA 021-84



Rainier Beach, 2000 ©Mary Randlett SPSA 021-82

the International Baccalaureate (IB) program. The IB Diploma Program at Rainier Beach is highly regarded as an integrated, college credit and college preparatory high school curriculum for 11th and 12th grade students.

Prior to the start of the IB program at Rainier Beach, there were poor test scores, low graduation rates, and talk of closing the school. Attendance was also dwindling. In 2007, enrollment was down to 359 students. After two years of the IB program, there was a marked increase in the graduation rate. This was improved in part by Principal Dwane Chappelle and language arts teacher Colin Pierce changing the curriculum so each junior and senior would take at least one IB language arts course. In 2016, Seattle Public Schools and the Alliance for Education averted a shutdown of the IB program with the Alliance's pledge to contribute \$150,000 over three years. Enrollment numbers have increased every year since the IB program was implemented, which is a significant indicator of the success of the program. In 2021, enrollment reached 840 students, which was about 60 more students than the year before.

In 2019, the school board approved the Rainier Beach High replacement project. The proposed project included a new multi-story high school with up to 283,000 square feet and improvements to the existing athletic fields. A draft proposal from 2021 said that when completed, the school would have permanent enrollment capacity for up to 1,600 students in grades 9 through 12; however, it is noted that SPS did not anticipate full enrollment for 10 years or more after completion. Construction began in April 2022 and will be completed in phases so students can stay on campus until it is substantially completed as scheduled in August 2025. The project will replace the Southeast Athletic Complex with new facilities, add energy efficient features such as geothermal wells for HVAC, provide state-of-the-art technology for students and staff, and replace the current performing arts center.