

Sanislo

Name: Captain Stephen E. Sanislo Elementary School	Enrollment: 195
Address: 1812 SW Myrtle Street	Nickname: n.a.
Configuration: K-5	Colors: Yellow and blue



Sanislo, 2000 ©Mary Randlett SPSA 273-1

Details:

Name: **Captain Stephen E. Sanislo Elementary**
Location: 1812 SW Myrtle Street
Building: Brick
Architect: Sullam, Smith and Associates
Site: 8.9 acres

1966: Named on November 9
1970: Opened on December 14
1998: Addition and renovation (Carlson Architects, BEX I)

In the late 1960s, a new school was planned for the Riverview area of West Seattle to reduce the distance to school for area children attending Cooper, Highland Park, and Hughes. The school was named for longtime West Seattle resident Stephen E. Sanislo, a 54-year veteran of the Seattle Fire Department. Captain Sanislo spent 31 years educating Seattle schoolchildren on fire safety, and in 1942 was named education director for the fire department. His talks, accompanied by his imaginary dog Skipper, combined storytelling and harmonica playing. The results of his work are evident in the city's excellent fire-safety record during his tenure.

In September 1969, a year before the new building opened, Sanislo Elementary students were housed in portables at Highland Park and Cooper. Groundbreaking took place on February 6, 1970, with Sanislo's widow helping with a shovel. Although it was not ready for the start of the following school year, Sanislo opened a few months later for 325 pupils in K-4 on December 14.



Sanislo, ca. 1973 SPSA 273-2

The design for the school followed the “open concept” design trend, which emphasized flexibility, collaboration, and individual learning. The school was dominated by a large “classroom laboratory” that contained enough room for 10 teaching spaces and permitted daily changes in area uses. Electrical and mechanical systems were housed not within walls, but in brightly colored exposed duct work.

The school’s space truss system was uniquely designed for Sanislo and used three simple fabricated elements that were shop assembled into large sections and erected in minimum time and at a cost below that of prefabricated proprietary systems. The school was designed by Sullam and Smith, but the truss system was designed with the aid of extensive computer study by structural engineers Kelly, Pittelko, Fritz & Forssen. The design for Sanislo was so unique that it was featured in *L’Architecture D’Aujourd’hui*, a French architecture magazine.

The educational theory used at Sanislo let children develop at their own individual pace. In its first years, the school was a showplace for the district. However, by the mid-1980s, some educators questioned whether the school should retain its open-concept design. At that time, there was movement toward a “return to basics,” favoring standardization, accountability, and basic skills instruction. Even though Sanislo went through a ‘renewal process’ that reflected this change in direction, the open concept was retained and staunchly defended. Sanislo considered itself a community that fostered cooperation and mutual respect, emphasizing integrated, thematically focused instruction with team teachers.

Sanislo won the state championship for physical fitness in 1990, with all students scoring above 85 percent on tests, which include running, pull-ups, and toe-touching. Sanislo was the home of SCATS, an after-school circus acrobatics team originally headed by PE teachers Bud and Sue Turner. The SCATS group performed Double-Dutch jump-roping, juggled bowling pins, rode unicycles, walked on their hands, and rocketed across the gym

in a chain of back-handsprings. Sue Turner retired in June 2006 after 35 years at Sanislo. “She is the icon of the school,” said then-Principal Eric Nelson. “We’re known because of Sue’s instructional prowess.”

A remodeling and expansion of the school launched in summer 1997. One of the goals of this project was to address deficiencies in the existing building. Existing classrooms were formed using bookcases, chalkboards, and other furniture with no acoustical separation. Some of these makeshift classrooms were a little over half the size of a standard classroom. Some classrooms had no natural light, while other classrooms could not escape natural light, because windows were slanted in such a way that window coverings did not exist.

The remodel involved the demolition of partitions separating auxiliary classroom areas and reconfiguration of existing spaces, which increased classroom size and the amount of natural light entering the main teaching areas. Three new conference rooms and a new music room were constructed, which provided more optional space for audio-visual presentations. The work was completed before school started the next fall.

Next came an addition west of the original building. Included were a new 2nd grade classroom pod for three classes, a multipurpose room, an art and science area, music room, and a learning resource center. Work was completed in time for graduation ceremonies in June 1998. In subsequent years, the school’s library was upgraded.

In 1997, a significant wetland area identified on the school site during the Master Use Permit (MUP) pre-application process resulted in a covenant with the city to ensure that the area is protected. In 2005, a Self Help Project was spearheaded by Sanislo families for the creation of an outdoor classroom at the edge of the wetland supporting outdoor and environmental learning. Over the years, the district received several grants and volunteer hours to restore Puget Creek headwaters. As part of the restoration effort, invasive ivy was removed and replaced with native trees and plants.

According to the school’s website in 2022, “Our diversity is our strength with our students sharing varied life experiences with one another. Sanislo is multi-generational, meaning that many parents attended Sanislo as children, indicating an even stronger community commitment.”