

## Warren Avenue



Warren Avenue, 1905 SPSA 280-42

The Warren Avenue School was built when Seattle's school enrollment was said to have been increasing by 2,000 children annually. A site was purchased in 1902 across the street from the Industrial School operated at 2nd Avenue and Republican Street from 1901-04 (see Burbank). The school opened on the new site in 1903 with 350 students to relieve overcrowding at the nearby Thomas Mercer and Denny schools. The building was designed with a classical arched-front entry that featured four detached columns and four built-in columns supporting a railed roof. It was situated on lower Queen Anne Hill on a portion of David Denny's 1852 land claim. The street to which the school fronted is said to have been named for Major-General Joseph Warren (1741-75), "the first great martyr" of the Revolutionary War, who was killed at Bunker Hill.

In 1914, the Industrial-Special School was installed at the Warren Avenue School after the construction of an eight-room annex building, also at 2nd and Republican. A portable was added as a gymnasium. The addition to Warren was probably made in anticipation of the closure of Denny School for a regrade project.

Enrollment at Warren Avenue peaked in 1929 when 734 pupils attended. As industry and commerce spread northward, residences near the school were torn down and enrollment declined. This led to the use of Warren Avenue School for special education where exceptional children, if not too handicapped, could participate in regular classes.

One of the pioneering programs at Warren Avenue School provided education for children with cerebral palsy. The program grew out of the Washington Spastic School that was started in donated space at the Gethsemane

Lutheran Church (911 Stewart Street) in fall 1942 by parents and physicians who believed these children were capable of learning. Tired of transforming the parish house from a Sunday School venue to a classroom every week, John Nelson (later superintendent of Seattle City Light) went to Roy Howard (then district head of Home Instruction) and asked him to supply a teacher and furniture for the program beginning with the September 1943 term. The argument must have been convincing, because in January 1944 the children and staff were transferred to Warren Avenue School. There they found a portable that had been adapted for wheelchair access.

The portable had served as a play center during the war years. Eventually the cerebral palsy unit expanded to five classrooms, serving students through 9th grade. Seattle was one of the first cities on the West Coast to have such a program in a public school and it attracted international attention.

Other programs for blind and sight-impaired children began in the same decade. Room signs in Braille and special equipment for writing and figuring arithmetic in Braille helped these pupils with their lessons. The last special education program added to the school was for hearing-impaired children, who had a classroom equipped with a microphone and racks of headphones. Students were transported to school by taxi from all parts of Seattle.

In 1950, Robert Terry—who attended school in Oregon and began his teaching career while enrolled in the U.S. Navy during World War II—was hired at Warren Avenue, becoming the first Black man to teach in Seattle Public Schools. When Terry was hired at Warren Avenue School, he told *The Seattle Times* he felt “being a teacher I can help a lot in this racial business,” and he hoped that students who had a Black teacher “may grow up with a better understanding of racial problems.” After three years at Warren Avenue, Terry taught at Summit School beginning in 1953 and later taught special education at Pacific School. He was president of Seattle Central College from 1976 to 1980 and later chancellor of the Seattle Community College System.

In 1957, Seattle voters approved a proposal for the development of a Civic Center and a World’s Fair. Warren Avenue School was in the area chosen for the future center, the site already having the Civic Auditorium, Ice Arena, National Guard Armory, Shrine Temple, and the district’s High School Memorial Stadium. By the 1958-59 school year, enrollment had dropped to 250 students, steadily declining as families moved away because of impending clearance of the neighborhood for the World’s Fair grounds. The school district sold the site to the State of Washington in 1957 after the State Supreme Court ruled that the state could condemn the property, though the school still had students enrolled for two more years.

On May 15, 1959, former teachers, students, and staff gathered to say farewell to the 57-year-old building. For the following school year, students were transferred to West Queen Anne or John Hay, with the cerebral palsy group going to Lowell, the blind children to John Hay, the sight-saving to Coe, and the hearing-impaired to Green Lake. When the Century 21 Exposition opened in April 1962, a portion of the Washington State Coliseum (1962-64), which housed international exhibits, was built on the former school site. It later became the Seattle Center Coliseum (1964-1994), then Key Arena (1995-2018), and on October 19, 2021, opened as Climate Pledge Arena following a \$1.15 billion renovation, which included naming rights purchased by Amazon.

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Name: **Warren Avenue School**  
 Location: Warren Avenue [North] and Harrison Street  
 Building: 12-room, 3-story wood  
 Architect: Albert Wickersham  
 Site: 2.12 acres

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1903: Opened on February 16; renamed Edwards on March 7; returned to Warren Avenue on September 1  
 1914: Additional building (n.a.)  
 1959: Sold to State of Washington; closed in spring; demolished on August 27  
 Present: Site of Climate Pledge Arena at Seattle Center