

West Seattle Elementary

Name: West Seattle Elementary School	Enrollment: 415
Address: 6760 34th Avenue SW	Nickname: Huskies
Configuration: K-5	Colors: Purple and gold



High Point, 2000 ©Mary Randlett SPSA 236-50

During World War I, many families moved to West Seattle because of its thriving industries. In 1918, a Seattle School Board committee recommended placing a school in the general vicinity of 35th Avenue SW and SW Juneau Street near the Ridgewood Addition. In 1922, when nearby Jefferson School became overcrowded, a small portable school called Ridgewood opened to handle the overflow. The site was originally leased from owner Henry M. Clay with an option to purchase. In 1925, Ridgewood's single classroom housed students in grades 1-3. When Ridgewood closed in 1939, its students were sent to Hughes, Gatewood, and Jefferson.

Two years after Ridgewood closed, the federal government took over the property as part of a 175-acre housing project. The project was named High Point because it was built at one of the highest points of the city overlooking Boeing Field. It was designed to house workers and their families who came from around the country to work in Seattle's shipyards and airplane factories during World War II. In April 1942, families started moving into the 1,300-unit housing project, said to be the second-largest housing project west of the Mississippi River.

Details:

Name: **Ridgewood School**
 Location: 35th Avenue SW & SW Juneau Street
 Building: 1-room portable
 Site: 5.0 acres

1922: Opened as an annex to Jefferson
 1939: Closed on October 2
 1941: Sold to U.S. government on April 9

Details:

Name: **High Point School**
Location: 6760 34th Avenue SW
Building: 12-room wood
Architect: Stuart, Kirk & Durham
Site: 3.47 acres

1944: Opened in September
1947: Acquired land from federal government
1953: Addition (n.a.)
1959: Site expanded to 5.64 acres
1976: School closed
1977: School reopened as the result of a lawsuit
1987: School closed in June for demolition; students relocated to Boren as an interim site

Approximately 306 children moved into High Point. In 1942-43, kindergarten was taught in the community hall, while older children went by bus to Cooper and Gatewood.

In August 1943, the school board decided that the High Point School would serve only children living in the High Point Project, and it would be “operated separately from other schools of the neighborhood.” That fall, classes for grades 1-3 and kindergarten began with each class held in a five-room apartment. On the first day, teachers were presented with their classroom materials in underwear boxes donated by the University District’s J. C. Penney store. Because classroom furniture was not yet ready, the children sat on the floor. The principal’s office was housed in the first apartment north of the school’s east entrance. The custodian stored supplies in a back bedroom.

In 1944, a new High Point School opened five blocks from the site of Ridgewood. Architect Paul Kirk, a 1932 Roosevelt graduate, designed the school with a distinctive “V for Victory” bracing on overhangs, a common feature of World War II military and defense-worker housing. Constructed with federal funds, the school accommodated kindergarten and grades 1-4, upper grades still went to Gatewood. Although Seattle Public Schools operated the school



High Point Annex, ca. 1948 SPSA 236-7

Details:

Name: **High Point Annex**
 Location: 2900 SW Graham Street
 Building: 4-room wood
 Site: 0.5 acre

1948: Opened in September
 1951: Acquired from federal government
 1972: Closed in spring

from the beginning, it was not until fall 1947 that the property was deeded to the district by the federal government.

In September 1948, two classrooms in the High Point Child Care Center were rented for use as kindergarten classes. This building became the High Point Annex.

By 1953, many of the wartime workers had moved out of the High Point Housing Project and the apartments were converted into low-income housing. That same year, eight classrooms, a gymnasium, and two play courts were added to the main 1944 school building and the student body expanded to K-6. From 1953-56, approximately 40 of the 1,100 students attending the school lived outside of the High Point development. In 1959, the district purchased 2.17 acres west of

the main building for a playground.

Enrollment at High Point continued to grow. In the early 1960s, in addition to the main building and four classes in the annex, 12 portables were situated at 32nd Avenue SW and [S]W Willow Street to accommodate up to 1,263 pupils. In 1964, enrollment began to decline, largely because a new Fairmount Park school opened, and boundary lines were redrawn. By 1972-73, for the first time in many years, the main building housed all classes. The housing project was reduced to 1,100 apartments, and school enrollment dropped to 340.

High Point School was first recommended for closure in 1974 for four reasons: declining enrollment, ample space in adjacent schools, to reduce costs, and to achieve a “desired racial balance.” A 1974 plan called for busing of High Point children to Sanislo, Gatewood, Cooper, and Fairmount Park, but residents wanted their own school. At a public meeting, one resident argued, “High Point is a community, it should have a community school.” Nevertheless, the school was closed at the end of the 1975-76 year, only to be reopened the following fall as a result of a lawsuit.

Under the district’s desegregation plan, High Point was paired with Hughes. From 1979-81, High Point housed grades K-2 while Hughes housed K, 3-5. High Point then served K-3 and Hughes accommodated K, 4-6 for 1981-88.

Although the old Hughes building could be repaired for a relatively low price, the wood-frame High Point was not thought worth repairing. A proposal for a new High Point School surfaced in late 1983 when Superintendent Donald J. Steele Jr. recommended consolidating Hughes and High Point at the High Point site. Although the name Emerald City Elementary School was selected in an unofficial contest, the newly built school remained High Point and served children from that community. While the new building was under construction,



High Point, 1963 SPSA 236-2

Details:

Name: **High Point Elementary School**
Location: 6760 34th Avenue SW
Building: 20-classroom, 2-story steel frame with brick veneer
Architect: Northwest Architectural Company
Site: 6.45 acres

1988: Opened in September on larger site with land from Seattle Housing Authority
2007: Fairmount Park closed; Fairmount Park students assigned to High Point; name changed to West Seattle Elementary
2011: School library upgraded
2021: School closed for construction; students relocated to Schmitz Park as interim site
2023: School reopened with addition (Miller Hayashi Architects; BEX V)

students were relocated to Boren as the interim site. High Point was the first new school in West Seattle in 18 years, since Sanislo had opened in December 1970.

The new High Point School was already under construction near the southwest corner of 31st Avenue SW and SW Holly Street, on property owned by the Seattle Housing Authority, when a land-swap deal failed. The district leased the property for \$1 a year for 50 years. A year later the Housing Authority agreed to the deal, which gave the district one acre at High Point in exchange for the one-quarter acre site of the first Alki School at SW Carroll and 59th Avenue SW.

During the early 2000s, Seattle Housing Authority, working with High Point and West Seattle residents, began making plans to turn the public housing development into a new mixed-income neighborhood enhanced with a new library, clinic, and community center. Families were relocated and could choose to return once construction was completed. When demolition started, there were 365 High Point families with 245 children aged 5 to 9. Between April 2002 and March 2003, that number dropped to 170 families with 110 children. School District officials estimated it would take six to seven years to rebuild the community to 1,600 households.

When it was announced Fairmount Park would close at the end of the 2006-07 school year and Fairmount Park students would be assigned to High Point Elementary, the two schools asked the school

board to rename the combined school. In August 2007, the Seattle School Board honored the request and voted to change the name of High Point Elementary to West Seattle Elementary School. Fairmount Park remained closed until 2014, when it reopened following a full-scale renovation (see Fairmount Park).

In 2010, West Seattle was one of three schools in the district to receive a School Improvement Grant from the U.S. Department of Education. The funds, approximately \$350,000 to \$400,000 a year for three years, were used to narrow the achievement gap. Nationwide about 100 schools received these turn-around grants. With the money, the school hired new teachers and staff, added 15 extra minutes to the school day, and offered more after-school activities. The grant also helped create more parent engagement and community-based education programs.

In 2011, the school library received a gift of \$200,000 from Target Corp. and the Heart of America Foundation, which provides grants to under-resourced schools. The funds were used to purchase new books and computer equipment and to make a few building updates. In 2012, the National Education Association selected West Seattle for a grant under NEA's Priority Schools Campaign, which provides support to schools as they implement sweeping school-based reforms.

In 2021, construction began on a new 20,000-square-foot two-story addition that provides 12 new classrooms and two learning commons. As part of the design, the library was relocated within the building and expanded to include more natural light, and new play areas were added. New carpet and technology improvements enhanced the existing 50,700-square-foot school building. During construction, students were relocated to Schmitz Park School as an interim site. With the completion of the new addition in fall 2023, the expanded building can accommodate up to 500 students.