

NEIGHBORHOODS SOUTHEAST SEATTLE COMMUNITY HISTORY PROJECT

Southeast Seattle Schools: World War II to Present

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Introduction

The second half of the 20th century brought tremendous changes to Southeast Seattle public schools. World War Two had brought thousands of defense workers to the area, and by the end of the war their children had filled the neighborhood schools to bursting. Rising enrollments continued into the 1950s, and the district responded with a school-building boom, hoping to add enough capacity in the South End to educate the children who lived there.

Through the 1940s and '50s, most of those children had been white, but that was about to change. The population of SE Seattle shifted in the 1960s, '70s, and '80s as white people moved out and African American and Asian families arrived; in the schools this demographic shift was especially dramatic.

Enrollment levels and demographics at Southeast Seattle schools would also be affected by the district's desegregation efforts, which began in the 1960s and continued in some form until 2002. An ambitious busing plan adopted in 1978 succeeded in its narrowly defined goal of improving the racial balance in the city's most heavily "minority" schools, but the program was expensive, and had many hidden costs that hit Southeast Seattle hard. As the busing plan was dismantled, new "choice" assignment policies allowed parents to send their children to any school in the district; this ultimately drained many of the area's neighborhood schools, particularly of white children. Efforts to strengthen Southeast Seattle schools, to serve poor and at-risk kids, and to attract white middle-class families back to schools in the neighborhood were often successful on a small scale, but the most effective programs proved difficult to replicate across the board. A year after the district eliminated the last remnant of its desegregation plan (a racial "tie-breaker" in school assignments), the neighborhood that prided itself on being "the most diverse zip code in the country" had eight elementary schools (out of thirteen) that were more than 90% minority.

As Seattle Public Schools returns to a neighborhood assignment plan in 2010, there is an enervating disconnect between the population of the neighborhoods and the population of the schools -- the legacy of years of white flight, "school choice," degraded neighborhood trust, and low community investment in South End schools. As

some neighborhoods gentrify and others languish, issues of racial disparity and educational equity have come to the fore in new ways. These issues will be grappled with in the present and future, but their roots go back to South Seattle's post-war past.

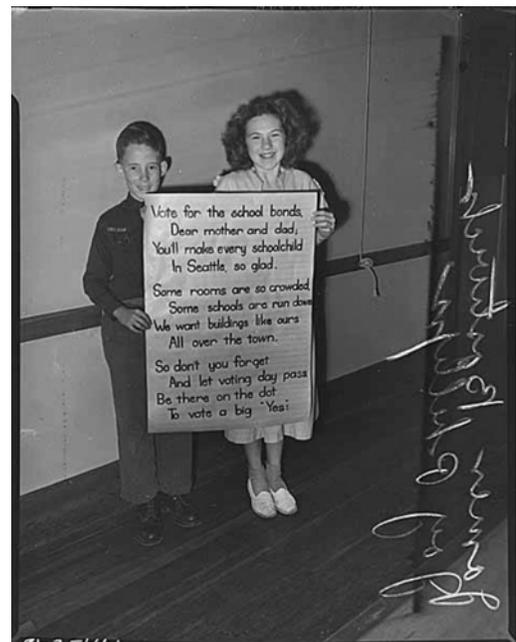
WWII Packs 'Em In

The end of World War Two found Southeast Seattle's public schools bursting at the seams: the increased population that arrived to work in defense industries during the war had significantly outpaced the school district's building capacity.

Seattle's population grew by nearly 100,000 during WWII, and 1400 units of new wartime housing at Rainier Vista and Holly Park meant that SE Seattle took in more than its share of young families. Schools all over SE Seattle felt the crunch, but Columbia (near Rainier Vista) and Van Asselt (near Holly Park) were especially affected by the influx of new arrivals. Jim Lough, who attended Columbia in the 1940s, remembers a new flood of students with different accents and unfamiliar slang: "Columbia Grade School was all of a sudden filled with kids from way other foreign places to us. Oh, we took them right in. It's just that some of them talked funny, we thought... I remember a girl who was a hero when she first came because she was at Pearl Harbor, and she'd remembered seeing the planes diving. So, she was just a big hero, telling her stories. But that wore out."

To relieve overcrowding, the district opened Van Asselt Annex in 1942, and Columbia Annex at Rainier Vista in 1944. These annex buildings helped, but both schools were still packed to the gills: Van Asselt's enrollment had gone from 120 in 1942 to 675 in 1944. Van Asselt Annex would get its own permanent building in 1967; it operated as South Van Asselt until 1969, when it was renamed Wing Luke Elementary School in honor of the City's first Asian American City Councilman.

Columbia Annex closed in 1971, when Dearborn Park opened one mile south. The structure still stands today; over the years it has housed a Head Start program, alternative schools,



Property of Museum of History & Industry, Seattle

Students at Columbia School shill for a capital levy, 1948.

enrollment offices, and non-profit organizations (including the Refugee Women's Alliance in its early years).

Postwar Building Boom

After the war Southeast Seattle continued to boom, and the district began a building spree to meet the needs of the growing school-age population. A new building was built for Van Asselt School in 1950, and Rainier View was started in portables in 1952 as an annex to Dunlap. Also in 1952, Sharples Junior High became the area's first junior high school. Brighton Annex opened in portables in 1957, and became Graham Hill with a new building in 1961, the same year Rainier View's new building opened.



Franklin High School remodel, 1959 RVHS Collection

In 1959 Franklin High School's capacity was expanded with the addition of a lunchroom and gymnasium. The school's neoclassical marble columns were covered by a chunky modern box.

The opening of Rainier Beach Junior-Senior High School in 1960 increased secondary capacity in the South End even more. Karen Conroy attended Rainier Beach in its first year of operation: "I remember that the building was not finished and there was a lot of noise from workmen. I was upset because I had wanted to stay at Sharples and go to Franklin like my parents, cousins, etc." Her friend Linda Bigley wasn't bothered by the construction going on around her that September, and she liked the new building: "Students filled the halls before school and at lunch. One benefit at Rainier Beach was that it had two floors of halls shaped in a square, so we could walk around perpetually in one direction. I liked that. We walked and talked, and probably looked at the boys." (When pressed, Bigley admits that "probably" may be an understatement.)

While some students were disappointed not to be attending Franklin with their friends, others enjoyed the opportunity to excel at activities that would have been dominated by an established (and well-off) "sosh" clique at the older school. "I probably would not have become a senior class officer at a much larger school,"

says Linda Bigley. "My sweetheart, Ron Atwood, commented similarly. Being short, he would not have made Varsity football, baseball, or track at a larger school." These fledgling sports teams needed all the support they could get from their schoolmates as they competed against Seattle's more established athletic programs: "Although we lost every football game on the scoreboard," says player Andy Schellhas, "every week the players and the student body came out proud and excited as though we were playing for a championship."

Cherie Duncalf remembers "the excitement of attending a brand new school. Our class would be the first class EVER to go through Rainier Beach, Freshmen to Seniors." The students got to choose their colors (blue and orange) and a mascot (the Vikings). Fifty years later Duncalf still recalls the school song:

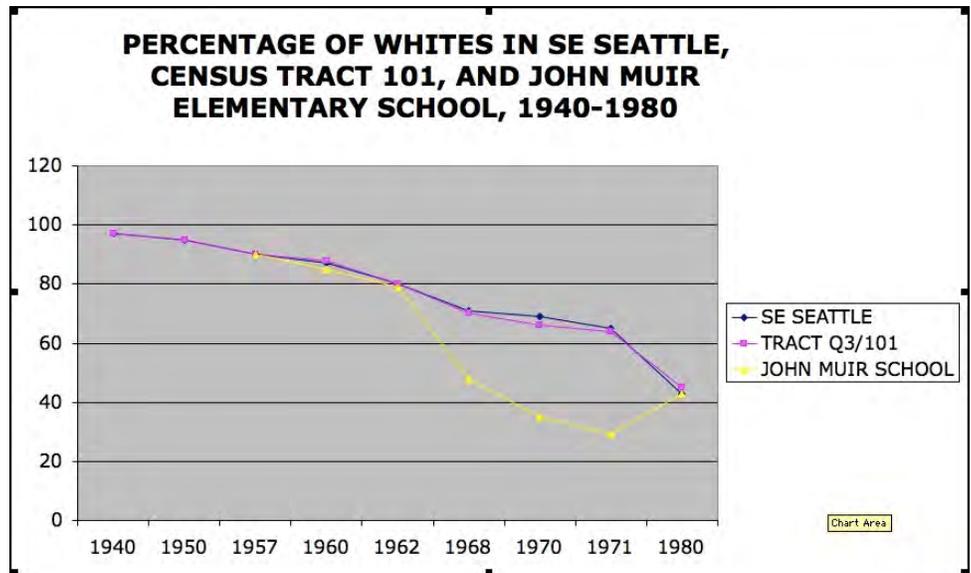
If, like Vikings, we may wander far from hearth and home,
Still we'll look to thee to lead us back from whence we roam;
Like a beacon shining brightly through the night's dark reach,
O'er the years our thoughts will hearken back to Rainier Beach.

Rainier Beach was headed up by new principal Donald Means, a former Husky football star. A Seattle Times profile of Means emphasized youth and enthusiasm to an almost comical degree: "'Our staff is a happy mix of successful experience and youthful enthusiasm,' the youthful principal said, pointing to several young-looking teachers fresh from college who were talking to several older-appearing, but equally enthusiastic members of the school's faculty." At least one member of this youthful, enthusiastic staff brought an early whiff of 1960s social change to their classrooms: "Prior to high school, I never had a young teacher, dressed in a short skirt, sitting on a table up front with her legs crossed," says Linda Bigley. "She also presented us with questions that made us think."

Declining Enrollment, Changing Demographics

Southeast Seattle as a whole was 97% white in 1940 and 95% white in 1950, and the population of the public schools was largely white through the 1950s as well (except on Beacon Hill, where Asian families had been living since the 1930s). In 1962, when district-wide enrollment peaked at 99,236, Beacon Hill and Kimball were more than half Asian, but eleven of the area's remaining 17 schools were more than 80% white. A demographic shift had begun, however -- in the population and in the schools: in 1970 Southeast Seattle's population was 14% African American and 17% Asian. By 1980 the African American population had risen to 29% and the Asian population stood at 23%.

The student population mirrored this demographic shift - and in some neighborhoods amplified it quite dramatically. John Muir Elementary School, for instance, was 90% white in 1957, 79% white in 1962, 48% white in 1968, and 29%



white in 1971. The surrounding census tract, on the other hand, was 95% white in 1950, 88% white in 1960, and 66% white in 1970. (The 1978 desegregation plan would initially bring the two a little more into alignment: in 1980 the school was 43% white, and the neighborhood was 45% white.) Data on private and parochial school enrollment is difficult to come by, but these statistics certainly suggest - and anecdotal evidence confirms - that many local white children left the public schools during this period.

At the high schools in particular, the dramatic demographic changes took place amidst a growing awareness of racial issues, a widening generation gap, and social unrest across the country. In the spring of 1968 these forces came together at Franklin High School when a student protest was joined by a group of visibly armed Black Panthers. Accounts differ considerably on the origins of this protest, but it seems to have begun when two African American girls were told their afro hair styles were not "ladylike" enough for school. Students were also angry about the lack of African American representation in the curriculum, and discipline policies they felt were being applied inequitably.

It turned out the rifles the Panthers carried were unloaded, and they later pointed out that they had been invited on campus by Franklin students to help the students work out their issues with the administration. But events spiraled, classes were disrupted, a teacher was injured - and parents were understandably freaked out. (Their fears could hardly have been allayed when, in the middle of the legal proceedings surrounding the incident, Martin Luther King was assassinated, sparking riots in the Central District.) Eventually the principal was removed.

John Morefield (who would go on to be a legendary principal in several South End schools) was hired as a counselor at Franklin that spring. "There were some really active, bright African American students at Franklin at that time. The new principal and his administration dealt with them in a very respectful way, and they responded in kind. So the students at Franklin were fine. But whenever there was a demonstration at the school it brought carloads of outsiders. It was outsiders who were the problem." The theme of that spring's yearbook -- "Unity" -- reads as a poignant plea in the midst of such turmoil.

That fall, tensions between black and white students mounted at Rainier Beach and Cleveland High Schools. A group of Black Panthers attended a community meeting about the issue in September of 1968 and marched out in silent protest. According to the *Seattle Times*, Rainier Beach Principal Donald Means -- eight years less youthful than he'd been when the school opened -- pronounced himself "sick over what has happened," and many parents demanded stricter security and discipline at the school. But some students "expressed the wish that the adults would let them work out harmonious race relations."

New Programs: Groovy to Gritty

Program and curriculum changes in the 1960s and '70s reflected shifts in educational practice, expanding federal requirements, and the changing needs of the children enrolled in South End schools.

Bilingual education became a federal issue after the 1974 U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Lau v. Nichol*, which mandated that districts provide equal educational access to their non-English-speaking students. Seattle's bilingual programs expanded through the 1970s and '80s, serving a growing and changing population of Asians, Latinos, and others.

Southeast Seattle was the focus of much of this growth. The Asian community spread beyond Beacon Hill and became much more diverse, with new arrivals from Southeast Asian joining established Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino communities. Ken Mochizuki's autobiographical novel *Beacon Hill Boys* describes the intergenerational struggles among some of these families, as Asian teenagers struggled to forge their own identities in a racially charged, multi-cultural community.

In the 1980s the school district worked to meet the needs of third-generation Japanese and Chinese students who had grown up speaking English, refugees arriving

from war-torn Vietnam and Laos, Filipinos of various backgrounds, and impoverished Pacific Islanders with little English - all categorized as "Asian" by the district demographers.

Other educational trends also found their way into Southeast Seattle schools during the 1970s. Progressive ideas about non-hierarchical classrooms and student-driven curriculum found a home in the District's first Alternative School, which got its start in 1970 at Martha Washington School, and later spent several years in the old Maple Elementary School building on Beacon Hill before relocating to the North End. In a scathing article, the *South District Journal* described the school as a hotbed of socialist indoctrination and four-letter-words, a place with "five to twelve year olds riding tricycles down the school halls, painting on the walls as they wish and what they wish, doing what they want to, and when they want." Even early administrators had concerns about "how much learning was going on there." But ASI was the first of several alternative programs started in the 1970s to address what a 1972 pamphlet described as "the disenchantment of some parents with public education and... its unresponsiveness to the needs of their children." In the intervening years these programs have evolved to balance out children's interests with academic goals, and, as teacher Marletta Iwasyk framed it, "freedom with responsibility."

Other alternative programs were created to address the effects of "racial isolation, student alienation and disaffection, economic recession," and so on, according to district pamphlets. These included the Cottage School (attached to Rainier Beach, meeting students' needs for "greater self-knowledge, a smaller more intimate program, and an opportunity to make responsible decisions"), the Franklin Project (a program for at-risk girls), American Indian Heritage High School, and the Mount Baker Youth Services Bureau, which served "as an alternative to traditional juvenile corrections system." Students at Rainier Beach High School were part of a collaboration with Boeing during which, over the course of eight years, they built an experimental aircraft, which was auctioned off for \$3000 in 1983.



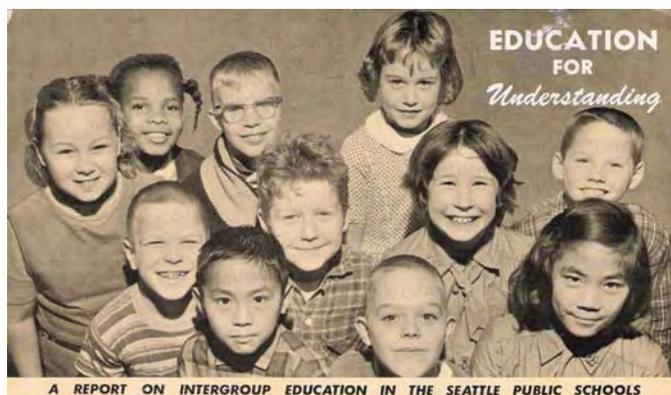
South Shore, 1974 SPSA 130-2

"Open concept" schools were another product of the 1970s - instead of individual classrooms these schools offered large multi-class spaces meant to encourage interaction between students and collaboration among teachers. Six "open concept" schools were built in SE Seattle in two years: South Shore Junior High in 1970, and Beacon Hill, Kimball, Wing Luke, Maple, and Dearborn Park elementaries in 1971. (South Shore and Dearborn Park were new schools; the others replaced existing buildings.) South Shore, the largest of these, basically consisted of one 1.5-acre room, carpeted with three-foot-wide day-glo stripes stretching across the vast space.

Desegregation: The Seattle Plan

Of all the policies implemented by the school district during this period, the one with the biggest impact by far was desegregation. Seattle's desegregation experience mirrored that of many other cities: after a voluntary program failed to shift the racial balance in the schools, a mandatory busing program was put in place, which was then gradually dismantled in the decades that followed. The 1978 "Seattle Plan" was unusual in that it was adopted by the School Board without a court order mandating it -- though the threat of an NAACP lawsuit was a factor in motivating the Board to act "voluntarily" when it did.

The District's first effort to desegregate its schools came in 1962: a strictly voluntary program called "Education for Understanding" allowed students to request assignment at a school outside their neighborhood in order to promote cross-racial contact. The program did not provide transportation to its participants, however, and by its third year had only attracted 400 volunteers, 36 of them white. Magnet programs came next; they were slightly more successful, but everyone acknowledged that they tended to produce segregated classrooms within schools: the special arts, science, or accelerated programs served mostly white children, whose parents were often more comfortable navigating the bureaucratic requirements for admission.



School district pamphlet, 1965. RVHS Collection

The district then tried a mandatory desegregation plan, but its first phase -- involving four middle schools in Central and North Seattle - stirred up so much

controversy that the plan to expand it to elementary and high schools was abandoned. A citizen protest group organized a recall campaign against the School Board. The recall effort failed, but Superintendent Forbes Bottomly resigned amid the controversy.

In 1977 a dynamic, decisive new Superintendent came on board: the *Weekly* described David Moberly as, "not what you'd call a pussyfooting bureaucrat." The NAACP was threatening to sue the district over its failure to desegregate the schools, and the Urban League had come up with a "Triad Plan" that had garnered support in the African American community, because it would not put an undue burden on minority students, as most busing plans did. There was still resistance in the wider community to the idea of mandatory busing, but the District-Wide Advisory Committee on Desegregation worked hard to garner support for the idea, and in the end the City government, business leaders, and community organizations, including the generally conservative PTA, endorsed the plan.

Good, Big Reasons

As in other urban districts across the country, rationales for desegregation in Seattle were well-intentioned: academic and psychological benefits for minority students, a broadening of horizons for white kids, and societal benefits for everyone, as children would learn to create the harmonious multicultural world their parents had failed to produce. These idealistic goals aligned with more cynical motives too. Many African American parents, for instance, wanted their kids in integrated classrooms simply because they believed that "better education - curriculum, supplies, teachers - will follow the white students." (Other black parents, on the other hand, shared Zora Neale Hurston's exasperation at the idea that their kids "require the presence of white children in order to learn.")

But even people of good will who shared the goal of having kids of different colors go to school together could not always agree on the best way to achieve it. Should race-based assignments be voluntary or mandatory? How could the burden of busing be equitably distributed, so it did not fall primarily on kids of color? (Activist Annie Jones described this disparity as a "totally obnoxious and unequal" result of the district's voluntary desegregation program, according to author Anna Siqueland.) Should children of color be sprinkled evenly throughout a city's schools, or should groups of "minority" students be kept together to support their sense of community and identity?

Sometimes different values clashed, as Siqueland documents in her book, *Without A Court Order*. For instance, the federal government determined in 1975 that Seattle's minority teachers were too concentrated in Central District schools and required that they be more evenly distributed across the district. African American parents (including Annie Jones) protested: they valued the positive role models black teachers provided, and didn't necessarily trust white teachers to treat their children equitably in mixed-race classrooms. Their fears weren't unfounded: according to Mindy Cameron's history of the period, Superintendent Forbes Bottomly once "visited a school where some [black] children from the Central District had been bused [and] found an older teacher at her desk, crying. 'I asked her what was the matter. She said she had never talked to a black person before and she was afraid of these children.'" (This was certainly an extreme case, but concerns about white teachers' sensitivity to the needs of black children continue even today, as Charles Mudede pointed out in a recent *Stranger* article entitled "My Daughter, Her Hair, and the Seattle School District: A Few Thoughts About My Daughter Getting Ejected from Her Class at Thurgood Marshall Elementary Last Week."

Seattle's significant Asian population presented unique issues: Should Asian students be counted as white, or minority? Would their (not homogenous) educational needs be met by lumping them in either group? How would busing Asian kids to distant schools affect immigrant communities, who relied heavily on each other for social support? How would bilingual and ESL programs be affected? Asian community leaders were involved in developing the Seattle Plan, but many people feared, like School Board member Suzanne Hittman, that non-English-speaking Asian parents "absolutely could not understand what [desegregation] was all about," and would therefore be blindsided by the changes. Siqueland quotes Hittman: "I sat with those parents in their living rooms at night and worked with interpreters and tried to explain it to them. I used to get to the point where I would say to the interpreter, 'Tell them I don't understand it either... They're just going to move.'"

Still, by 1978 there was fairly broad support for (along with vocal opposition to) the idea of busing as part of the desegregation plan. As Mayor Charles Royer put it in an interview quoted by Siqueland: "The fact is that getting to know each other at an early age, has to have a benefit to us in the long term. That is the reason we are doing this difficult and wrenching thing. It's a good reason, and a big one. It's hard to get your hands on it to put it down on your coffee table so you can look at it, but it is a big and important thing we are doing."

Superintendent David Moberly agreed with this in principle. But, he pointed out in the *Weekly* profile "It's all a matter of logistics, which have a way of defeating noble ideas." And indeed, from a mélange of good intentions, cynicism, ambivalence, and conundrums, district officials had to develop official definitions, quantifiable goals, concrete strategies, and, in the end, a workable assignment plan that would distribute real children to real classrooms across their (mostly) residentially segregated city.

Ironically, the city's most racially integrated neighborhoods had the least influence on the process. According to Dan Levant, chair of the District-Wide Advisory Committee on Desegregation, "Central Area schools had a history of active, organized parents and fairly effective advocacy. This wasn't true of SE Seattle, where the schools were becoming segregated quickly, where leadership was not present, where there was little community organization, and where there was no one to stand up to the School Board." Southeast Seattle's unique issues were not always fully understood, and its neighborhoods were disproportionately affected by the desegregation plan the district adopted in the end.

Logistics Have Their Way

The Seattle Plan as adopted in 1978 included both Asian and African American children as "minority" students, and defined as "racially imbalanced" any school whose "minority" population exceeded the district's average by 20% -- so in 1978, with the district-wide minority population at 33%, the limit would be 53% minority students at any given school. This definition put every school in SE Seattle, with the exception of Emerson Elementary, into the "racially imbalanced" column -- even though many of them served a relatively balanced population of White, Black, and Asian students. (Franklin High School, for instance, was 27% white, 37% black, and 31% Asian in 1975, while Cleveland was 35% white, 18% black, and 43% Asian.) Meanwhile, essentially all-white schools in the north end were not considered segregated, and were unaffected by the Seattle Plan.

The definition also created a moving target - the district's own minority percentage continued to rise every year as white children left the public schools. In a 1986 *Weekly* article, David Brewster noted that the district's minority percentage had just topped 50%, and wryly pointed out that most of the district's progress in moving schools from the "segregated" to the "desegregated" column could be attributed to this slow march of the goal-posts. Brewster concluded that under the official definition of racial imbalance, "When the district minority

percentage reaches 80%, presumably complete desegregation will have been achieved, and a pyrrhic victory can be declared."

The Seattle Plan paired each "racially imbalanced" school with a majority white school in the north end. All students attended their neighborhood school for kindergarten; students from both neighborhoods attended one school for grades 1-3, then the other for grades 4-6. In a few cases schools were placed in triads instead of pairs -- one racially imbalanced school and two majority white schools. The pairings and triads for SE Seattle schools were as follows:

- Brighton Elementary paired with West Queen Anne & Hay
- Columbia (K, 4-6, Science & Tech magnet) paired with Olympic View (K, 1-3)
- Dearborn Park (K, 4-6) paired with Magnolia, later Lawton
- Dunlap (K, 4-5) paired with Roxhill & Fauntleroy
- Graham Hill (K, 1-3) paired with Northgate
- Whitworth paired with West Woodland (this pairing was added to the plan several years into it)
- As part of the Mandatory Middle School Plan adopted in 1970, Sharples Junior High got students from Broadview & Wilson, and Mercer got students from West Seattle

The district prepared for chaos and protest on the first day of school that fall, but the school year began without any of the ugly scenes that had played out in Boston and other cities. One white student from a politically progressive family remembers being proud of Seattle's proactive approach: "Seattle was cool - we were the only city that did this without a court forcing them to!"

The Seattle Plan had some clear advantages: neighborhood kids stayed together with their peers. The burden of busing did not fall exclusively on kids of color, as had happened in other cities. It was predictable: every family knew where their children would be attending school from year to year. And it achieved its stated goals: In 1980, two years after the plan was adopted, only Brighton, Columbia, and Cleveland High School were "racially imbalanced" (and barely).

But the plan had some pretty big costs. The first was the financial burden of transporting whole classrooms of children across the city, far more than were necessary to achieve the district's desegregation goals. It's also pretty clear that the plan cost the district white students -- though it's hard to say exactly how many, as white enrollment had been dropping steadily for more than a decade even before the plan was enacted. Still, more than six thousand white students left SPS between 1978 and 1980, and it seems likely that many of their parents

simply balked when it came time to send their children across town on a bus to attend school in a "minority" neighborhood.

Services and programs designed to serve the district's neediest students were deliberately placed in distant neighborhoods in order to attract students of color to all-white schools. The district's 1977-78 bilingual services brochure warned that "some of the schools where we have bilingual programs already have a great number of minority students. We will keep our bilingual programs in these schools, but we cannot transfer additional minority students into them." Franklin High School's bilingual advisory committee was divided on this issue. The committee's minutes from 1978 show some members wanting to push to have bilingual students continue to be assigned to Franklin, because "bilingual students might not be treated fairly if they will just send them to the north end as part of the Desegregation program." Others argued that "this is our chance to let the students go to the north end, because if we let them stay, we are tying them down."

Evelyn Fairchild was a principal at Olympic Hills, "the furthest north school in the whole district" in the 1990s.

I would hear from the teachers, "Those parents don't care about education. They don't come to meetings." I thought, Well, here we are at 130th and 20th NE, way off the freeway. They just came to this country, they don't speak English, public transportation doesn't serve this area well. Even if they had a car, it's hard to get all the way up here for a meeting. If those families chose to live in this (northern) neighborhood, then it would be easier to be involved at school. But if they choose to live on Beacon Hill, with their community, and then their kids get sent up north for school? These parents didn't know how to complain, how to say, "Not my child!" In other countries they learned not to protest, not to interfere with schools and teachers. The district was able to use kids for years that way - to integrate schools, not to serve kids.

Meanwhile, students of color were denied entry to "advanced" programs in their own neighborhoods, because the district needed white students to fill those seats. Evelyn Fairchild saw this side of the equation too, as she tried to get her own mixed-race daughters into the Horizon program at Whitworth, their neighborhood school. Her first frustration came when she tried to write "Black and White" on the girls' enrollment forms, "and the form always came back marked 'Black.'"

But the big problem I had was, the girls qualified for the Horizon program, and they had one at Whitworth. Well, the reason they had a Horizon program at Whitworth was so white kids would go there. They wanted to send my girls to the Horizon program at West Woodland in the North End. "It's a new program," they told me. "A nice program." Well," I said, "you have the program here, so I want to send them to our neighborhood school." [Eventually] I went to talk to the principal. "I've been waiting for two

years. [My daughter is] not going to go to West Woodland to integrate their program. They are not going to use my child that way."

A 1985 *Weekly* article quoted African American teachers who felt that the academic benefits brought to minority kids by integrated education were outweighed by the detrimental effect on black neighborhoods robbed of strong neighborhood schools. Eric Scigliano, writing in the *Weekly* in 1991, pointed out that the imbalance between white kids busing south and "minority" kids busing north "sapped enrollment, sometimes to dangerously low levels, at Southeast Schools such as Graham Hill, and has also sapped the sense of community that neighborhood schools foster." Though the original plan tried to preserve the relationship between school and neighborhood by keeping neighborhood kids together and keeping them at their local school for at least part of their education, in practice it marked the beginning of a slow severing of the connection between SE Seattle schools and their surrounding neighborhoods. This may have been the most significant negative effect of the Seattle Plan -- and also the most intractable.

Erosion of Trust

This loss of connection would be exacerbated in the next decade by several controversial capital projects that pitted neighborhood residents against the district.

In 1986 the district determined that Franklin High School's 74-year-old building was insufficient to meet the needs of the current and future student body. On September 17th, after considering several renovation options, the School Board voted to demolish the old school and build an entirely new building. "We have exhausted the possibilities of renovation within our budget," said Board member Elizabeth Wales. "I love preservation, and part of me feels terrible about that building... but we're not in a position to add that kind of expense."

Two hours later, the City's Landmarks Preservation Board nominated the building for landmark status, limiting the district's ability to tear down the building without a lengthy public process and documentation of "economic hardship." According to Beth Chave, Landmarks spokeswoman, "the Board was impressed by the community's enthusiasm for saving the building."

Community activists working with the South East Seattle Community Organization (SESCO) had formed the Committee to Save Franklin in order to organize opposition to the demolition plan. They spent the winter garnering support, and working with

architects Hewitt/Daly/Isley to come up with a plan that would save the building, add sufficient capacity to serve 1600 students, and stay within the district's budget. The School Board approved the plan in the spring of 1987. Three years later Franklin students re-entered the renovated building. The original façade had been restored with the removal of the 1959 box addition, and a state-of-the-art theater space had been added. The building was beautiful, but the neighborhood would never forget that the district had tried to tear down Franklin High School.

Meanwhile, three miles south, neighbors were actively fighting the replacement of the Whitworth Elementary School building and the expansion of the school's site. Under the leadership of principal Al Cohen, the school had become one of the most popular elementary schools in the district. John Morefield took over from Cohen in 1984, and two years later the school won an Exemplary School Award from the U.S. Department of Education - the first urban school in the nation to be so honored. The program was truly integrated (Morefield was not above sneaking "minority" kids into Horizon classes). Alumna Emily Hendrickson recalls that she had friends of all races -- and scrapbook photos bear out this claim. "I've heard that some people didn't learn about black history in school, but I was always taught it. When you're a kid, you don't know what's normal, but we always had it -- it was normal to us."

The 1907 building had been expanded in 1918 and again in 1955, but many parents and teachers felt the facility was inadequate for the 600+ students who were attending the school in the mid-eighties. In 1984 parents had threatened a boycott of the school, demanding that the district provide more staff and retrofit the building for earthquake safety.

The 1984 boycott was averted, but parent and staff concerns about earthquake safety and the capacity of the building and playground persisted. In 1986 the district decided to expand the site and replace the building - which meant tearing down neighboring homes. Many of the neighbors living in those homes had attended Whitworth themselves (or sent their kids there) in the days when nearly 900 students swarmed the playground, and could not understand why the district needed more space. Staff and parents were divided on the necessity of expanding the site.

Three years, many contentious meetings, and one lawsuit later, the district leveled seven homes to the west of the school, adding 2.8 acres to the site -- half as much as they had originally sought. The new school's footprint shifted the playground slightly westward -- so that the space once occupied by the seven

houses was now an empty playfield. It was hard for the residents who remained not to feel outraged by the ultimate fate of their neighbors' property.

For many neighbors, these conflicts shook their faith in the school district -- the institution they had once entrusted with their children. Linda Jordan, a neighborhood activist whose house had been under threat as part of the Whitworth site expansion, described the district as "the new bully on the block." This loss of trust led to less investment in the schools on the part of the local community, and may have contributed to a series of levy failures in the 1970s and '80s -- which in turn led to budget cuts that contributed to a teacher strike, larger class sizes, shorter school days, and so on.

Another blow to the relationship between neighborhoods and schools came in 1989, when the district revised its assignment plan. The new plan, modeled after an idea pioneered in Cambridge, Massachusetts, created "clusters" of schools, each of which included several mostly-white North End schools and several "minority" South End schools. Families could request any school within their geographically split cluster, but the District reserved the right to make mandatory assignments as needed to achieve "racial balance" at every school. The "Cambridge Plan" offered more choice to families and reduced busing considerably, as whole grade-bands of students at each school would no longer be transported across town regardless of race. It also involved every school in the district for the first time: the old "Seattle Plan" had left many all-white north end schools entirely unaffected.

Unfortunately, the district's rushed implementation of the Cambridge Plan was something of a disaster. Superintendent Kendrick's October 18, 1989, presentation to the School Board details some of the problems:

We created uncertainty and upset the lives of a number of parents and children. Many parents are angry about their experience... and I would feel the same way if I were in their position... Applications were lost. Assignments weren't processed in a timely manner. Some parents weren't treated in a kind, caring or respectful manner. Many parents were given misinformation or no information at all. The assignment forms were confusing and difficult to understand. Too many students remained unassigned when school opened. The Parent Information Centers had a difficult time handling the large demand... Transportation assignments have been -- and continue to be -- a problem. The appeals process has been overwhelming to many people.

Some people credited this debacle with an increase in white flight from the district. But actually, the rate at which white students left the district stayed relatively stable throughout the period -- about 500 kids a year. White families were leaving the South End, however -- by 1990 Southeast Seattle was 32% white,

down from 43% ten years earlier. As a result, the racial balance at South End schools was preserved by the new plan, but overall enrollment in those schools declined considerably.

In addition to adopting the Cambridge Plan, the school district also closed several schools in 1989. Most of these were in the North End, where enrollment had been dropping; one exception was Columbia School. Columbia, which housed a Kindergarten and 4th-6th graders during the "Seattle Plan" days, had only 186 students attending by 1987. Eighty percent of them were African American or Asian, making the school one of six Southeast schools that were officially racially imbalanced that year. The District decided to close the building and move Orca, an alternative school then located in Fremont, to Columbia City. Orca opted to invite the remaining Columbia students to join its program, and embraced the idea of bringing "alternative education to a diverse population."

This wasn't Orca's first foray into interracial education: the school had made a big - and fairly successful -- effort to recruit students of color several years before the district's desegregation plan was adopted. But the move to Columbia was still a challenging transition for the school, and its effect on the program was deep: with poor kids and kids of color suddenly filling more than half the seats at Orca, "social justice" became a hands-on pedagogical issue rather than a vague, feel-good notion. The school's progressive emphasis on process and self-directed learning over standards and academic outcomes had to be balanced against the long-term consequences those academic outcomes might have for the school's neediest students: for poor children of color, equal access to opportunity in the future hinged on academic success at school, in a way that wasn't necessarily true for the children of white middle-class progressive parents.

The Orca community eventually found its footing in Columbia City, and its community-oriented program, focus on social justice, and thriving school garden all contributed to the neighborhood's revitalization in the early 1990s.

Community Efforts to Improve Schools/ District investments in SE Seattle

Seattle Public Schools invested significantly in Southeast Seattle schools in the late '80s and early '90s. In addition to the Franklin renovation and the generally unadmired new Whitworth building, John Muir and Hawthorne both reopened in new buildings in 1989.

Hawthorne's reopening came eleven years after the original building had been torn down for earthquake-safety reasons; children from the neighborhood north of Columbia City and south of Mount Baker had been busing to Magnolia that whole time. Hawthorne's new building came with an inspiring and unprecedented commitment to educating all students, particularly poor kids and kids of color. John Morefield, returning to principalship after several years as a district administrator, offered an official guarantee to incoming kindergarten parents that "if they kept their child at Hawthorne through 6th grade, their child would graduate at grade level or better." Morefield describes the experiment:

The vision was to guarantee the success of 100% of the kids. The mission was to educate all students, particularly kids of color - basically we were going to close the achievement gap. I had to go to the school board to get a contract hiring exception from the teachers union. In those days, teachers picked where they wanted to go, by seniority. The exception I got was that teachers had to apply to work at Hawthorne, had to read the mission, had to meet with me and convince me that they were up to this task -- And then they could chose to come to Hawthorne." I didn't have veto power, but I could tell someone, "Look, this isn't going to work." And fabulous teachers showed up! We had a warranty that looked like a Sears warranty that we gave to all the parents, guaranteeing that their child would be at or above grade level at the end of six years, or we could all be fired. In 1995 we graduated our first class. The class was 75% free and reduced lunch, and maybe 65% kids of color. Sixty-five percent of those first incoming kindergartners had stayed through all six years. And 100% of them were at grade level or better. The same was true for the class of 1996.

Ironically, the program's success undermined its original mission. Morefield goes on: "white parents from Mount Baker came in droves. Some took their kids out of private schools to send them to Hawthorne." Morefield was ambivalent about the influx of white kids. At first he had actively recruited white families, to make sure the school would be integrated. But in 1991, when Hawthorne's white population reached 50%, Morefield quit recruiting. "The neighborhood was 80% 'minority,'" he recalls. "White kids from elsewhere were taking seats that could have gone to neighborhood kids of color." He and his staff worked to make sure that poor Black and Asian kids would stay at Hawthorne. "Many of them lived at Rainier Vista, and if they got a chance at Section 8 housing, they would take it - which might mean moving out of the neighborhood. We worked with them to make sure they could move into better housing, but still stay at the school."

The school also provided clothing, a food bank, multilingual programs - Morefield did everything he could "to attract and retain and be successful with the marginalized members of the community." One of his most effective means of providing that support was "Mom" Wilson, a retired teacher who served as volunteer coordinator at Hawthorne. A 1993 *Seattle Times* profile describes her approach:



"Mom" Wilson, second from right, with some of her charges. Photo swiped from SouthendSeattle.com.

Come here off that bus and give Mom a hug. I'm so glad you're here.

Tell me, kids. Do you need shoes? A button on your coat? Are you not feeling well?

Things OK at home? Are you hungry? Oh, you had an accident, didn't you? That's OK, everybody has accidents...

Mom is the anchor that holds in place the school's philosophy that all adults are responsible for all children. This means, for instance, that you will not wonder whether you should stop the fight in the hallway because those are not your kids. You just do it.

Unfortunately, Hawthorne's success wilted in the years after Morefield retired. He says, "It wasn't about me - the staff tried hard to hold on to the vision. But it was too hard."

It shouldn't be that hard. It's not a lack of will, or a lack of passionate people... But school districts are compliance-driven organizations. It's not that the people downtown are bad people. They are well-intentioned. But people pay attention to what's in front of them. And if what's in front of you is a piece of paper that you want to get off your desk, you are likely to do what it takes to get that paper off your desk, even if it doesn't make sense in the classroom. Star schools emerge despite the organization, not because of it.

Other programs initiated by the school district and community organizations in Southeast Seattle schools during this period include the Montessori program at Graham Hill Elementary School, South Lake High School (a re-entry program for students who have been expelled from other schools), Powerful Schools (a community organization that provides artists-in-residence, tutoring services, and after-school programs in several South End elementary schools) and a program at Rainier Beach High School aimed at Samoan youth.

Betty Patu, one of two teachers who established a program for Samoan kids at Cooper Elementary School in West Seattle, was asked to develop the Rainier Beach program.

Samoan kids were dropping out, hanging out on the streets, causing problems. Gang involvement was very high. Out of 59 Samoan kids at Rainier Beach, maybe five were in class. The rest played football or were in the bathroom drinking. They pretty much ran the school. They would stand at the door in their gang colors and "mean mug" you [she demonstrates the technique: an intimidating glare]. Gang involvement was very high. The principal, and many of the teachers would just ignore them. There was uneasiness and fear toward Pacific Islander students. They are big kids!

The program piloted in 1989 with funding from the State -- \$75K a year for three years. Out of that budget Patu paid herself and two other staff members. The program relied on community volunteers and support from local businesses and partnering organizations. Patu admits it was slow going at first. She had difficulty getting the students to respect her as a leader because, she said, in Samoan culture women do not traditionally play that role. It was difficult to establish trust with the students. "Other people had tried to reach out and had left. The kids figured if they were mean to me, I'd leave too. But they didn't know who they were dealing with!"

Eventually Patu hit on a successful strategy: she recruited The Jets, a pop music group whose members are Tongan, to help her inspire her students. The Jets were playing at the Puyallup Fair that September, and Patu arranged for a busload of her students to meet with the band in person, to hear from these celebrities what made them successful -- and to have front-row seats at the concert. She selected "the critical kids, the ones that seemed hopeless."

Those kids were on cloud nine - they had special seats at the show, with the lights shining on them. They had never felt so special before. When they came back to school, I did not have to say anything. Those kids became leaders. They got the other kids to come in and listen to me. That was the beginning of our success: Kids helping kids.

The program was a huge success. In years past, only one or two Samoan seniors had graduated from Rainier Beach every year - a drop-out rate near 90%. In the first year of the program, all twelve of Patu's seniors graduated, even though it meant catching up on years of lost academic work. "Those kids worked their butts off. I would be there until midnight. They were working that hard." Patu also worked with parents to get them involved in their kids' education, and with Rainier Beach staff to help them understand Samoan culture so they could teach the kids more effectively.

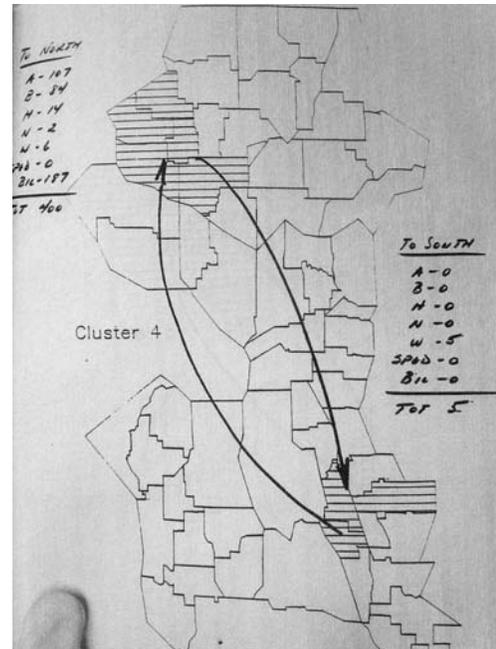
She also made herself available immediately if there were problems involving her students. Once she even took a gun away from a former student who had brought it to school to threaten a boy who was bothering his sister. "The other kids came to tell me what was going on. I ran upstairs and said 'Give me the gun, what are you doing?' He put his head down, and handed me the gun. I said, 'Go down to my room and wait for me there!' And he did. He was waiting for me when I got there. I handed him over to the police, then I went home and cried. 'What did I just do!' I believe it was God's grace he didn't shoot me."

When the three-year pilot funding from the State ended, the district funded the program for fifteen years, until budget cuts eliminated it in 1998.

End of Desegregation

In 1989 when Superintendent Bill Kendrick proposed the "Cambridge Plan" with its racially balanced clusters, he told the School Board that he would be "working with community groups, realtors, and elected officials" to work toward "integrated neighborhoods" - which, he pointed out, were "the ultimate answer." He said he was optimistic that desegregation could be achieved by entirely voluntary assignments by 1993.

The Cambridge Plan had lowered busing costs considerably without affecting racial balance at South End schools. But racial balance had been maintained only by shipping more minority children north; white children were not coming south as the plan intended. In addition, fifteen years of busing did not seem to have benefited minority children very much: as the *Seattle Times* pointed out in 1991, "Last year, African American students scored an average of 33 points lower than white students on standardized reading, math, and language arts tests." Hawthorne had succeeded in bringing poor kids of color up to grade level per its guarantee, and Betty Patu's program had brought graduation rates up for Samoan students at Rainier Beach High, but the achievement gap persisted at other schools across the district.



Undated map showing disparity in north- and south-bound students under the "Cambridge Plan." In Cluster 4, only five white children bused south, while six white and 394 minority children bused north. SPS Archives

In 1995, Kendrick came before the School Board again to propose another new assignment plan. He all but admitted that desegregation's lofty goals - Academic achievement for minorities! Whole and healthy self-worth for all children! An egalitarian society! - had eluded Seattle Public Schools. (He did not point out, as he might have, that this was an awful lot of social change for one beleaguered bureaucracy to tackle singlehandedly.) But he was able to report a face-saving solution based, once again, on moving the goal posts. "With successful completion of the District's years-long effort to have the State Board of Education's definition of racial imbalance liberalized, fewer schools and programs are in danger of being racially imbalanced without significant District student transfer activity."

Obviously (as David Brewster had pointed out in 1986) this sort of semantic sleight-of-hand would not mean the schools were any more racially balanced than they had been the year before. But it did allow the district to adopt a new assignment plan that all but abandoned proactive desegregation. Kendrick's new "Choice" plan did away with the Cambridge Plan's dual-neighborhood, racially balanced "clusters" and instead proposed geographically-based clusters of schools within the city's still-segregated neighborhoods. Under the new plan, students could get priority assignment to any school in their neighborhood cluster, and get transportation there if needed. But families could also request assignment to any school in the district, and get transportation there as well, if space allowed. If their presence would improve the racial balance at the chosen school, they would get preference in assignment - this "racial tie-breaker" was the new plan's only race-balancing tool.

The Cambridge Plan had been described as "controlled choice." The new uncontrolled version added a layer of complexity, confusion, and anxiety to the assignment process that took a heavy toll on parents and district staff. Instead of walking into the enrollment office and signing their kids up for a predictable school, parents were expected to tour the schools they were interested in, rank them on their child's enrollment form, and then sit back and hope for a low lottery number, or at least a spot at the top of a waiting list at their first-choice school. Families who were not able to navigate this system for whatever reason -- language, work schedules, etc. -- were assigned to their neighborhood school automatically.

The complexity and confusion -- which in practice meant inequitable access to the choices afforded by the plan -- was only one of the negative effects. Another cost of the new plan, related to its unpredictable assignment model, was a further

disconnect between neighborhoods and schools. Kids on the same block no longer went to school together. Young parents buying a house in the neighborhood no longer had to ask the question "How are the schools around here?" - the answer didn't matter, as their children wouldn't necessarily be going to them. As noted before, Southeast schools were already suffering from community disinvestment; the new plan only made this problem worse. It also necessitated the most extensive and expensive transportation system of any school district known to man -- a downside that would become more and more of an issue as the school district's budget continued to tighten in the years ahead.

The ultimate effect of the new plan was a significant trend toward resegregation in South End schools. The Cambridge Plan had also been unpredictable and confusing for parents, but it had maintained some semblance of racial balance. Under the new choice program, the percentage of white children plummeted in South End schools. Three years after the School Board approved the plan, the only Southeast Seattle schools with white populations over 20% were Hawthorne, where John Morefield's program was attracting white kids; Kimball, with its uniquely defined assignment area (lobbied for by Mount Baker parents); and Orca, the alternative school that children were assigned to only if their parents could navigate the system well enough to request it.

The saddest thing about this outcome was that Kendrick had predicted it himself in his original proposal - and he had promised a slew of extra support for South End schools in order to prevent it.

There seems to be a significant difficulty in attracting, on a voluntary basis, sufficient majority [*i.e.*, white] students to several central- and southeast-area elementary schools to avoid racial imbalance... The problem faced by these schools is self-reinforcing: so long as they are not chosen by significant numbers of majority families, they will continue to experience difficulty in meeting desegregation guidelines; so long as that difficulty continues, they will... probably continue to be regarded by majority families as low-priority choices in the District's assignment system.

This was followed by a pledge to support these schools with magnet programs, increased and stable staffing, and smaller class sizes. Unfortunately, these efforts were not enough to stem the flow of white students away from many Southeast Seattle schools.

In 2002 the district eliminated the racial tie-breaker in school assignment. In 2007 the lawsuit that precipitated this decision - a case called *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1* - reached the US Supreme

Court, which ruled in a 5-4 decision that any use of race in school assignments was unconstitutional. Desegregation advocates decried this decision - the abandonment, they felt, of the last trace of commitment to the lofty ideals that had created the Seattle Plan a quarter-century earlier. And indeed, the white population at Southeast Seattle schools continued to slide after 2002. But the resegregation of Seattle Public Schools began in earnest with the 1995 "Choice" Plan.

Turn of the Century Building Boom

The turn of the century found the school district in the midst of another South End building spree, as many of the area's older schools were upgraded or replaced. In 1998 Rainier Beach opened a new performing arts center and Kimball added a new wing. Dunlap was completely renovated in 1999, and Emerson's 1909 building was "reconstructed and modernized" in 2000. Also in 2000, a new facility was built for the African American Academy on South Beacon Hill, bringing the program back to Southeast Seattle after several years in Magnolia. Brighton's building was replaced with a new school that opened in 2004.

In 1999 South Shore Middle School moved out of its "open concept" building and into the old Sharples Middle School building on South Graham Street. Sharples had been home to bilingual, alternative, and other special programs; these were all relocated. In November 1999, the building was renamed in honor of Aki Kurose, a former teacher known for a lifetime of peace and social justice work. "Kurose taught in the district for 25 years and inspired many with her actions for peace and understanding among all cultures," says the district's official school history. "She received the Presidential Award for Excellence in Education and the United Nations Human Rights Award. Her favorite saying was, 'If we are to teach real peace in the world we will have to begin with children.'"

Two years later the district embarked upon a new educational experiment in the cavernous - and still day-glo-stripe carpeted -- South Shore building. The New School @ South



First day at the New School @ South Shore, 2002.

Shore, a partnership between Seattle Public Schools and the private New School Foundation, was headed up by veteran principal Gary Tubbs as a neighborhood school serving at-risk kids in the Rainier Beach area. An additional million-plus dollars a year would fund a pre-K program, small class sizes (17 kids in a class), instructional aides, extra classroom hours, a year-round school year, and family support programs. The school's motto, posted in giant letters on the wall, reflected Tubbs's educational approach "I am a Bright Spirit on a Magnificent Journey." The New School opened its doors in September 2002, and its passionate principal, whole-child philosophy, and extra resources worked wonders: according to a 2006 *Seattle Times* article, "More than 71 percent of New School third-graders passed both the math and reading sections of the Washington Assessment of Student Learning. Districtwide, 62 percent did. The New School's demographics are comparable with those of other schools in the neighborhood, but its scores were twice as high." Like Hawthorne in the early '90s, the school succeeded in attracting white middle-class families as well: in fact, the New School was so popular that students had to live within a mile of the school in order to get in (race was no longer a tie-breaker for school assignment, but geography was).

The success of the New School (now simply called South Shore K-8, and inhabiting a brand new building) has been bittersweet. The school has had to tread carefully: nearby schools understandably resent the extra financial support it receives, especially as their own budgets have been cut to the bone in recent years. The New School Foundation has always argued that its role is to demonstrate what "adequate" funding can achieve -- that if the school's bigger budget brings results, it will speed the day when all schools are funded at the same high level. Still, it has been difficult for most school-funding observers to imagine that day arriving any time soon. Furthermore, the New School Foundation's support has been tapering off every year, and is scheduled to end in 2012. Will its success outlast the extra money? How will this latest "star school" fare?

System Reboot: School Closures and the Return to Neighborhood Schools

In 2005 Superintendent Raj Manhas proposed a new round of school closures, designed to bring the district's building capacity in line with its shrunken student population. The list of targeted schools was heavily weighted toward the South End, where enrollments were lowest. Public outcry was so strong that the plan was withdrawn, but a narrowed version resurfaced the following year with the backing of a Citizens Advisory Committee. In the end the Board voted to close five schools, all in Central or South Seattle. In Southeast, Rainier View was merged with Emerson, and Whitworth was merged with Dearborn Park. Orca moved from

Columbia to the Whitworth building. Graham Hill, which had been threatened with closure in the initial proposal, was spared.

Two years later new Superintendent Maria Goodloe-Johnson proposed another round of closures. This time Central Area schools were the focus, but the African American Academy on South Beacon Hill was among the closures. Van Asselt's building was shuttered, and the school was moved into the African American Academy's facility.

The community's response to these events proved that Dan Levant's 1970s assessment of Southeast Seattle as a place "where leadership was not present, where there was little community organization, and where there was no one to stand up to the School Board" was no longer true - parents, teachers, and community groups worked together to mobilize support for threatened schools and to voice their opposition to the closures' disproportionate effect on poor and minority children. In the end, dwindling enrollments and a looming budget shortfall convinced School Board members to proceed with most of the closures anyway -- but many of the South End's emerging leaders and advocacy organizations would continue to stay involved in school district issues as events unfolded.

In 2009, Goodloe-Johnson took even bolder action to address the district's demographic and budgetary woes. She persuaded the School Board to end the district's expensive, complicated "choice" assignment plan and return to neighborhood schools - something Raj Manhas had proposed, but had not had the political support to enact. Starting in the 2010-2011 school year, students were guaranteed assignment to their neighborhood elementary schools, which feed predictably into middle and high schools. Each middle school attendance area also contains a K-8 "Option School," for families who feel their neighborhood school does not meet their child's needs; assignment to Option Schools is based on a lottery system. Families can still apply to attend any school in the district if space is available, but transportation is not provided.

Conclusion

Southeast Seattle's unique demographic profile and complicated history make it difficult to predict how this new assignment plan will affect its schools and neighborhoods. The area has changed enormously since neighborhood schools were the norm in the 1950s and '60s - and it continues to evolve. Southeast Seattle's diversity has become the stuff of hyperbolic legend - a recent television spot cheerily proclaimed, "you can walk into any café in the Rainier Valley and hear thirteen or fourteen languages being spoken" -- but it is also real. This

community is now home to second-generation Vietnamese bakeries and fourth-generation Italian restaurateurs. There are acupuncturists and orthodontists, tattooed bicyclists, and soccer moms of every color and creed. The weekly Columbia City Farmers Market draws African Americans and African immigrants, Latinos and Filipinos, Samoans and Orthodox Jews, same-sex couples, mixed-race families, and everybody in between. Much of Southeast Seattle really does consist of what Bill Kendrick called "the ultimate solution" - integrated neighborhoods.

The return to neighborhood schools could in theory bring about, in Southeast Seattle anyway, what idealistic desegregation advocates have wanted all along: integrated schools -- without long bus rides for small children, confusing assignment plans for anxious parents, and exorbitant transportation costs for the cash-strapped district. Surely if the children of this notoriously vibrant, diverse community all attended their neighborhood schools, those schools would not be, like Rainier Beach High School, 94% minority, with security guards in the halls and test scores in the gutter (according to the Seattle Times School Guide, only six percent of Rainier Beach's tenth graders met state standards in Math, Science, and Reading in 2009).

Of course, the presence of white students in itself should not be the only measure of success for South End schools (nor should test scores, for that matter). Many of these schools are remarkably racially and culturally diverse with or without white kids, and children of color are being taught by passionate and talented teachers in many of their classrooms. But the last decade has seen a multicultural revitalization of Southeast Seattle that has included many young white people - business owners, professionals, community activists, etc. - as well as middle-class Asians, African Americans, Filipinos, and others. As the children of these new arrivals reach school age, their investment in the community will depend in large part on their connection to the local schools. And at the moment this link, as we have seen, is conspicuously missing after thirty years of busing plans, white flight, budget crises, and inconsistent efforts to "reform" South End schools.

As the new assignment plan goes into effect, the community and the district face some tough questions: What will it take to rebuild that shattered trust between the school district and the white and middle-class families of Southeast Seattle? How will continuing state budget cuts affect the district's ability to pay for the improvements all South End parents want to see? Will the K-8 "Option Schools" become escape valves for white families seeking to avoid minority-heavy neighborhood schools? (Will they at least keep those families from opting for

private schools?) How can schools meet the needs of both college-bound teens and those who seem to be headed for prison without serious intervention? What role can parent leaders play in strengthening the schools so they serve all children? Clearly the newly-activated community of Southeast Seattle and the long-beleaguered bureaucracy of Seattle Public Schools have a lot of work to do if they are to make the dream of quality education in integrated neighborhood schools a reality. Whether they are up to the task remains to be seen.

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