

Graham Hill

Name:	Graham Hill Elementary School	Enrollment:	393
Address:	5149 S Graham Street	Nickname:	Whale School
Configuration:	Preschool-5	Colors:	Blue



Graham Hill, 2000 ©Mary Randlett SPSA 220-32

The area where Graham Hill School is located was named after Walter Graham, who moved to Seattle in 1853. Graham came from New York and, at the age of 27, took up a claim along the shores of Lake Washington. His property included the uplands near Seward Park, which was called Graham's Peninsula. In 1856, Graham built a home on the hillside and planted an apple orchard. He married Eliza Mercer, daughter of Thomas Mercer. Walter's brother, David Graham, who arrived in 1857 and became Seattle's fifth schoolteacher, married his former pupil and Eliza's sister, Suzanna Mercer.

In 1865, Graham sold a portion of his land to Judge Everett Smith, who then donated one acre for a school. The first school near the top of Graham Hill was called Brighton School and was not opened until 1901. "There was just a path up to the school from Rainier Avenue." The one-room schoolhouse held grades 1-3, while grades 4-5 were housed nearby in the Brighton Church. Brighton School was an attractive building with a columnar front porch and a well-lit classroom.

Brighton School was closed in 1905 with the opening of new school with the same name on Holly Street (see Brighton). The older building later became known as Brighton Beach or "Little Brighton" in

Name: **Brighton School**
Location: 51st Avenue S
& Graham Street
Building: 1-room wood
Architect: James Stephen
Site: 0.9 acres

1901: Opened by Columbia School District
1905: Closed
1907: Annexed into Seattle School District
1907–08: Operated as *Brighton Beach*, annex to Brighton
ca. 1916–22: Operated as *Brighton Annex*
1943: Building sold and removed
1944–45: Leased to Seattle Parks Department
ca. 1949: Building destroyed by fire
1957: Lease canceled and property returned; site expanded

Name: **East Brighton School**
Location: Graham Street & 51st Avenue S
Building: Portables
Site: 4.4 acres

1957: Opened in September as annex to Brighton
1960: Became independent school; renamed *Graham Hill School* on June 1

Name: **Graham Hill Elementary School**
Location: 5149 S Graham Street
Building: 14-room, 2-story brick
Architect: Theo Damm
Site: 4.5 acres

1961: Opened

1907–08 when it operated as an annex to the larger school. It also served to ease overcrowding during World War I. The old schoolhouse was removed from the site in 1943, and the Seattle Parks Department acquired a lease for a playfield where the schoolhouse formerly stood.

As the population in this part of the city grew, it became apparent that a school was needed at the site, so the 99-year playfield lease was canceled. In September 1957, five portable buildings opened on the site for K–2 students. East Brighton, as it was called, operated once more as an annex to Brighton. In each successive year, another grade was added until the school became K–6 in fall 1961.

By June 1960, the school was large enough to have its own principal. The name Graham Hill School was chosen by the community to commemorate Walter Graham and the location of his farm. Plans began for construction of a new building on the property adjacent to the portables, which were no longer adequate for the increasing enrollment.

The new brick building was completed at the end of the 1960–61 school year. In addition to classrooms, the new school contained a library, administration and health unit, auditorium/lunchroom, gymnasium, playcourt, and service facilities. Located on a hillside, the building offers a breathtaking view of Mt. Rainier. The school features two stories, each of which opens directly onto the grounds: the upper floor onto the street level, and the lower floor onto the upper playground level. The site where the portables once stood, the original one-acre donation to the school board, is part of the playground facilities at the new school.

Under the district's desegregation plan, Graham Hill (K, 1-3) was paired with Northgate (K, 4-6) from 1978–88. Thereafter Graham Hill became K-5.

Graham Hill currently houses programs for the highly capable, ESL, and special education. Since 1991, it has housed the district's only public Montessori program, for preschoolers and grades K–5. The PTA has worked to improve the grounds and build a new playground.