

History of The Meridian School

Founded in 1946 by E. Louise Perkins, a Seattle piano teacher, Meridian School began as Perkins Musical Kindergarten. Ms. Perkins held classes in her home in Seattle's Ravenna neighborhood. In 1961, she and Betty Lea, a teacher at Perkins, became business partners, obtaining a business license for a private, for-profit preschool. When Mrs. Perkins retired in 1972, Betty purchased Ms. Perkins's share of the preschool.

After expanding her program in 1976 to include the lower elementary grades, Betty rented space at the Woodland Park Presbyterian Church in Seattle's Phinney Ridge neighborhood, founding Perkins Elementary School. She applied for non-profit status for the school in the mid-1970s and received 501(c)(3) status in 1978. Betty hired Ellen Toole as a French teacher and swimming instructor that same year. Ellen also served as an assistant administrator.

By 1981, Betty had become concerned that the church's space couldn't adequately support her students' diverse needs, so, when the school's lease on the church expired that year, she decided to close the school. Ellen, however, didn't want to see Perkins School close. Betty agreed to keep the school open as long as Ellen assumed more responsibility in the school's administration.

When the school's lease on the church was up, Ellen fortuitously found space at the Good Shepherd Center in Seattle's Wallingford neighborhood. Perkins Elementary officially opened there in September 1981 with 30 students enrolled. Ellen was named Headmistress the next year.

After several years of evaluation, Perkins received accreditation through the Pacific Northwest Association of Independent Schools (PNAIS), now the Northwest Association of Independent Schools (NWAIS), in October 1990. Since then, the school has been reaccredited by the NWAIS several times.

In 1991, Betty Lea retired, and her daughter, Chris Chevalier, took over leadership of the preschool and kindergarten. Chris then opened an elementary school also under the name of Perkins School the following year. That same year, the Board of Trustees at the Good Shepherd Center Perkins Elementary School began making plans to open its own kindergarten. Due to licensing issues, both schools couldn't operate under the name *Perkins School*, so the Good Shepherd Center Perkins School relinquished the name. The school chose the name *The Meridian School* because of its proximity to Meridian Park. It officially changed its name in the fall of 1997.



Ellen Toole

After 25 years with Perkins Elementary and The Meridian School, Ellen Toole retired in 2004. The school established the Ellen Toole Endowment for Professional Development in her honor. During Ellen's tenure, the school grew significantly from 30 students to 168. She left a legacy of a strong and creative

academic program; a dedicated, competent, and active staff; and a warm and welcoming climate.



Camille Callner's 1982-1983 3rd grade class

Robert Coombs was hired as interim Director for the 2004-2005 school year. He was replaced by Ron Waldman the following year. During his tenure, The School grew and benchmarked itself as one of the best elementary schools in Seattle. Jack Shea succeeded Ron as Head of School in 2013. The school continues to develop an imaginative,

academically challenging, and sustainable future for The Meridian School community.

Renovations

Although the school's space in the Good Shepherd Center was in useable condition when Perkins School first leased their space, several renovations were necessary to maintain the upkeep of the building and the growing population of the school. The first major renovation was the completion of the current music room during the 1983-1984 school year. After the school acquired nearly full occupation of the South Annex in 1989 (a small portion was still leased to Seattle Tilth), it began major renovations of the space. The school partitioned the larger spaces to create the current kindergarten and first grade classrooms and the Extended Day room. Renovation of the gym was completed in November 1991. The school rented the North Annex space in 1994 and subsequently renovated it. Renovation of classrooms, hallways, and bathrooms is ongoing.



Students helping with the landscaping of the future playground site, Community Service Day 2002

In 1998, the current playground equipment was deemed inadequate. Hundreds of people in the Wallingford neighborhood joined Meridian parents and staff to raise money to install new playground equipment. These funds were matched by the Seattle's Neighborhood Matching Fund Program. The project was completed in March of 2002.

Long-standing Meridian Teachers and Staff

Regis Thevenet, The Meridian School's physical education teacher, and Camille Callner, the school's substitute coordinator, joined the staff in 1979. Ellen Toole hired Joan Reynolds, Meridian School's office manager, and Meredith Ward, today a fifth grade teacher, in 1982. Lorie Van Etta, third grade associate faculty member, was hired in 1989. Marilyn Easton began working at The Meridian School in 1988. After her retirement in June 2015, the Marilyn Easton Endowment Fund was created to further the School's commitment to equity and inclusion.

The Parent Association Group and Meridian Traditions

In 1982, Heather Hodsdon, a parent at the school, started the Parent Advisory Group; its central mission was fundraising. The PAG's first large undertaking was the initiation of the annual auction, first held in 1983. In February 1985, the PAG initiated a two-year fund drive to buy Orff musical instruments. The instruments were purchased in memory of Mrs. Perkins, who had just died at the age of 87. The PAG launched its first Annual Fund Drive in 1992.

The PAG, now called the Parent Association, also hosted many other social events that are still in place today, including the Halloween Carnival (1983), Grandparents Day (1985), end of the year picnic (1985), the holiday music program (1989), Parent Orientation Night (now known as Curriculum Night) (1989), Staff Appreciation Day (1990), a reception for new families (1993), beginning of the year picnic (1993), and a September coffee for parents (1995). The tradition of Monday morning meetings, an effort to cultivate an inclusive school culture, was started in 1994. The school initiated a three-day "Multi-cultural Celebration," a precursor to the school's current Global Studies project, in 1997. In 2002, Ellen started the school's annual Community Service Day.

Neo Art first leased space with the Good Shepherd Center in 1982, and Ellen immediately contracted with the organization to provide sophisticated art instruction. Seattle Tilth opened its children's garden in 1989. The school contracted with the association for gardening instruction, which it has continued to do ever since.

The Meridian School Today

The Meridian School currently employs 12 classroom teachers, 7 associate faculty, 6 specialists, 3 customized learning faculty, and a team of administrators. 198 students are enrolled.



THE
MERIDIAN
SCHOOL

The Mission

The School promotes a balance of mind and heart, of contemplation and action, of individuality and a commitment to the community.