When the John Phillips School was moved to Southac Street (now Phillips St), it was renamed after Wendell Phillips, a famous abolitionist and son of John Phillips, due to a clerical error. In 1909, the school committee realized the error but took no action to change it back, despite an outcry from alumni. Elias Hutchins, principal from 1865 to 1913 and former valedictorian graduate (1856), was particularly adamant that the school should remain the John Phillips School.

In 1861, a new Phillips School building was built on Southac Street and occupied for two years. It was approximately 11,200 square feet with four stories, fourteen classrooms and a hall. In 1876 the Mayhew School on Hawkins Street was consolidated with the Phillips School.

In the 1870’s, Elizabeth Smith, daughter of abolitionist John J. Smith, started teaching at the Phillips School. Smith was one of the first African Americans to teach in an integrated Boston public school.

Though the school was closed by the City in 1940 and used for Work Progress Association (WPA), it was later housed in the Northeast Institute (1997).