

# History of

## Gwin Oaks Elementary School

Gwin Oaks Elementary School opened in September 1976 with 745 students. The school is named for the county of Gwinnett and for the beautiful oak trees on the property. Gwin Oaks is located at 400 Gwin Oaks Drive in Lawrenceville, Georgia. The school is nestled in a neighborhood bordered by the Yellow River and natural wooded areas. The school was built to relieve overcrowding in two elementary schools, Knight and Bethesda. The gymnasium was constructed in 1977. In fall of 1989 a two-story addition was opened to house the growing student population of Gwin Oaks. A new activity building was built in 1992. Today, the school has 56 classrooms to serve a student population of just over 1,000 students.

Since its opening, there have been seven principals at Gwin Oaks. Mrs. Maxine Rithmire opened the school in 1976. Dr. Beverly Dryden served as principal from 1978-1989. Mrs. Lyn Burdette-Evans was principal from 1989-2002. Then Mrs. Jean Loethen-Payne became principal in January 2003-June 2006. She was followed by Mrs. Peggy Goodman who served from July 2006-2012. She was followed by Dr. Tonya Burnley who served as the school's principal until she transferred to another principal post in 2017. In July of 2017, Dr. Craig Barlow, a long-time GCPS administrator, became the proud principal of Gwin Oaks.

### FAST FACTS

**Address:** 400 Gwin Oaks Drive  
Lawrenceville, GA 30044

The following have served as principals of Gwin Oaks Elementary School:

1976–1978	Maxine Rithmire
1978–1989	Dr. Beverly Dryden
1989–2002	Lyn Burdette-Evans
2003–2006	Jean Loethen-Payne
2006–2012	Peggy Goodman
2012–July 2017	Dr. Tonya Burnley
July 2017–Present	Dr. Craig Barlow

**School Colors:** Burgundy, and Gold

**School Mascot:** Bronco

The oak tree was the school's original mascot and its colors were originally green and white. These were selected to represent the strong heritage of the school community. However, in later years, the school changed its mascot and colors to align with other schools in the Brookwood Cluster. The school colors are now burgundy and gold to reflect the Brookwood Cluster colors and the school's mascot is the Brookwood Bronco. The Oak Leaf remains the name of the annual school newsletter, paying tribute to Gwin Oaks history.



Through the years Gwin Oaks has received numerous awards. In 1984 and again in 1989 Gwin Oaks was presented with the Georgia School of Excellence Award. The Georgia School Bell Award was received in 1985. In 2005 the school was the recipient of the Georgia Silver Award for the highest percentage of students at the meeting and exceeding standard on the Georgia CRCT Assessment. During the years of the No Child Left Behind Law, Gwin Oaks achieved adequately yearly progress and made great strides in closing the achievement gap between the student subgroups. The school continues to take accountability seriously and works to provide all students a quality and effective education.

The culture of Gwin Oaks is reflected in the traditions of the school. There is a sense of community and great pride. The focus of the school is on teaching and learning with the emphasis on student learning. Students are honored for their citizenship and academic achievements. The citizenship awards were established by Dr. Beverly Dryden in 1980 and continue to be presented to the students. Other awards earned by Gwin Oaks students include the Principal's Award, which is presented to students who cooperate with teachers and students; the Extra Effort Award, presented to students who put forth extra effort with their academics and/or behavior. There also are two academic awards: The Principal's Honor Roll for students earning all A's and the A/B Honor Roll for students who earn A's and B's.

A key to the success of Gwin Oaks' students is involvement. We are proud to have students participating in the following clubs or enrichment programs: Environmental Club, Robotics, Witzzle Pro Math, Cover 2 Cover Book Club, Photography, Continental Mathematics League, Science Fair, Chorus/Drama, Talent Show, Running Club, Art Club, Yearbook, Jump Rope, Yoga, Minecraft, and Student Council.

Over the years, our school and students have earned a number of honors, including:

- Gwin Oaks has been recognized by Gwinnett Clean & Beautiful as a Green & Healthy School;
- Our chorus produces and performs multiple concerts;
- The Science Olympiad team does well in county competition; and
- Students represent us well in the Gwinnett Science & Engineering Fair.

Reading is extremely important for the students at Gwin Oaks. Each year the Media Specialist organizes a reading incentive program for the students. The Reading

Buddies program, formerly called the PhD. Reading Volunteer Program, supports students who need more opportunities to read. Volunteers are trained and come weekly to school to work with students. The After School Enrichment Program is a favorite of the students at Gwin Oaks. Interested staff members develop classes for the students to participate in that enhance the Gwinnett Academic Knowledge and Skills. Eagle Scout projects are important to the beauty of the grounds. Gwin Oaks has an outdoor classroom that was developed then enhanced by Eagle Scouts. Picnic tables, benches, a privacy fence, birdhouses and several planting projects are among the most recent completed by Eagle Scouts.

The support of the PTA is extraordinary at Gwin Oaks. Besides the three main community events—STEAM Night, Special Friends Luncheon, and Spring Festival—the PTA organizes many volunteers for school projects and programs as well as classroom and Media Center volunteers. The Gwin Oaks Running Club is sponsored by PTA volunteers. The students train after school. The goal is for the students to participate in the Atlanta Junior Peachtree Road Race as well as other local races. Over the years, the PTA has been very supportive financially with several major projects: wooden bookshelves for the classrooms, technology upgrades, teacher "Wish List" items, playground equipment, a walking track, sod on the playfield and a gym floor. The PTA works in partnership with the school to provide for the students academically as well as recreationally.

Of particular interest are the opportunities Gwin Oaks provides students in the area of STEAM and project-based learning. Students get a healthy dose of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEAM) in their classes and celebrate with a community night focused on this initiative. In addition, 4th and 5th graders participate in a project-based model that provides a regular dose of real-world learning as they explore entrepreneurship and other topics.

Gwin Oaks Elementary School has a long history of successfully educating its students. A focus on student achievement, a supportive community and students who come to school each day ready to learn and do their very best are a few keys to this success.