

History of

Central Gwinnett High School

The school in Lawrenceville known today as Central Gwinnett – Lawrenceville High School has been in existence since 1957. Before that time, high school education in the county seat was provided by Lawrenceville High School. The school had a long and colorful history.

The Georgia Legislature passed an act in 1822 that called for an educational institution to be built in Lawrenceville. Ten acres ‘on the hill’ at the corner of Perry and Oak streets were designated for that purpose. The Lawrenceville Academy was first opened on that site on January 1, 1826. The academy boasted of an enrollment of 75 by 1837, 18 females and 57 males. Reading, writing, grammar, science, Latin and Greek were subjects taught.

The Lawrenceville Female Seminary opened in 1837. Soon this school enjoyed such academic success that some local families wanted to enroll their sons. Although this idea was not accepted immediately, males were eventually admitted, as long as they were not of courting age. The two sexes were not allowed to have recess together or to leave school together. The local Masonic Lodge occupied a room on the second floor of the school, thus providing some help with the school’s expenses.

With the coming of the city’s railroads, more people started moving to Lawrenceville, and the need for a public school was evident. The first public school started in the mid 1890s and utilized the academy buildings on the hill

FAST FACTS

Address: 564 West Crogan Street
Lawrenceville, GA 30046

The following have served as principals of Central Gwinnett – Lawrenceville High School:

1957 – 1963	Boyd Q. Baggett
1963 – 1966	D. L. Hitchcock
1966 – 1970	Don Phillips
1970 – 1978	Rex Cassidy
1978 – 1984	Dr. Pat Mahon
1984 – 1987	Dr. Edith Belden
1987 – 1994	Dr. Wendell Jackson
1995 – 2000	Dr. Charles “Buck” Buchanan
2000 – Dec. 2008	Dr. Valerie Clark
Jan. 2009 – May 2009	Jane Stegall (interim)
2009 – Feb. 2012	Nancy Martin
Feb. 2012 – 2017	Maryanne Grimes
2017– Present	Shane Orr

School Colors: Black and Gold

School Mascott: Black Knight

in Lawrenceville. Several buildings have been constructed since that time, replacing older buildings that were either condemned or destroyed by the fire. The building that is still standing at the site was built in 1945, and was used as some



part of the school system until 1972. After that time, it was used for county administrative offices until the new county courthouse was built in 1988.

Lawrenceville High School, first an independent school and then a part of the Gwinnett County School System after 1938, enjoyed many successful years. The students were known as the Lawrenceville Panthers; their colors were gold and white. Although the exact details about these choices are not known, one theory often told about the colors involves the influence of a great number of Georgia Tech fans in the area. Roy Garner, a former basketball coach for Lawrenceville High School, was a Tech graduate who was thought to have influenced this decision. One theory surrounding the choice of the Panthers for the school mascot linked the name to the Panther Club that was prominent in the town for some years.

Until the middle of this century, Lawrenceville was still a very strong farming area. Because of this, many students had to take time off from the school year to help with the crops. Although this was necessary for some students, they still maintained their academic and athletic standings in the life of the school.

Basketball was a popular sport in Lawrenceville High School. There were several teams from the school that went to regional and state playoff competitions. Some of those players still live in Lawrenceville and have remained active in Central Gwinnett's booster club through the years. Lawrenceville was also strong in literary competitions. Students won many regional and state honors in music, business education, writing and speaking contests.

Eventually, in an effort to eliminate so many small high schools in the county, the Gwinnett Board of Education decided to consolidate them into four schools. One of those, Central Gwinnett High School, was to be located in Lawrenceville. Lawrenceville High School, Lilburn High School, Dacula High School and Bethesda High School were to combine to make Central Gwinnett. Of the original four included in the plan, only Lawrenceville and Bethesda actually merged. The others took legal action in order to keep their own schools. Dacula still has its own high school, and Lilburn maintained its school until Berkmar was built in the mid 1960s.

The site selected for Central Gwinnett was the old fairground area on Highway 29 (564 Crogan Street). The

school was opened in the fall of 1957. Original Central teachers, recalling that first year, remember all the mud because Gwinnett Drive, which intersects Crogan Street, was nothing but a dirt road, and the gymnasium was still under construction.

Central Gwinnett opened with approximately 400 students from Lawrenceville High School and Bethesda High School. Since the school was built to accommodate 650, there were empty rooms until a decision was made to bring seventh and eighth graders from the Lawrenceville elementary school. This practice was stopped when the high school enrollment reached capacity.

Boyd Q. Baggett was the first principal of Central



Central Gwinnett High School — 1959

Gwinnett. There were approximately 12 teachers on the faculty that first year, including J. W. Benefield, later Gwinnett County school superintendent, and Bartow Jenkins, formerly major of Lawrenceville. Mr. Benefield was a teacher from Bethesda High School who came to Central in the consolidation move. Mr. Jenkins had been the football coach at

Lawrenceville High School.

Central's enrollment steadily increased until the mid 1960s, when rezoning took many students back to the former Bethesda area to attend the new Berkmar High School. This move prompted many Lawrenceville residents to ask the school board to change the name of Central Gwinnett to Central Gwinnett – Lawrenceville High School. The school board granted that request.

In the late 1960s, Central Gwinnett consolidated once again, this time with Hooper-Renwick, the black high school in Lawrenceville. Hooper-Renwick brought its own high standards and rich heritage to this merger. Trophies exemplifying its rich background are proudly on display in the hall of Central today.

For a few years Central was a small school, but when the rapid growth of Gwinnett County began, Central also grew. From a school that opened in 1957 with 12 teachers and 400 students, Central grew to a school with 190 professional staff and approximately 2,600 students by 2007. In 1987 the 600 hallway of 22 classrooms was added. In 1994 Collins Hill High School opened with approximately 1000 of Central's 2400 students rezoned to the new high school. In 2000 the 700 hallway which has an additional 12 science classrooms

was added, and in 2005 a new theater and a four story building which contains 36 classrooms were added.

In addition to the growth in physical facilities, Central Gwinnett has successfully entered the technology era. From a school that used typewriters to win state competitions to a Wi-Fi school that wins international competitions for media through access to eight productivity labs, seven technology education labs, tow portable labs, a student station in every classroom, and lap top for each teacher.

When Central Gwinnett opened in 1957, the school colors of black and gold were chosen. Several original teachers remembered that this was an effort to consolidate the colors of Bethesda High School (red and black) and Lawrenceville High (gold and white). The mascot became the knight, at the suggestion of Mr. Baggett, who had been a knight at West Point Military Academy. Since 1957, the mascot and colors have stood as a great part of the tradition of the school. However, in 2015, the school provided a makeover to its logo and colors. Principal Maryanne Grimes led an inclusive process to update the school's logo. She pulled together groups of students, parents, and community members who shared ideas about the school and its brand. She said, "Meeting with the community, parents, and students as we worked to update the high school mascot and colors was a great way to engage our community, connecting the past, present, and future. The Black Knight is an important part of our school history and the consensus was that it is very meaningful to our students, Central Gwinnett alumni, and the City of Lawrenceville. The Black Knight unites our cluster schools. It is a symbol that has withstood the test of time and represents the strength and honor exemplified by our community." With that in mind, Grimes set out to provide the school's Black Knight and other significant marks (the traditional CG), with a makeover that celebrated the past while presenting a more modern look. The edgier, more modern black knight is one that has generated a lot of excitement and is now found throughout the school and cluster.

Central Gwinnett has had its share of success stories. A look into the many trophy cases at the school shows its areas of strengths, both academic and athletic. Central has been a strong competitor in its climb from a Class B school in 1957 to its Class 5A status in 2007. In 2001 the Central Girls' Softball team and in 2001 the Central Basketball team won State Championships. During this time, the Central Gwinnett Booster Club built a Field House with an extensive weight room and a Castle to serve as the press box. In 2005 the football field was named after Tally Johnson, Central Football Coach from 1974 to 2001 and the main through fare through the Central Campus was

named Bartrow Jenkins Way after Bartrow Jenkins, former Lawrenceville City Mayor and Central Gwinnett Football Coach from 1957 – 1974.

The list of Central graduates would include successful lawyers, judges, politicians, doctors, dentists, teachers, accountants, athletes, entertainers and many other professionals. Although not all of these still live in the Central Gwinnett High School area, many of them do. They, along with the many other graduates in the area, make up Central's greatest success story. That success has been characterized by the keen interest in the school the community has always had; this is the very important part of the Central Gwinnett – Lawrenceville High School tradition of Black Knight Pride.



That link to the community continues today through the school's College and Career Academies. With an emphasis on relationship, rigor, relevance, and readiness, Central's five Academies help students acquire the knowledge and skills needed to be successful as they continue their education at the postsecondary level and/or enter the workforce. The Academies include: Business and Entrepreneurship; Medical and Health Care Sciences; Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math; Law, Education, and

Public Service; and Fine Arts and Communications. The school has partnered with a number of businesses and organizations in order to provide relevant and real-life experiences to students. For example, Central Gwinnett partnered with the second largest theatre in Georgia, Gwinnett's own Aurora Theatre. The Aurora Theatre has an office on the campus of the school which serves as a center for students interested in volunteering, interning, and working at Aurora Theatre and a meeting place for collaborative projects between the theatre, school, and community. In addition, Peach State Federal Credit Union opened a branch inside Central Gwinnett High School in 2016 as part of a partnership to provide a number of financial education and real world work experience opportunities for students. Students also put what they learn to the test to benefit their community in a number of ways. For example, in 2014, 2015, and 2016, students used what they had learned in their classes to partner with the Magic Wheelchair to provide children in wheelchairs who live in the community the best and most exquisite looking costumes for Halloween. The unveiling for this project coincides each year with the school's annual Trunk or Treat event which benefits younger children in Lawrenceville.

Although much has changed over the years, much remains the same. Central Gwinnett High School remains a hub in the Lawrenceville community and is focused on preparing students for a bright future.