

# History of

## Suwanee Elementary School

The 1850 census referred to Suwanee as a “public place.” In the early 1870s, the Southern Railroad built a line through the area, and the town moved from its original site on Suwanee Creek to its present location.

One of the first concerns of the leaders of the community was the erection of a “one-teacher” school building, which served the small community for several years. For some time, the building was also used by Methodists and Baptists as a place for holding religious services.

In those days, only a few months of the school year were supported by the state. Most of the parents paid a certain amount per pupil, and the trustees supplemented that amount so the school could operate for a full nine-month school year. There were a few years when the school had summer school and opened late in the fall. This was done to accommodate the children whose families were primarily engaged in farming and needed their children’s help for harvesting. That schedule, used only for a brief period, proved to be unacceptable.

About 1917 or 1918, the old school building was torn down and a four-room building was erected behind the former post office on Highway 23. Increasing enrollment in the early 1920s required more room. A temporary three-room building was erected by the side of the school building.

In the 1930s, there was consolidation of Trinity, Level Creek, Old Field, McKendree, Howell and Old Suwanee elementary schools when they moved into Suwanee School. The facilities soon proved to be inadequate to meet the needs. Federal aid became available, so the trustees began studying plans for a new school building.

Under the Federal Works Progress Administration program, another building with a large auditorium and 11 classrooms was erected on Buford Highway (Highway 23) in Suwanee. It opened at the beginning of the school year in 1941. A library was made available. An addition to the curriculum was a much-needed course in home economics. The land for the new building was purchased from the Verner estate. The building was constructed at a cost of \$55,000 and was used for combined elementary and senior high school until 1958.

When the new building was occupied in the 1940s,

### FAST FACTS

**Address:** 3875 Smithtown Road  
Suwanee, GA 30024

The following have served as principals of Suwanee Elementary School:

1958–64	Hulon Farmer
1964–65	Bob Denny
1965–67	Julian Waters
1967–74	Elsie Hadaway Roberts
1974–79	Scott Pryor
1979–84	Louie Grizzle
1984–87	Nelda Heatherly
1987–92	Don Graham
1992–96	Diana Baird
1996–03	Nancy Samples Hammond
2003–2007	Rita Cantrell
2007–Dec. 2012	Dr. Kimberly M. Smith
Jan. 2013–2015	Dr. Michele Smith
2015–2018	Emily Keag
2018–Present	Mary Taylor

**School Colors:** Blue and White

**School Mascot:** Jaguars

Historian: Kathy Rivas

a lunchroom opened in the basement of the school. Later, a government surplus temporary building was moved to the back of the building to house the kitchen and lunchroom. A permanent lunchroom was added to the building and first served the students in 1956–57. An addition to house the primary department of the school was completed and first used in the 1962–63 school year.

The citizens of the community sold bonds and built a gymnasium at a cost of \$10,000. The gym burned in 1955. The insurance money plus many local projects financed the construction of a new facility that was completed in 1957.

Feeder schools consolidated again in 1958 to establish North Gwinnett High School. The existing Suwanee school building was used as an elementary school to serve grades one through seven until 1973. That year, the middle school students were transferred



to the newly constructed Lanier Middle School. Since 1973, a kindergarten program for five-year-olds has been a part of the school program, thus making Suwanee into an elementary school with grades kindergarten through five.

When the middle school students were transferred to Lanier, the big auditorium in the center of the Suwanee building was converted into a modern, attractive media center. It was named the Doyle Moulder Library with love and happy memories of a local, successful educator who was a drowning victim while on a family outing in 1965.

In 1984, Suwanee began to experience rapid growth and soon outgrew its facilities. Twelve portable classrooms housed the overflow of students. In 1986, a bond referendum was passed and included plans to build a brand new school for the Suwanee community. The present building is located at 3875 Smithtown Road and was opened at the beginning of the 1988–89 school year. It was built to house 875 students and had 35 self-contained classrooms. Midway through the year, two portable classrooms were added due to the continued growth. In 1991, a 16-classroom addition opened to help house students who had moved to the area.

The present school building has 57 classrooms. Over the past 30 years the school's enrollment has fluctuated due to growth and the building of new schools from a high of approximately 1,750 students to today's enrollment of just over 600 students. During this time

five new elementary schools have opened to relieve Suwanee Elementary's overflow. These schools include Walnut Grove, Riverside, Parsons, Level Creek, and Roberts.

The school mascot is the jaguar, and the school colors are blue and white. The jaguar was the high school mascot and because of tradition was adopted by the elementary school. And while North Gwinnett High's mascot changed to the bulldogs, Suwanee has held to its original mascot and colors.

Throughout the years, Suwanee Elementary has earned a reputation as a small school with a big focus on its students and their achievement. Suwanee was recognized by the Governor's Office of Student Achievement in 2016 as a Highest Performing School at the Silver Level under Georgia's Single Statewide Accountability System. The school also has earned kudos on the Governor's SHAPE Honor Roll which recognizes the efforts of schools in the areas of physical activity, nutrition, and wellness. Gwinnett Clean & Beautiful also has recognized the school's environmental education efforts.

Suwanee Elementary was one of the school district's pilot schools for the eCLASS Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) initiative. Technology continues to be a teaching and learning tool at the school. Parent Learning Nights involved Suwanee families and engaged them in learning about Local School Plans for Improvement. Improvement strategies included the use of resources that are part of the district's eCLASS digital

initiative as well as strategies to increase literacy and numeracy in language arts and mathematics. Suwanee also is introducing students to STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) lessons, fostering their critical-thinking skills and creativity.

Before- and after-school programs provide enrichment, enhanced creative learning experiences, and extension of the Academic Knowledge and Skills (AKS) curriculum. The programs include Chess Club, Chorus, Guitar Club, Technology Club, PE Club, Art Club, Readers Rally, and Environmental Club.

Community plays a big role at Suwanee and throughout the North Gwinnett Cluster. Suwanee students and staff members participate in a number of community outreach projects, including contributions to Great Days of Service, Toys for Tots, Relay For Life, United Way, and the North Gwinnett Co-op. In 2016, Suwanee Elementary raised the most money in Gwinnett County Public Schools' Jump Rope/ Hoops for Heart American Heart Association Fundraiser. The All Pro Dad organization has provided many resources for Suwanee Elementary including a state-of-the-art outdoor classroom facility. Suwanee Elementary also hosts many special guest including first ladies of Georgia, notable authors such as Patricia Polacco, and other local dignitaries and community leaders. In addition, the school and its students and teachers benefit from the North Gwinnett Schools Foundation which awards grants to teachers throughout the cluster.



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*No Suwanee school history would be complete without a review of the many years of dedicated service by three educators— Leona Williams, Carfax Baxter, and Hulon Farmer. Together they gave over 90 years of service to Suwanee’s school and its community.*

*Mrs. Williams came to Suwanee from another county when her husband was sent here by Southern Railroad, his employer. She taught in the primary department for 35 years until her retirement in 1974.*

*Another longtime teacher in the primary grades, Miss Baxter taught for 26 years in Suwanee; however, her total teaching experience was 46 years. She was a native of the community and told the school children interesting stories about her grandparents trading with the Indians. “Miss Carfax,” as she was known far and wide, retired in 1961 at the age of 72.*

*A third longtime teacher at Suwanee was Hulon Farmer. He attended elementary and high school at Suwanee and came back to the community after college and military service. He taught every grade in Suwanee School except first, and then served as principal for several*

*years. The last of his 38-plus years of service were spent as a visiting teacher for the northern area of the county. The Gwinnett County Board of Education maintained an office for him in the Suwanee school building until his retirement in 1978.*

*Some of the local citizens who served on local boards of trustees were Marvin Verner, J. C. Davis, Artis Britt, Ralph Kennedy, Gene Gilbert, Rowe Ed Brogdon, Albert Kennedy, Cliff Hosch, and Bonnie Moulder.*

*While the school was a combined elementary and high school, the principals who served were F. A. Brinson, 1941–42; Hosea Reynolds, 1942–43; Troy Thomason, 1943–45; Walker Buice, 1945–46; Walker Buice and George Buice, 1946–47; J. G. Dyer, 1947–51; W. B. Bramblett, 1951–55, and M. C. McDaniel, 1955–58.*