

History of

W. J. Cooper Elementary School

In August 2003, W. J. Cooper Elementary School opened its doors to serve 1,206 students. The school was built as a relief school for Grayson Elementary and was funded through the 2002 Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST). Cooper Elementary opened as part of the Grayson Cluster.

The school was named in honor of William Jennings Cooper. Cooper was the product of true pioneer families. His mother and father's families were both settled in Gwinnett County by the 1830s. His great grandfather, Levi Cooper, settled much of the southern area of Gwinnett County. His grandfather, Richard T. Martin was Sheriff of Gwinnett County at the turn of the century, circa 1901. His father, C.C. Cooper owned a store in Lawrenceville and after his marriage to Laura Maud Martin owned a mercantile store and the cotton gin in Grayson. The pioneer spirit and drive was evident in Jennings Cooper's short life.

Mr. Cooper was born in 1904 in Gwinnett County and was a life long resident of Grayson, Georgia. Only once did he venture to live away from his home. During the Depression he went from Grayson with other young men to Detroit, Michigan to find work. He stayed for only a few months. He and his wife made their home in Grayson and raised their family there.

Jennings Cooper was the oldest of nine children. He attended school in Grayson as did his siblings. When it

FAST FACTS

Address: 555 Ozora Road
Loganville, GA 30052

The following have been principals of W. J. Cooper Elementary School:

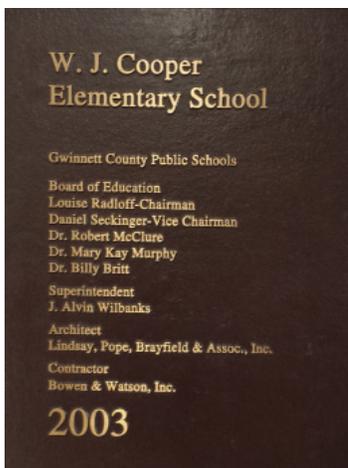
2003–2008	Dr. Phil Epperson
2008–Present	Dr. Donna R. Bishop

School Colors: White, Silver, and Red

School Mascot: Tiger

was time to graduate from high school, their father signed most of his childrens' diplomas, as he was chairman of the local Board of Education.

Although he was never an educator himself, education played a big role in his life. He was involved in the activities at the school. At Christmas he would bring gifts for all the students who had not received gifts. He was always on the scene for plays talent nights, and community activities that were held at the school such as Fourth of July celebrations and the annual Fish Fry. He served as a member of the local Board of Education when it was in existence in the late 1930s and early 1940s. In the early 1940s he served on the Gwinnett County Board of Education with J. Arthur Alford, Alton W. Tucker, C.S. Pharr, and C.A. Garner.



He met and married his wife Inez Starnes Cooper as a result of the changing face of education in Gwinnett County. Inez came to Grayson to finish high school because those grades were lacking at Centerville School. She boarded with Mr. and Mrs. M.C. Ethridge which is a house now used by the transportation department of the Gwinnett County Board of Education which is directly across the street from the Cooper home. Mrs. Inez Cooper was a teacher and taught in the Gwinnett County Schools.

Mr. Cooper's sister Geraldine Cooper was also an educator for fifty years, many of which were spent in Grayson and other parts of the county. Another sister, Hazel Edge taught school at Lawrenceville, Grayson and other schools in the county. Ann Starling, his daughter taught at Grayson Elementary for 25 years. All Mr. Cooper's children attended Grayson Elementary and his two daughters graduated from old Grayson High. Two of the Cooper grandchildren attended Grayson Elementary



Jennings Cooper was active in many capacities in Grayson and Gwinnett County. He was a member of Grayson Masonic Lodge, a Shriner, a member of Grayson United Methodist Church, owner of considerable land and had many business interests. He was Mayor of Grayson and was serving in that capacity at the time of his death. He served as Chairman of the Red Cross during WWII and was most involved in traveling throughout the county to sell war bonds in an effort to support the war. When the building now known as the Rock Building burned in 1945-46, he was the first to be called to the scene. He was instrumental in helping find space to house the classes, which had no place to meet and to see that plans were made to get the rebuilding started. He did not live to see the building finished.

William Jennings Cooper was a man of integrity. He was a citizen his community and county were proud of. He was a man who was responsible and dependable, kind and compassionate. He was a great friend to many. His positive and supportive attitude was evidenced as he served his community an especially the school community where he was born and made his home for his entire life.

W. J. Cooper Elementary has experienced tremendous growth since it opened in 2003. To better serve the students in this area, a 45-room, three-story addition opened in 2006. As of 2016, the school served more than 1,185 students.

The school colors were originally green and gold and the mascot for the school was the ram, in keeping with the Grayson Cluster. A mural of the ram was in the school atrium with the names of all students and staff members that were at Cooper in the 2003-04 school year listed on the rock beneath the ram. When Archer High School opened in 2009 to relieve overcrowding in the Grayson Cluster, Cooper Elementary became a feeder school for the Archer Cluster middle and high schools. Along with the change in clusters, the school changed its colors and mascot to align with the new cluster. The school's new mascot became the Tiger and its school colors transitioned to white, silver, and red.