

# History of

## Norcross Elementary School

Norcross Elementary School is located one-fourth mile from the main street of Norcross at 150 Hunt Street. The school ground reaches from Hunt Street to Born Street and at one time had the front office on Born Street.

Norcross Elementary School has had a long and interesting history since it began in a small wooden building on Holy Row (now Sunset Drive). This history involves many changes in size and location.

In 1871, the first school in Norcross was established in a two-story wooden building on Holy Row. The upper floor was used for Masonic Lodge functions and the lower floor was for the school. Both Methodist and Baptist churches used the school for church services before building their own churches. The land for this building was given to the city by G.T. Rakestraw, the lumber was given by S.T. McElroy, and labor was freely given by the people of Norcross.

In 1872, a Professor James Vincent opened a boarding school in Norcross. It was built on the corner of Holy Row and North Peachtree near the public school. Professor Vincent's leadership lasted for about a year. However, in 1873, Professor N. F. Cooledge became the owner of the school and operated it successfully for several years. The student body was composed of boarding students and some local children. This building later burned and was never rebuilt.

It is not known just when the city school moved from Holy Row, but the next account given of a city school is one that many long-time residents remember. It was a wooden building located next to the Methodist Church on College Street. This building was said to be badly in need of repair and unsuitable for use as a school. Many citizens felt that the boys and girls of Norcross deserved a better school and they worked to obtain support for a new school.

The Norcross City Council decided in 1898 to elect a board of education and their duties included 'to secure the services of competent and well-qualified teachers.'

Bonds were issued for a new modern brick school building in 1903. A two-story red-brick building was constructed on College Street next to the old wooden building. This new building faced Jones Street and overlooked the town. The building had four rooms downstairs and a large auditorium upstairs with a stage and two dressing rooms. Grades 1–10 were housed here.

### FAST FACTS

**Address:** 150 Hunt Street  
Norcross, GA 30071

Some of the early Norcross principals were:

C. C. Gilbert	Fred Brinson
Samp Tolar	J. D. Poole
Mr. Curry	Will F. Padgett
Hamp Maxwell	Lonnie Johnson
W. P. Lunsford	Will Williams
R. O. Powell	J. E. Richards

The following more recently served as principals of Norcross Elementary:

1957–62	L. D. Strickland
1962–70	D. E. Nalley
1970–72	Jim Burgess
1972–77	Bob Beiser
1977–79	Gary Fairley
1979–82	Allen Bower
1982–85	Cindy Antrim
1985–89	Jan Hall
1989–94	Gary Yetter
1994–99	Jean Walker
1999–2002	Dr. Angela Pringle
2002–2007	Dr. LaVern Watkins
2007–2016	Dr. Dora Hill
2016–Present	Kassia Morris-Sutton

**School Colors:** Blue and White

**School Mascot:** Eagle

The auditorium was used for community events, many plays were given on the stage and in later years movies were shown on Saturday nights. A large belfry on the front of this school building made it a landmark for Norcross. S. T. McElroy was mayor when this building was constructed. The old wooden building was torn down.

The citizens of Norcross voted on bonds amounting to \$4,000 for a new school on July 6, 1914. Soon, another two-story brick building took its place beside the 'old building,' as it is affectionately known, on College Street. This building was called the 'new building' and was the elementary school. Grades 1–7 were housed here. This building contained eight classrooms. The building had a wide porch across the front where students could stand out

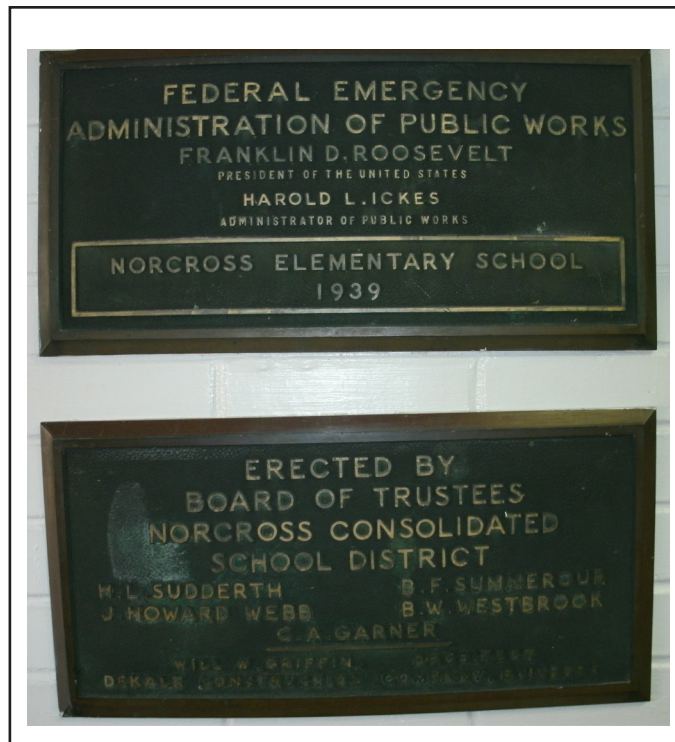
of the weather while waiting for the bus. Dr. O. O. Simpson was mayor of Norcross at this time.

These two buildings were considered one school and all teachers and pupils were under one principal. This plan of administration continued until 1957, even though the physical plant underwent many changes.

In 1937, the city of Norcross sold the school property to the Norcross Consolidated School District for \$8,000. The small rural schools in this area became part of this Norcross School District.

Many high school students from these rural schools had attended Norcross High School for several years as these small schools did not include the upper grades. The schools that consolidated with Norcross were Beaver Ruin, with 60 students, Glover with 172, Mechanicsville with 87 and Pittman with 60. Some students continued to attend Glover until it was finally closed in 1943.

The year 1939 brought a big change in the school plan in Norcross. A new elementary school building was built in another part of town. The Norcross Elementary School was moved to its present location but continued to be under the supervision of the same principal as the high school. The two buildings on the hill were used for the high school.



Growth continued in the Norcross schools and the elementary school became overcrowded. Two classrooms were constructed in the gym and one first grade was taught in a classroom at the Baptist Church.

In 1957, a high school was built on Beaver Ruin Road. Part of the students from Norcross Elementary were moved back to the buildings on College Street. At this time the student body was divided into two separate schools—a high school and an elementary school—each having its own principal. J. E. Richards became the high school principal and L. D. Strickland moved from

Duluth to become the elementary school principal. D. E. Nalley became the assistant to Mr. Strickland and also taught seventh-grade classes. Mr. Nalley was placed at the building on College Street which housed part of the fifth grade and all of the sixth and seventh grades.

Norcross Elementary had the only cafeteria, so the students from 'on the hill' were carried over by school buses if they wanted a hot lunch. The students who brought their lunches to school ate in a classroom under the supervision of a teacher.

A new school building, Summerour, was constructed on Mitchell Road, and grades 5–8 were placed there in



1964. Peachtree Elementary opened in 1971, and Norcross Elementary was enlarged to house grades 1–5. Finally all Norcross Elementary students were at one location under the leadership of D. E. Nalley. The Norcross Elementary School remains at this location today. The students selected the eagle as the Norcross Elementary mascot and blue and white as their colors. The 1989 enrollment was 1,200, with 51 classroom teachers.

During the summer of 1989, Norcross Elementary underwent tremendous renovation. The entire inside of Building “B” was torn out to the exterior walls. Classrooms were replaced, restrooms were added for individual classrooms, electricity, HVAC, a music room, two computer labs, new carpeting, and new sinks were added. Building “A” was partially renovated to replace the entire front office area. Student enrollment reached 1,500 during the 1998–99 school year. A new elementary school, Susan B. Stripling, was constructed nearby to relieve the overcrowded conditions at Norcross Elementary in August of 1999. As a result, Norcross Elementary’s student population reduced to 875.

The Norcross Cluster continued to grow and change. Norcross High School moved from its location on Beaver Ruin Road to a new facility located on Spalding Drive. The old Norcross High facility housed a number of programs for a few years, including Gwinnett Online Campus and

GIVE West. As part of its building program, the school district made plans for the Norcross Cluster that included tearing down the old Norcross High School facility and building a new Summerour Middle School facility at that site. The new Summerour Middle School opened in 2015. Its former facility was demolished and is the site where the new Baldwin Elementary School was built. When Baldwin Elementary opened it provided relief for all of the Norcross Cluster elementary schools, including Norcross Elementary.

At the present, Norcross Elementary serves more than 1,000 students in grades K–5. The school has a proud history of serving as an active part of the Norcross community. This holds true today as the school is involved in a number of community-sponsored activities, including Habitat for Humanity, Chairs for Charity, and the Norcross Community Fall Festival. In addition, the school’s Parent Center offers ongoing seminars including English I and II Classes, Math, Science, Testing, Nutrition, and Literacy Sessions to enhance student achievement and promote support at home. The school also has a partnership with the Norcross Rotary Club which sponsors initiatives to support teaching and learning.

Norcross Elementary School traces its origin back to a community that made the education of its children a priority. This belief in the power of public education and the important role it plays in building a strong community is a hallmark of the Norcross community and has played a pivotal role in the success of Norcross Elementary and its students and staff.

*(For more information on Norcross schools, see History of Norcross High School.)*