

History of

Peachtree Elementary School

An Indian trail called Peachtree Path once led from North Georgia to the trading area of Atlanta. On January 6, 1971, Peachtree Elementary School opened at a site along that path at Peachtree Corners in Norcross, at 5995 Crooked Creek Road. It had taken 18 months to build the school, which relieved overcrowding at Norcross Elementary School.

From September of 1970, until January of 1971, the first two grades attended Norcross Elementary School. Awaiting the completion of the building, the third grade held classes in the Summerour shower rooms, and the fourth and fifth grades were housed in the old red-brick school building in Norcross that had served as the school for Norcross in the early 1900s. It was fondly called the 'castle' because it was two stories and had the look of a castle.

Principal Brooks Coleman opened Peachtree as the first school in the county designed for open-space team teaching. Camp Creek and Lilburn Elementary schools were later built with the same floor plan. Peachtree was designed to house 698 students, but finished its first year with an enrollment of 733 students. The students selected the panther as their mascot, and blue and peach as their school colors. Mr. and Mrs. Sterling Wise were the first co-presidents of the school's Parent-Teacher Association. Dan Osburn, the only male lunchroom supervisor in Gwinnett County at the time, was at Peachtree from its opening until 1979.

FAST FACTS

Address: 5995 Crooked Creek Road
Peachtree Corners, GA 30092

The following have served as principals of Peachtree Elementary School:

1971–75	Dr. Brooks Coleman
1975–78	George Thompson
1978–81	Edie Belden
1981–84	Jerrilyn Berrong
1984–92	Deanna Fraker
1992–98	Maureen DeLoach
1998–2006	Kathy Eichler
2006–2009	Jean Loethen-Payne
2009–Dec. 2013	Dr. Beverly Smith
Jan. 2014–2017	Kara Dutton
2017–Present	Gretchen Runaldue

School Colors: Red, White, and Blue

School Mascot: Panther

An activity building was added to the facility in 1973, and except when it grew to 835 in 1973, enrollment remained in the 700s through 1976. From 1974 through 1979, the fifth grades had annual field trips to Washington, D. C. as part of their government unit in social studies. Fifth-grade teachers chaperoning the first trip were Mary



Mansker, Starla Sherrill, Paulette Buffington, Jerri McBride, Susan Crice and Cindy Davenport. The first trip by train cost \$100 per person. Also that year, Janet Tiller became the first lead reading teacher at Peachtree and Norcross Elementary schools.

George Thompson was principal from 1975–78. During this time, team teaching was replaced by individual, self-contained classroom teaching methods. Title I and kindergarten were introduced to Peachtree in the fall of 1975. Beth Trawick became the lead reading teacher. Rachel Haddon joined the staff as the first music teacher in 1976. Peachtree's counselor, Nancy Mason, part-time since 1974, became full-time in 1977. Under the leadership of media specialist Anne Hale, the Peachtree media center was honored in 1977 as one of the 50 best media centers in the country by Phillip Baker in his book *School and Public Library Media Programs for Children and Young Adults*. By 1977, the enrollment had risen to 971 by adding several portable classrooms on the grounds. Vera Hollifield retired after being at Peachtree since it opened and in Gwinnett County for 30 years.

Edith Belden was principal from 1978–81. In 1978, the six classes of fifth graders were housed at Summerour Middle School to relieve overcrowding. Nancy Mason, Peachtree's counselor, was named state counselor of the year in 1979. Jane Pulling joined the staff as instructional lead teacher that same year.

In 1980, Peachtree was awarded the elementary "Excellence in English Award" presented by the Georgia Council of Teachers of English. Despite school redistricting, a steady rise in house-building around Peachtree caused the school population to grow and change. Peachtree added a half-time gifted program teacher to the staff and lost the Title I position. Josephine Johnson retired in the spring after teaching 10 years at Peachtree.

A former Peachtree teacher, Jerrilyn Berrong, became the principal in the fall of 1981. An assistant principal, John Tippins, was added to the administrative staff. Peachtree's custodian, Oscar Smith, was honored in the Georgia Department of Education's publication, *Georgia Alert*, for his excellent work at Peachtree since the school opened. Walls were built to separate classrooms from the hall space.

Enrollment grew to over 1,100 and 10 portable classrooms were added to house students. A team of FOCUS students placed second in the state Future Problem-Solving Bowl for grades 4–6. The Peachtree math team scored among the top 25 schools in the state on the Georgia Mathematics League Contest for grades 4–6, and one student made the top score in Gwinnett County.

The following year, 1982, the six fifth-grade classes were shuttle-bused to Norcross Elementary to relieve severe overcrowding. Dixie Sanders was named grade chairman to help with the transition. Rise Spearman joined the staff as the first art teacher. Marion Sebastian was named Elementary Science Teacher of the Year for the state by the Georgia Science Teachers Association. Media created by Janelle Cannon's third-grade class with the help of media specialist Dorothy Swindle won state competition and participated in the national finals in the Student Media Festival with the slide/tape presentation 'Vegetable Soup.'

The opening of Berkeley Lake Elementary in the fall of 1983 returned Peachtree's enrollment to under the 698 students for which the school was designed. However, the luxury of low school enrollment was not to last for long, as the world kept discovering the Peachtree Corners area to be a wonderful place to both work and raise a family. Many foreign and American businesses have relocated in this area and Peachtree Elementary School has been greatly enriched by the diverse ethnic population brought here as a result of this growth.

In June of 1984, Jerri Berrong announced that she would be leaving Peachtree for a year's sabbatical. Taking her place was the instructional lead teacher from Annistown Elementary, Deanna Fraker, a former Peachtree teacher. That same year, Dr. Jane Pulling went to Hopkins Elementary as ILT and was replaced by Susan Irby.

During her tenure as principal, Mrs. Fraker very quickly became known as the construction principal. This happened because, to accommodate the growth patterns projected by county office research, it was decided to add two more buildings to the existing facility. Construction began in the spring of 1986.

While waiting for the completion of these additional buildings, Mrs. Fraker creatively dealt with the overcrowded conditions. During the fall of 1986, two full-day kindergarten classes filled the cafeteria while the entire school ate lunches in their classrooms. By December of 1986, the new kindergarten building was completed, and a delighted group of students and teachers moved into their new home after the winter holidays. During the spring of 1986, the west building, which was to house the fourth and fifth grades, was completed. That summer the original building was remodeled. This included enlarging and improving the cafeteria and media center, building a special education suite and remodeling the office area. This final phase of the project turned out to be very extensive, and at one point, the whole building seemed to have been gutted to make way for Peachtree's new look.

With many long hours put in by Mrs. Fraker and her staff, which now included Judi Rogers, the new assistant principal, the school was ready for all 1,100 children the first day of the 1987–88 school year. As the year progressed, it was very apparent that the new Peachtree facility was a working success. Among the many highlights of that year was Dr. Evelyn Gilliard's FOCUS class becoming the state winners of the Odyssey of the Mind competition. As the 1988–89 school year got underway, Bron Gayna Schmidt became a second ILT, replacing Judi Rogers, who left to become principal at Pinckneyville Middle School.

In the fall of 1992, Maureen DeLoach, former principal at Rockbridge Elementary, became principal at Peachtree. Enrollment was forecast for 1616 students. In 1993, another new school opened, Simpson Elementary, which relieved some of the overcrowding at Peachtree. In 1997 a new two-story addition was built. In an effort to create a smaller school atmosphere within a large school, Peachtree implemented a School-Within-A-School structure. Four classes of each grade K–5 were housed in each school: Red School, Blue School, and Green School! Under Ms. DeLoach's leadership the school achieved many recognitions: Georgia School of Excellence for 1995–96; National Blue Ribbon School of Excellence for 1996–97; and a Georgia Pay for Performance School in 1998 and 1999.

In the fall of 1998, Kathy Eichler, former assistant principal with Maureen DeLoach from 1992–1998, returned to Peachtree as the principal. During her eight-year tenure, Mrs. Eichler worked with the staff to become a Literacy Collaborative School and a Professional Development School with Georgia State University. In 2000 Peachtree became a targeted assisted Title 1 School and in 2003 became a School-Wide Title 1 School. As a Title I school, Peachtree was able to better support its growing number of students who received free and reduced lunch. The school continued to excel beyond the county's and state's expectations and in 2005 and 2006, was awarded the Superintendent's RBES Award. In 2006, Peachtree was also recognized as a Title 1 Distinguished School, an honor it received numerous times.

The school's strength always has been reflected in its staff's commitment to ensure that all children reach their academic potential. Peachtree is a school that fosters respect, responsibility, and caring. At the end of the 2005–06 school year, Mrs. Eichler moved to Seneca, South Carolina, to be a principal. Mrs. Jean Loethen-Payne, former principal of Gwin Oaks Elementary in GCPS, was named as the new school leader for Peachtree Elementary. Under her leadership Peachtree continued to do good work!

Mrs. Loethen-Payne served as principal of Peachtree until

2009 when she was tapped to open a new elementary school in Gwinnett County. Her successor, Dr. Beverly Smith, served as principal of Peachtree Elementary from 2009 until December of 2013. Peachtree Elementary started the new year with a new principal... Kara Dutton. Mrs. Dutton served as principal of Peachtree until June of 2017 when she handed the reins of leadership over to the school's longtime assistant principal and new principal Gretchen Runalduie.

Over the years, Peachtree's growth has mirrored that of Gwinnett County as a whole. As a result there have been two new classroom additions, a gym, and an outdoor classroom added since 1986. Peachtree grew to a then record high of 1600+ students in the early 1990s before two new elementary schools were built in the cluster to relieve overcrowding. The addition of Baldwin Elementary to the Norcross Cluster in 2016 brought a new wave of redistricting that relieved overcrowding at Peachtree.

In 2010, Peachtree Elementary was named as the first elementary school in GCPS to be authorized by the International Baccalaureate Organization as an IB World School. As an IB World School Peachtree delivers the Primary Years Program (PYP) in grades K–5 by integrating the GCPS curriculum (our AKS) into the six IB transdisciplinary units. These units are taught at the conceptual level encouraging and enabling students to link content knowledge to their prior knowledge, to their lives, and to the world around them.

The school's connection to its growing and changing community has been a key to its success over the years. In fact, in 2015, Peachtree Elementary was recognized as a Georgia Family-Friendly Partnership School award winner, recognizing the partnership between the school, its families and community which has led to increased student achievement. Parent and community involvement are encouraged through a very active PTA, parent participation in Title I planning, and School Council. In addition to involvement activities, the school has offered English and computer classes for Peachtree parents.

Peachtree Elementary, which has served its community for nearly 50 years, has a very different look from those first days when Brooks Coleman met the first students with paper towels to wipe the red mud off their shoes before entering the new building which was then very much out in the country. Although the faces, the facility, and the surrounding area have changed greatly in these years, some things have remained the same. Peachtree Elementary is still a school staffed by outstanding educators who seek to meet the needs of all the children. With a history rich in wonderful people and special times, Peachtree Elementary faces the future with anticipation of the good days yet to come.