

# History of

## Sweetwater Middle School

Sweetwater Middle School was named for the surrounding Sweetwater community. The building site was used as farmland before the building of the school. Cotton and peppers were grown on the land.

Sweetwater Middle School is located off of Pleasant Hill Road at 3500 Cruse Road, Lawrenceville, Georgia. Growth in the area was the reason for building the school, which opened in the fall of 1976. Enrollment that first year was between 750 and 800 students. The first principal was Jim McGarity, who had been assistant principal at Lawrenceville Middle School. The assistant principal at Sweetwater was Allen Bower, who had been Dyer Elementary School's special education resource teacher.

Students who came to Sweetwater in 1976 were drawn from the following schools: some sixth and seventh graders from Lilburn Middle, all the Bethesda Elementary School fifth graders and about half of the fifth graders at Lilburn Elementary School. Built to house 1,200 students, the original building had 36 classrooms, two multi-purpose rooms, a media center, a physical education facility and a cafeteria.

Sweetwater students were originally known as the "Saints," a nickname chosen by the first principal. Mr. McGarity also selected the school colors of maroon and gold. Prior to Sweetwater's opening day, Mr. McGarity confidently stated, "We're really convinced we'll have a fantastic school." The attendance of more than 600 persons at the first PTA meeting indicated the support that the community has continued to show for Sweetwater Middle School.

### FAST FACTS

**Address:** 3500 Cruse Rd.  
Lawrenceville, GA 30045

The following have served as principals of Sweetwater Middle School:

1976–78	Jim McGarity
1978–87	John Ford
1987–2001	Virginia Crowley
2001–2003	Joyce Spraggs
2003–2007	Angela Moton
2007–2014	Georgann Eaton
2014–Jan. 2016	Dr. Gene Taylor
Feb. 2016–Present	Jay Nebel

**School Colors:** Red, White, and Blue

**School Mascot:** Patriots

Historian: Betty Williams

In 1977, the first orthopedically handicapped program for middle school students in Gwinnett County was started at Sweetwater Middle School.

After serving as principal for two years, Mr. McGarity was named Director of Middle Schools for Gwinnett County, and John Ford became principal of Sweetwater Middle School. Previously, Mr. Ford had been assistant principal at



South Gwinnett High School. Upon being named principal of Sweetwater in 1978, Mr. Ford said, “A lot of unique programs have started at Sweetwater, and I plan to continue all of them” Mrs. Virginia Crowley, who had served as principal of R.D. Head Elementary School, became principal of Sweetwater Middle in 1987, when Mr. Ford left to become principal of the new J. E. Richards Middle School.

In the fall of 1989, Sweetwater Middle School distinguished itself by earning the title of Gwinnett County Middle School of Excellence. The school went on to be named a 1989–90 Georgia School of Excellence.

In January 2001, Virginia Crowley retired and the school received a new principal, Ms. Joyce Spraggs. Previously, Ms. Spraggs had served as an assistant principal at Sweetwater Middle School and principal of Beaver Ridge Elementary School. Sweetwater now had the honor of housing six computer labs; a technology lab, and a Media Center stocked with two classroom sets of computers to assist students with their research needs.

In May of 2003, Ms. Spraggs moved to the Central Office, serving as Director of Elementary School Staffing in Human Resources. Her successor, Mrs. Angela Moton, had vast experience with Gwinnett County schools at Lilburn Middle and Lanier Middle, serving as assistant principal at both schools. The school year began with a school population of 2,560 and a staff consisting of 225 personnel.

Due to Sweetwater’s continued growth, a new middle school was built to open in the fall of 2004. Berkmar Middle, which drew almost 700 students from Sweetwater Middle, joined Sweetwater as a feeder school to Berkmar High School.

Mrs. Moton served as principal until 2007. At that time, Mrs. Georgann Eaton was named principal. For Mrs. Eaton this was a homecoming of sorts as she had served as an assistant principal at the school from 1994 to 2001. In 2014, she accepted a position at the district office and the Board named Dr. Gene Taylor as the new leader at Sweetwater. Dr. Taylor, who came to the school from the principal post at North Atlanta High School, had previously served as the principal of Lilburn Middle School (2008–12) and Crews Middle School (2006–08). When Dr. Taylor was tapped to become the new principal of Discovery High School in January of 2016, the Board of Education named Jay Nebel, an assistant principal at Creekland Middle and a former Gwinnett County Teacher of the Year, as the new principal of Sweetwater.

In addition to leadership changes over the years, the school has seen a number of other changes, including its logo, student population and facility. Since opening, the school has doubled in size— both in terms of students served and the actual size of the school. The school’s student population in 2016 stands at more than 1,400 students compared to the 750 when it opened. What’s more the 38-classroom, 84,350 square foot facility from 1976 has been added to and renovated over the years and now has a total of 105 classrooms in a

209,725 square foot facility. The changes occurring at the school offered a perfect opportunity for the school to update its logo. Sweetwater Middle School joined the other schools in the Berkmar Cluster and adopted the Patriot as its logo. The Saints had served the school well but the move to the new logo helps to identify the school with its cluster and provides a more unified brand.

Sweetwater is focused on becoming a world-class school, committed to honoring the dreams of families who choose to send their children to the school. As Sweetwater Middle School has proven over the years... it is not the building that make a school. It is the people— both students and staff— and the great teaching and learning that goes on within the classroom walls. In addition to pushing students to higher levels of achievement, the school also has focused on helping students who have fallen behind. The Sweetwater Middle STEP Academy serves average 8th graders, providing an accelerated curriculum and support so that students can earn credit for both 8th and 9th grade classes in one year and rejoin their peers on grade level as high school sophomores.

Over the years, Sweetwater Middle students and staff have won numerous accolades, including:

- Six consecutive years as Gwinnett County Readers Rally Division Champion;
- A 6th grade team winning first place in the national WordMasters Challenge, a national vocabulary competition involving nearly 220,000 students;
- Band and choral groups that have earned superior ratings;
- Top finishers in the Gwinnett Science and Engineering Fair;
- Recognition by the Georgia Department of Education for implementation of its Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) program. PBIS encourages positive and responsible behaviors with recognition for those students who exhibit appropriate school conduct.
- In 2015-16, Sweetwater was one of six Georgia middle schools to receive the Georgia Association of Secondary School Principals Breakout School Award. Of those 6, SMS was one of three to be recognized as Distinguished.

For more than 30 years, Sweetwater Middle School has served the students of this community, helping them to develop the academic knowledge and skills they will need to be successful in high school and in life. It is a tradition of which they are proud. The school’s founding principal Mr. McGarity was right... Sweetwater is a fantastic school!