

# History of

## B. B. Harris Elementary School

While there is a need to build new schools in growing districts, there is value in reinvesting in older schools. B.B. Harris Elementary has been a central landmark within the Duluth community for more than 50 years. Many older residents love to tell stories of when they attended the school. The wildcat mascot and spirit that Harris Elementary shares with Duluth Middle and Duluth High School is still very much alive and thriving.

When B.B. Harris Elementary School opened in the fall of 1966, it was considered to be one of the most contemporary and modern facilities in the state. Mr. B.B. Harris, who at that time was Gwinnett County School Superintendent, believed that the individual needs of students were not being met. His belief was that a school building should be designed to adapt to the curriculum instead of adapting the curriculum to the building. Located on Claiborne Drive in Duluth, the school was built with few inner walls and presented a new concept of freedom and open movement for students and teachers. Harris soon became a model for many buildings in this area. It was “not by accident or happenstance” that the school was named to honor Mr. Harris. He served

### FAST FACTS

Address: 3123 Claiborne Drive  
Duluth, GA 30096

The following have served as principals of B.B. Harris Elementary:

Nov. 1966–June 1967	Brooks Coleman
1967–1973	B. B. Harris
1973–1975	Gary Fairley
1975–76	Russ Everson
1976–81	Fred Rundle
1981–98	Judy Sullivan
1998–2003	Melinda Sepmeyer
2003–2006	Nancy Harris Hammond
2007–2015	Dr. Lauri Burton
2015–Present	Dr. Erin Hahn

School Colors: Purple and White

School Mascot: Wildcat

Motto: The Power of Positive Doing!



as principal of the Duluth School grades one through eleven from 1945-52 and was the county's School Superintendent from 1952-67. During his 15 years as superintendent there were tremendous improvements and progress in the school system. Mr. Mose Hamrick known in Duluth as "Ole Moe," a local merchant, led a group of towns folk to speak to the Board of Education and requested that the school be named for Mr. Harris. Their request was granted. At that time the school contained grades one through three and there were 12 teachers.

Fourth and fifth graders became part of the Harris family in 1978 and an addition to the building was constructed to accommodate them. As the community began to grow, more classroom space was needed, and the fifth graders were relocated to Duluth Middle School in 1979. They remained there until 1983, when a major rezoning to a newly built Berkeley Lake Elementary provided necessary classrooms at Harris for these older students. A little more than a decade after Harris was built, ideas about education began to change and across the nation there was a return to more traditional teaching methods. In the summer of 1980 extensive remodeling took place at the school to add classroom walls. Additional construction in 1986 eliminated the remaining open spaces that were so popular in the late 60's.

Construction continued in December 1988 when the original school was completely renovated and a second building was added to house kindergarten through second grade classrooms and a new art and music room. During the second half of the 1988-89 school year, 930 Harris Elementary students were moved to the newly built, Chattahoochee Elementary School. In August of 1989, Harris "reopened" with 27 classrooms in the new addition and larger classrooms, media center, and cafeteria in the original renovated building.

Nancy Harris Hammond, daughter of the late B.B. Harris, served as the eighth principal of Harris Elementary. Dr. Lauri Burton followed her, becoming the school's ninth principal in 2007. In December of 2015, the Gwinnett County Board of Education tapped Dr. Erin Hahn to take the helm of B.B. Harris as its tenth principal.

Today, more than 800 students attend Harris Elementary. The school houses students in grades kindergarten through grade five. All classes are grouped heterogeneously. Schoolwide programs include counseling, special education, remedial education (EIP), speech and language therapy, English Language Learners (ELL), and gifted resource. In addition to the

core curriculum, all students receive instruction in art, music, and physical education. A key for today's learner is the incorporation of technology into classrooms. All classrooms have a small-group set of laptops to promote differentiated instruction. Teachers use both district and local technology resources to enhance curriculum and instruction. Teachers participated in technology staff development and weekly collaborative planning sessions to prepare instructional activities for students using these technology resources.

The Harris staff is a professional learning community and works together in a collaborative manner to promote teaching and learning and achieve annual school goals.

Harris Elementary has been honored as a Georgia School of Excellence and believes in the continuous improvement process. The Local School Plan for Improvement (LSPI) is written each year based on interpreting data available and input from the staff.

Harris Elementary is very fortunate to have an active parent base, involved Parent Teacher Association (PTA), and supportive community. The city of Duluth also is a strong advocate of the school, and city administrators and a variety of local businesses lend support.

The Duluth area is experiencing growing diversity and changing demographics. Ethnic minorities that presently make up our student population are Asian (19.5%), Black (21.7%), Hispanic (32.8%), Caucasian (22.2%), multiracial (3.2%). Harris Elementary also has experienced an increasing rate of students who qualify for free and reduced lunch. In 2005-06 school year, the school's percentage of students qualifying for free and reduced lunch was 49%. By 2016-17 that percentage had increased to 64%. Students in public schools are eligible for free or reduced price lunch if their family income meets eligibility requirements. Free or reduced lunch figures provide a measure of the economic status of the household. Over the last few years teachers have worked hard to learn strategies that meet the needs and challenge of our diverse population of students. As we meet the challenge of change we grow professionally.

Harris Elementary is a child-centered school, and visitors often remark that the climate of love and caring can be felt throughout the building. This supports the philosophy of the school which has always been to provide a supportive and nurturing atmosphere that encourages an eagerness for learning and social growth. This philosophy serves the school and its students well as evidenced by the many accolades earned throughout its history.