

History of

Duluth High School

“Rural school buildings were generally shabby structures,” said James Flanigan in *Volume I of the History of Gwinnett County* as he discussed the very earliest schools. Usually, they were log cabins or frame houses with a wide fireplace in one end. Pupils sat on slab benches, solved their arithmetic problems on slates, played town ball and marbles for recreation and walked from one to five miles to school without complaint.

Flanigan records that a week of school work culminated with spelling bees and recitations on Friday. Parents watched proudly as their youngsters spelled difficult words and quoted famous poetry and readings.

At the end of the year, elaborate closing exercises were attended by the entire community. “Great preparations were made, and days were spent in practice,” recalled Flanigan. “The youth in the neighborhood put on their best clothes, and on the night of the exhibition, people came from far and near, on foot, horseback, wagon, and buggies.”

Young people from what would become the Duluth area may have attended Washington Academy as early as 1827. It is supposed the students were from wealthy farm families living along the Chattahoochee River.

A teacher’s contract dated July 19, 1830, gives some idea as to how the schools were conducted. The contract was with one George Hopkins and called for him to teach an English school for the term of 12 months. He was to teach spelling, reading, writing, and arithmetic for five days each week with “good order and attendance.” He started with 25 pupils. In return, Hopkins was provided a house on land

William Wardlow furnished for the school. At the end of the 12-month period he was paid the sum of eight dollars for each scholar in his class.

Education in Duluth appears on the records about 1880, according to *Volume I of the History of Gwinnett County* by Flanigan. The school, staffed by R. H. Villard and W. C. Wright, was called Duluth Academy. The 59 students in attendance were taught mathematics, science, and the classics.

FAST FACTS

Address: 3737 Brock Road
Duluth, GA 30096

The following have been principals of Duluth High School:
Before the 1940s—

	Walter F. Harvey
	Marvin Allison
	J. Blake Cash
	Glenn Boggs
	Rembert Green
	Everett Bagwell
	R. Lee Buice
	E. E. Gibbons
1944–45	M. H. Reynolds
1945–52	B. B. Harris
1952–53	Clarence Lambert
1953–57	L. D. Strickland
1957–58	West Gwinnett High
1958–62	M. C. McDaniel
1962–63	Emmett Wilson
1963–65	Gerald McQuaiq
1965–79	Lyle Coker
1979–84	John McMillian
1984–2002	Ted Neuman
2002–2008	Pat Blenke
2008–Dec. 2012	Jason Lane
Jan. 2013–Oct. 2017	Anthony Smith
Oct. 2017–Present	Dr. Eric R. Davidson

School Colors: Purple and White

School Mascot: Wildcats

School Motto: Challenging All To Succeed

Revised by: Marsha T. Hunter, PhD, Media Specialist,
Duluth HS



Duluth's first public school building was a frame structure located on the site of the former Duluth Middle School at 3057 N. Peachtree Street. The land had been donated by Singleton Howell, son of Evan Howell, a successful merchant and farmer.

In 1907, the frame building was moved to the front of the lot and a brick building replaced it. In 1912, Duluth had its first graduation with diplomas. Miss Nellie Summerour was a graduate. In 1913, Herb Dowis and Calvin Parsons, well-known Duluth businessmen, were graduates.

Walter Harvey, principal from 1919–24, would allow no students to graduate in 1924, since he felt they had not made significant progress. During this same period of time, it is significant to note that a student was awarded a certificate after a nine-week period for no tardies and no absences.

In 1933, Duluth was named an accredited school. Duluth public school was housed in one large building and employed 12 teachers. The property was valued at \$35,000. Competent and trained teachers were used in this school.

In the summer of 1935, lightning struck the steeple of the school, destroying the building by fire. A concerned citizen, John Gilbert, helped salvage furniture by throwing chairs out windows. Students had to attend classes in old Baptist and Methodist churches while a new building could be constructed.

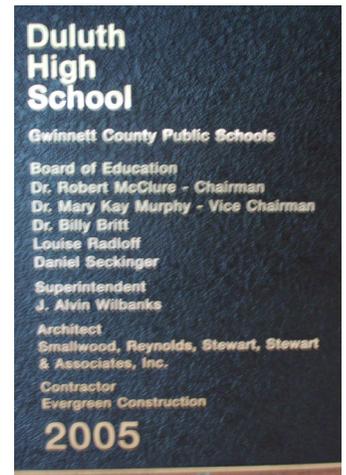
There seem to be no records of the school until the mention of 14 graduates from the 1938 class. The school at that time included only grades one through 11. The 12th grade was not added until 1954.

A bond issue in 1955 provided \$659,000 to be added to \$1,807,000 of state funds to erect four high school buildings: Central Gwinnett in Lawrenceville, South Gwinnett in Snellville, West Gwinnett in Norcross, and North Gwinnett in Suwanee. Included in the building of these high schools were Hooper-Renwick Elementary, Sugar Hill Elementary, Harmony Elementary and Hull Elementary. From these same funds, additions were added to Dacula, Lilburn, Duluth, Centerville, Norcross, Snellville, Grayson, Bethesda, and Suwanee schools.

In the school year of 1957–58, Duluth High School, as such, ceased to exist for the secondary-level (grades 8-12) students. The Duluth High School students were consolidated into a school called West Gwinnett High School in Norcross. The school was located so far from Duluth that parents of many of the students were most unhappy. They demonstrated their displeasure by



The 2005 renovation/addition to Duluth High School provided the school with a new facade, marrying a state-of-the-art facility with portions of the older building.



campaigning for the re-creation of a high school in the Duluth vicinity.

The strong parental influence was heard as the people of Gwinnett County voted for a school bond and construction program to begin on a school to be located on Brock Road. Duluth High School would once again be in existence. Before Christmas in 1958, the high school students attended classes at Duluth Elementary School, while awaiting the completion of their new building.

Duluth High School, home of the Duluth Wildcats, is now located at 3737 Brock Road, N. W., Duluth. When the re-created Duluth High School was opened for attendance in 1958, the building consisted of 12 classrooms and an enrollment of 200. The faculty was comprised of 10 teachers, as compared to the 150 employed in 2006.

Several traditions were established for the school: purple and white were chosen as the colors and the Wildcat, a feline of fierce nature and keen vision, was named the mascot. Dr. Brooks Coleman, then assistant superintendent of Gwinnett County Public Schools and a long-time resident of Duluth, became known as “the voice of the Wildcats.” He has been announcing and describing every football game since 1963.

The 60s brought about several building projects. In 1962, the original gymnasium was completed on lands bought from Frank Mattison. Later, he graciously donated land for other purposes. The school building was extended from 12 to 16 rooms in 1963, and then to 18 in 1967, with the vocational building was added in 1971. In comparison, there are now 60-plus classrooms at Duluth High School.

New football stands were constructed in 1966, and the Lion's Club donated money for tennis courts to be built in 1967. The Duluth Athletic Club helped finance a new football field house in the spring of 1969, and Vantress Farms sponsored an underground sprinkler system for the football field in that year, showing strong community support for the local school.

Before the school term of 1970–71, a new vocational building was completed, which housed an expanded home economics department, library, and industrial arts department. Benches were built and placed in the landscaped area completed between the original building and the vocational building, giving Duluth High a “campus” look second to none in the area.

On September 18, 1985, a stunning new stadium in a natural setting with a 5,000-seat capacity opened as the new home of Wildcat football fans. The Tim Maxwell Memorial Stadium was named for the first Duluth resident to be killed in World War II.

Growth in Duluth High School and in the community continued in dramatic fashion. In 1986, new additions and renovations included a 300-seat theater, four science laboratories, a choral suite, new art facilities, expanded band room, media center, a new cafeteria, and 24 new classrooms.

Enrollment grew to approximately 1,200. The administrative staff built a strong curriculum by adding more course offerings. Enhancement of courses included fine arts, foreign languages, gifted, AP/joint enrollment, debate, and computer programs. The Guidance Department, begun in 1968, increased to a full-time staff of three. Greater involvement with students generated more school spirit through curricular and extra-curricular activities. In May of 1984, a unique and successful venture took place. “Project Twin City” was conceived. The idea was to have a cultural exchange between six students from Duluth, Georgia, and Duluth, Minnesota. The Duluth Organization for Scholastic Achievement and journalism clubs sponsored this activity with the cooperation of the PTSA and community groups.

School spirit was apparent in the DHS sporting events and activities. In 1969, 1971, and 1972, the football team claimed regional championships with North Georgia championships won in 1973, 1975, and 1980. To the delight of the Wildcats, George Rogers, a graduate of Duluth High and one of the finest running backs ever to play football, was awarded the Heisman Trophy while playing at the University of South Carolina. Cecil Morris, the successful football coach of the Wildcats, was named “Sportsman of the Decade” in 1990 by the *Gwinnett Extra* newspaper as it cited his 151 career victories on the gridiron.

Girls’ and boys’ basketball teams were highly competitive, making it to state tournaments for several years. Girls’ and boys’ track, girls’ softball, boys’ baseball, soccer, golf, cross country, and tennis teams continued to excel and won numerous competitions in each of their respective areas.

A new larger gym was finished and ready for use by the school term 1989–90. The new gym provided a larger seating capacity. The old gym was used for physical education classes, enabled a basketball team to practice at the same time one was practicing in the new gym, and provided an excellent place for wrestling teams to practice.

The growth and expansion of Duluth High School continued throughout the decade of the 1990s, seeing student population and building facilities expand as Gwinnett County grew. Duluth High School was recognized as an outstanding public school and received National School of Excellence status in 1991, as well as being recognized by *Redbook Magazine* as one of the “Nation’s Best 140 Schools” in 1992.

As the student population approached the 2,000-student mark, construction on additional facilities was started. The 500 Building opened in the fall of 1997 with a new media center, new Main Office, and classrooms for Science, Language Arts, and Mathematics. Duluth High School was taking on the look of a college campus with numbered buildings (100, 200, 300, 400, and 500) each with its own department. Even new buildings did not provide all the classroom space needed and trailers began to spot the campus. By school year 1998–99, enrollment reached 2,155.

As Duluth High School entered the 21st Century, the student population continued to grow and to become more diversified. The school building was expanding including the several new or improved athletic facilities. A new field house with weigh room, coach’s offices, media room, and locker rooms was completed in 2001. An expanded

community stadium with new home stands and track was completed for the opening of the fall football season in 2002. The Brooks Coleman press box was dedicated to and named for “the voice of the Wildcats,” State Representative Brooks Coleman. The old gymnasium built in 1962 was torn down and replaced by a large new gym with indoor walking track, exercise room, coach’s offices, and physical education classrooms. In 2003, the new gym was dedicated and named for former Duluth basketball coach and athletic director, Joe Marelle. The Joe Marelle Gymnasium officially opened for 2003 basketball season.

Duluth’s student enrollment reached 2,620 in the 2002–03 school year. As construction began on the new 600 building, 54 temporary classrooms filled every empty space on campus and parking became a premium commodity. A new principal, Pat Blenke, started the 2002–03 school year as Dr. Ted Neuman, who had led the school for 17 years, retired. Duluth was entering a new phase in its history. Approximately 1,000 students would be transferred to a new high in the area in the fall of 2003. Enrollment dropped immediately but returned to approximately 2,000 by 2005— an enrollment level seen in the early 1990s.

By the opening of this 2005–06 school year, the campus of Duluth High was brand new. The cafeteria had been expanded and was flanked by landscaped courtyards featuring a circular bricked entrance to the new 600 building. The 400 Fine Arts building featured a refurbished and enlarged choral room, band and orchestra rooms, and art facilities. The 200 Technology Building housed updated multimedia and computer labs. The four-story 600 Building included the new Main office, a 600-seat theater, and 60-plus classrooms for Science, Social Studies, Foreign Language and Special Education. Early graduates of DHS would have a difficult time recognizing the Duluth High School of today.

In 2019, additional improvements to the school’s football field occurred as the school became one of the first two in the county to have artificial turf installed on its field.

Despite the growth and numerous physical changes at Duluth, the commitment of faculty and staff to academic excellence has not changed. That commitment has produced student success in all realms of achievement— Advanced Placement, preparing students for college, and scholarships. The success of the Advanced Placement program resulted in Duluth receiving the 2005 Siemens Award for advanced Placement for Georgia bestowed by the College Board to schools showing excellence in Math and Science. In addition, when Gwinnett County Public Schools was recognized as the 2016 AP District of the

Year by College Board, the ceremony was held at Duluth High School, another recognition of the school’s efforts to challenge students with rigorous AP classes.

Student extracurricular clubs and activities continue to be recognized locally and nationally. State championships in Girl’s Softball and Competitive Cheerleading (two), along with championship soccer keep Duluth’s athletes in the news. The 2005 National Geography Champion came from Duluth. Duluth’s Orchestra was ranked the #1 public high school orchestra at the 2005 National Orchestra festival in Reno, Nevada. Duluth’s musicians and choral students hold seats in state orchestras and choirs. Duluth student writers, essayists, artists and broadcast students are recognized and awarded locally and at the state level for their talents and accomplishments. Duluth High students continue to take advantage of the many opportunities afforded to them at the school, building on the school’s tradition of success and achievement.

Principal Blenke summarized his time at the school in an annual report saying,

“Over the last decade, Duluth High School has developed a reputation for academic and extracurricular excellence. This past year’s accomplishments will enhance this already sterling record. This reputation has developed because of the quality of our students, teachers, parents, and community. DHS’s many awards and recognitions serve to highlight our standing in the state and the nation.”

That reputation continued under principals Jason Lane, Anthony Smith, and Dr. Eric Davidson. Today, Duluth High School serves more than 2,600 students providing a wide range of academic and extracurricular opportunities. In true Wildcat fashion, the school’s mission is laser focused on Challenging All To Succeed (CATS).

Alma Mater:

Bravely, bravely stands old Duluth,
Waving purple and white,
Emblems of true sons and daughters
Living for their rights.

Duluth, Duluth, dear old Duluth,
May she ever be
Proud to claim her alma mater.
Duluth, hail to thee!

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