

# History of

## Norcross High School

Norcross High School opened a beautiful 440,000 square foot facility at 5300 Spalding Drive in August of 2001. This land was purchased for the school by the Gwinnett County public school system after a devastating tornado in 1990 cleared the land of hundreds of trees. The new building opened with a student population of 2,400 students who live in the attendance area bordered by Peachtree Corners on the west and Beaver Ruin and I-85 on the east.

Norcross High School began offering the prestigious International Baccalaureate program in 1999 and this highly rigorous curriculum now serves over one-third of the student population. Norcross High School has a rich and long history dating back to 1827. Extremely successful alumni, including Norcross Mayor Lillian Webb, are the pride of the school.

Before moving to its new location on Spalding Drive, Norcross High was located at 600 Beaver Ruin Road. That facility opened in 1957. At that time, the school was called West Gwinnett High School. In 1962, the name was changed back to Norcross High School. Norcross was named after Johnathan Norcross, a friend of the founder of the town, John Thrasher.

One of the earliest schools in the area that would become Norcross was the Washington Academy, incorporated by the state legislature in 1827 with Charles Gates, William Green, David Burge, Samuel

### FAST FACTS

**Address:** 5300 Spalding Drive  
Norcross, GA 30092

The following have served as principal of Norcross High School:

1957–68	J. E. Richards
1968–76	C. B. Davis
1976–77	Art Otwell
1977–79	Bill Heron
1979–82	John Phillips
1982–86	Ronnie Williams
1986–92	Charles Meagher
1992–2003	Judith Rogers
2003–2006	Mary Anne Charron
2006–Feb. 2012	Jonathan Patterson
Feb. 2012–Present	William “Will” Bishop

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

**School Mascot:** Blue Devils

Maloney, Henry Dunn, John Baker and Thomas Morgan as trustees. Located near the Chattahoochee River at the present site of Shiloh Baptist Church, Washington Academy was patronized by the wealthy farmers who lived along the river, according to James Flanigan in *History of Gwinnett County, Georgia, Volume I*. Records show that in



1836, Washington Academy received \$260.56 from the state and had an attendance of 72 males and 31 females.

Another early form of schooling was provided by 'contracts.' George Hopkins was an educator who 'contracted' with area parents to provide classes in available sites, such as churches, meeting houses or even homes. Since the county was still young, school buildings were few, explained Lucille Baldwin, great-granddaughter of Hopkins. 'The older students were called scholars, while the younger children were referred to as half-scholars,' added Mrs. Baldwin.

In July of 1830, Hopkins signed an agreement to educate the children of the following pioneer citizens: John Mathis, Jesse Dickerson, John Dickerson, John Lietch, William Wardlow, Lazarus Jones, Nora Collins, Jemison Ware, Francis Hopkins, John Stell, Robert Stell, Henry Mathis, Amos Kelley, Joseph F. Comer, George Hopkins, Curtis Corley, John Nash, Joshua Durham, William Armstrong, Nancy Burns and Larkin Brown, according to *History of Gwinnett County, Georgia, Volume I*.

Just about the time that Norcross was being organized, free schools were created by the Georgia General Assembly in 1870. However, schools were suspended during 1872, because no funds were available. The public school system began to function again in 1873.

Soon after the 1870 founding of Norcross, a two-story school house with eight rooms was erected in the town, and Professor James Vincent was the principal. At the closing exercises in May of 1873, it was revealed that two flourishing literary societies were doing well and the enrollment had gone beyond 100. Performing at the closing exercises were Alice Harrell of Cumming, Nora Strickland of Duluth and Ellen Thrasher and Helen Jones of Norcross. In August of that year, Professor Vincent printed an advertisement for Norcross High School, revealing that the tuition ranged from \$1.50 to \$3 per month. Board, exclusive of washing, was \$10 a month.

"We believe in the co-education of the sexes," proclaimed Professor Vincent in 1873. "We limit their association. They meet only in the recitation room except in passing to and from the Academy and during the suspension of regulations pertaining thereto. Their association to this extent makes them more attentive to personal appearance and more refined in speech."

The next year, Professor Vincent sold the school to Professor Norman Favius Cooledge, a native of Vermont said by many to be a relative of President Calvin Coolidge (despite the different spellings of their last names). The

Cooledge Academy was reportedly attended by many boys and girls of the Norcross area and even some from out of state. Cooledge was a highly respected member of the community and lived in Norcross until his death at the age of 72. He was also one of the leaders in the organization of the First Baptist Church of Norcross and served as the first Sunday school superintendent.

Terrell Simmons, member of a pioneer Gwinnett family, opened the Georgia School of Languages, Science and Art in Norcross in 1883. Simmons had just graduated from Emory College and later became a successful businessman, according to Flanigan's *History of Gwinnett County, Georgia, Volume II*.

W. H. Baker was in charge of a teachers' training institute in Norcross in 1883, but he complained in a letter to G. J. Baker, state superintendent, that attendance was low because school was still in session. The usual salary for first-grade teachers in the late 1890s was about \$38 monthly, while upper-grade teachers received only \$23.

The Norcross City Council decided in 1898 to elect a board of education and the duties would be 'to secure the service of competent and well-qualified teachers, to settle all differences that may arise in the schools and to look after all school projects and see that it is well cared for by teachers and report it to the mayor and council.'

Bonds were issued for a new modern brick school building in 1903, and another bond issue approved an additional school in 1914. These buildings stood side by side on College Street for many years in the center of Norcross and were preceded by an old wooden building at the same site, say many long-time Norcross residents. Before this older wooden school was destroyed, it became very unsteady, former students recall.

After the second red-brick building was constructed as a grammar school, the first building became Norcross High School. Many persons who grew up in Norcross and attended these schools have not forgotten the school-day memories collected there, referring fondly to the 'castle on the hill.' Both of the brick schools were demolished several years ago, although the first building was in use until 1970.

According to a booklet compiled in 1923 and reprinted recently, the rural schools surrounding Norcross were Beaver Ruin with 60 students, Glover with 172, Mechanicsville with 87 and Pittman with 60. Crabapple School, which was located at Pinckneyville, had apparently closed earlier.

In 1933, a report printed in *Flanigan's History, Volume*

I, stated, “Norcross has three buildings valued at \$60,000, and used 13 teachers. For many years this has been one of the best schools in the county and is accredited first class.” A school for black children was located near Hopewell Baptist Church at that time, according to Clara Nesbit.

Norcross Elementary School was built in 1939, and the Board of Trustees of the Norcross Consolidated School System listed on the corner stone were H. L. Sudderth, J. Howard Webb, B. F. Summerour, B. W. Westbrook and C. A. Garner. This school is still in use, although many additions have been built through the years. With the completion of the new elementary school, the two older buildings ‘on the hill’ became Norcross High School.

When West Gwinnett High School was built in 1957, parents of Duluth students objected to consolidation and fought successfully to have a new high school built in Duluth. The citizens of Norcross later asked to have the name West Gwinnett changed back to Norcross High School.

The school colors— blue, silver, and white— and the school mascot— the blue devil— were chosen by the students in 1957 when football was played as a school sport for the first time.