

# IMAGINE OUR NORCROSS

## Planning for Immigrant Integration



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School of City and Regional Planning, Georgia Institute of Technology, 2015

Commissioned By: The City of Norcross and the  
Gwinnett Community Improvement District



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Website: <http://www.advancingjustice-atlanta.org/>

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the spring of 2015, a group of researchers from Georgia Tech's School of City and Regional Planning created a studio project to collect information about the immigrant populations living and doing business in the city of Norcross, Georgia, as well as the unincorporated parts of the Gwinnett Village Community Improvement District (CID). The goal of the studio was to provide the city of Norcross and the Gwinnett Village CID with two sets of information: one, a portrait of the overall immigrant community—how and where people lived; where they worked; where they played, argued, shopped, and prayed—and two, what this community would need in order to become more engaged in the area's civic and economic life.

As such, the studio divided into two groups: one focused on community development, the other on economic development. Both groups pursued both quantitative and qualitative research, supplementing face-to-face interviews, surveys, and focus groups with statistical analysis. Their efforts culminated in a presentation to the public at Norcross's Cultural Arts Center on April 22, 2015.

The studio presented four main points:

### **Immigrants are underrepresented in Norcross civic life.**

More than 40% of the city's population is foreign-born. Yet non-Hispanic whites, who make up only 20% of Norcross's population, dominate its government and political community. Similarly, the economic activity of foreign-born entrepreneurs is similar to that of their native-born counterparts, yet there exist few opportunities for the two groups to interact in inclusive business networks.

### **Quality of life is highly unequally distributed in the study area.**

The study area can be divided into three tracts, with the "Upper Tract" (northwest Norcross, bordering Peachtree Corners and including downtown and City Hall) having the highest incomes and home values and the lowest relative housing cost burdens. By contrast, the middle and lower tracts, which house the vast majority of Norcross's immigrants, suffer from low-value housing stock, aging infrastructure, and limited transportation options.

### **Despite this inequality, immigrants think well of Norcross and want to stay.**

Both residents and business owners reported long-term settlement plans. Immigrants in Norcross want much the same thing native-born residents do: safe places to live, access to jobs, chances to spend time with family and friends, and education opportunities for their children

### **The city of Norcross has many opportunities to reach out to immigrant populations and help their members integrate into the larger community.**

Substantial challenges exist, particularly in terms of housing, community engagement, and transportation infrastructure. However, these challenges are not insurmountable. If city leaders are willing to put in the time, energy, and humility to engage with and listen to immigrant communities, Norcross as a whole will be a much healthier and stronger community.

Norcross cherishes its community atmosphere and quality of life. In America, the historical default has been to see new immigrants as threats to such valued qualities, rather than possible additions to them. Yet Norcross's new residents, although coming from different backgrounds, value social connections and shared amenities as much as its longstanding ones do. By reaching out constructively to its immigrant populations, Norcross has a chance not to lose its distinctiveness, but to enhance it—and become a leader among American cities.

## PRIMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

● **Take advantage of the ethnic business and cultural centers that currently exist in Norcross. Immigrant groups are gathering at specified locations: Global Mall, Plaza Latina, and Hong Kong Supermarket. City leaders should connect with leaders at these locations to build bridges between different communities.**

● **Work to improve aging and inadequate transportation infrastructure—both at the local level, continuing improvements on Jimmy Carter Boulevard, and by supporting county-wide transit options, including possible MARTA expansion.**

● **Continue ongoing efforts to reach out to immigrant communities, such as the Spanish-language Citizens Police Academy, and establish new ones, such as an advisory board staffed by representatives of immigrant communities.**

● **Take advantage of existing affordable-housing incentives to replace old, undervalued housing stock without driving out existing residents.**

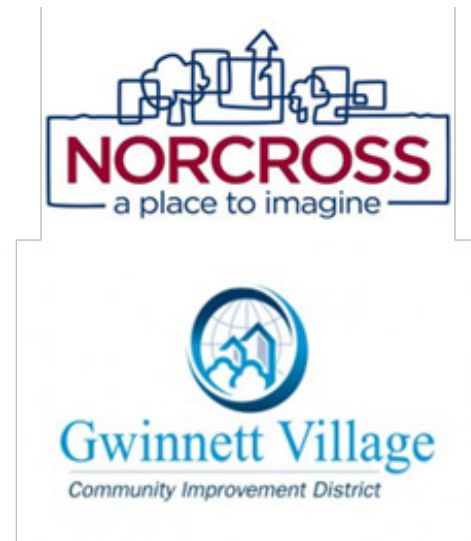
● **Increase connections between immigrant business communities and mainstream business communities through networking, marketing and promotion, and business assistance.**

## INTRODUCTION

The immigrant population is not new to Norcross but has been growing steadily over the last decade. In commissioning this report, the City of Norcross acknowledged both the value of the immigrant population's contributions to the city and the city's need to better understand, acknowledge, and encourage those contributions. By first understanding the current state of the immigrant population, it is easier to then define the challenges they face. Despite these difficulties, the immigrant population has put down roots and flourished both civically and economically. The ongoing strength of the immigrant community is vital to the future of Norcross. By welcoming and promoting this diverse population, Norcross stands to benefit financially and culturally. Because other cities around the United States are also dealing with an expanding immigrant population, Norcross' initiatives can become a model for others to follow. This will help Norcross become a recognized national leader in immigrant integration.

This report was completed utilizing quantitative data analysis, including Census and Dun & Bradstreet, as well as qualitative research, such as surveys and focus groups. In total, there were 335 community outreach survey, 12 focus groups, and 20 in-depth interviews. None of the work would have been possible without the assistance of our partners; City of Norcross, Gwinnett Village Community Improvement District, the Latin American Association, and Asian American Advancing Justice Atlanta.

## IMPORTANT PARTNERS



## BACKGROUND

The genesis of this research was a meeting between Dr. Anna Kim, professor of City and Regional Planning at Georgia Institute of Technology, representatives of the City of Norcross, and the Gwinnett Village Community Improvement District (CID). Dr. Kim presented data placing the study area's recent population and economic changes in the context of metropolitan Atlanta. Between 2000 and 2010, growth in Gwinnett County was far greater, by sheer population numbers, than in any other of the 20 counties within metropolitan Atlanta; and that growth was driven by an in-migration of immigrant and minority populations. By addressing the needs of its immigrant communities, Norcross would have the opportunity to improve not just the city's future but that of thousands of its new residents.

The city and the CID shared the goal of learning more about the needs and strengths of the local immigrant populations. Their specific areas of concern included:

- learning more about the housing and infrastructure needs of immigrant populations;
- assessing immigrant-driven economic activity and its value to the CID, particularly along Jimmy Carter Boulevard;
- learning which public facilities were most valuable to the immigrant populations;
- learning what attracted immigrants to settle in the study area, and whether they planned to stay long-term or were a more transient population;
- discovering new opportunities for potential economic growth;
- connecting with leaders of the immigrant communities; and
- branding Norcross as a "welcoming city," under the Welcoming America framework.

The studio team, assembled by Dr. Kim, began working on learning more about the study area—both its specific needs and the context in which it had developed. To that end, the studio team first concentrated on background research, reading about attitudes towards immigration and legal responses to immigrant in-migration in Georgia. The studio team also met with demographers at the Atlanta Regional Commission to understand the forces driving demographic and economic changes in metropolitan Atlanta as a whole.

Soon after, representatives of both the city of Norcross and the Gwinnett Village CID met with the studio team to give further background on their efforts to date and their hopes for the project. Bucky Johnson, mayor of Norcross, and Warren Summers, chief of police, came to Georgia Tech to discuss their hopes for immigrant integration into the City of Norcross. Chief Summers would later host a "ride-along" in a police car with team members, allowing them to observe interactions with residents firsthand. At the Gwinnett Village CID's office, Chuck Warbington and Alyssa Sinclair Davis explained the CID's aims for further development around Norcross, including unincorporated areas.

The next step was to connect with organizations that worked closely with local immigrant communities. The Latin American Association (LAA) and Asian Americans Advancing Justice (AAAJ) were contracted to translate and help distribute surveys and assemble focus groups. Representatives of both organizations also met with the studio team to share their understanding about the needs and frustrations of the communities they served. The Vietnamese Community

Figure 1 - Studio team with representatives of the Vietnamese-American community



of Georgia provided a tour of HongKong Supermarket, a noted ethnic supermarket on Jimmy Carter Boulevard, and answered questions about the local Vietnamese community and outreach efforts.

The studio also met with representatives of Welcoming America to get a better idea of what it meant to be a “welcoming” city. This work created the framework of a website that will later be used by the city of Norcross as a tool for reaching out to immigrant populations. Monica Fuentes, Chief Service Officer for the City of Atlanta, also shared Atlanta’s ideas for working with immigrant communities.

While researching the study area and its resident communities’ needs, the studio team divided into two groups: one focused on community development and one focused specifically on economic development. Figure 2 shows which subject areas fell under which group’s oversight.

Figure 2 - Studio teams’ descriptions

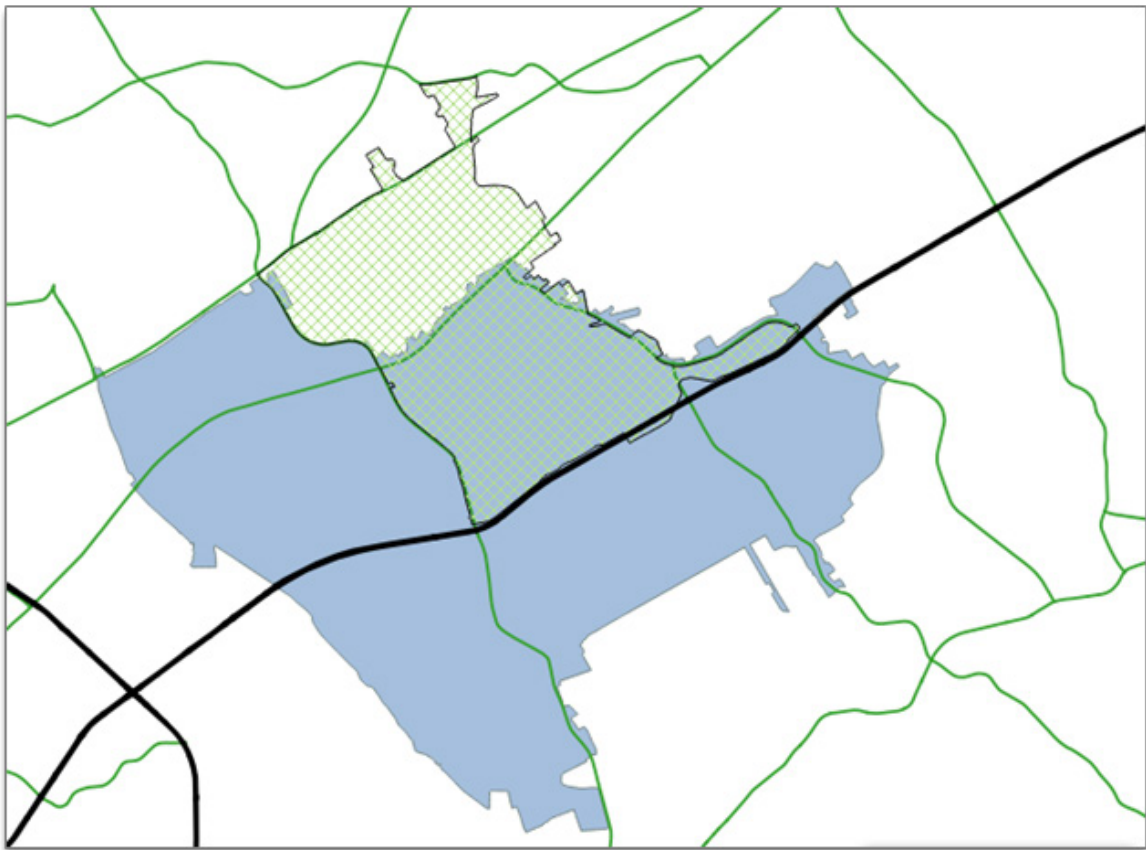
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT	ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
Demographic analysis Asset mapping and identification of primary community gathering points Understanding of social networks Educational attainment profile Housing profile	Business ownership data Economic activity data Employment profile Survey of property ownership and commercial land uses Infrastructure recommendations



Both groups conducted surveys of the local populations and hosted focus groups in order to pin-point particular local issues. The surveys were translated into Vietnamese, Korean, and Spanish; a Spanish-language interpreter provided by the LAA assisted with focus groups consisting of Spanish-speaking residents. With help from LAA and AAAJ, members of the studio team canvassed the study area to solicit responses from the community. The studio team began their outreach by distributing surveys at a Vietnamese Lunar New Year celebration. Later, the entire studio team videotaped an appeal to the public that was translated and broadcast by Viet Song, a Norcross-based Vietnamese-language TV station.

Both groups analyzed Census data to understand population and economic trends. The economic development team also analyzed proprietary business data from Dun & Bradstreet. On April 22, 2015, the studio team presented its findings publicly to the City of Norcross and the Gwinnett Village CID in the Norcross Cultural Arts Center. After the presentation, Mayor Johnson moderated a question-and-answer session with a panel consisting of representatives of AAAJ, the LAA, and Gwinnett Village CID. In attendance were residents of the study area, media outlets such as the Atlanta Journal-Constitution and Telemundo and representatives of community organizations. The feedback given at the public presentation was taken into account when drafting this final summary report.

Figure 3 - Study Area



## POPULATION CHANGES IN THE REGION

Between 2000 and 2010, metro Atlanta grew by 24 percent or approximately a million new people. Many of the counties that make up the metro saw growth but none as great as Gwinnett, which added over 200,000 residents. In fact, Gwinnett had the 18th-largest county population gain in the nation (Atlanta Regional Commission 2011). A majority of that new growth comes from an increase in the Asian and Hispanic population. Between 2000 and 2010, the Hispanic population in Gwinnett rose from 11 percent to 20 percent while the Asian from 7 percent to 11 percent. This diversification of the Gwinnett County population continued and by 2013, the county converted to minority-majority with non-Hispanic white population falling below 50 percent. Gwinnett County had one of the highest percentage point declines in non-Hispanic white population in the United States between 2000 and 2013 (Krogstad 2015). This rapid change in demographics has impacts on a number of issues including voting, infrastructure, education, and housing.

# IMMIGRANT POPULATIONS IN NORCROSS

While the last ten years saw a significant growth in the ethnic population of Gwinnett County, in 2000 the city of Norcross was already 40 percent Hispanic and 6 percent Asian. The Hispanic population remained steady through 2010 while the Asian population more than doubled to 14 percent. This indicates that Norcross already attracted an ethnic populace long before the rest of the county.

**47%**  
OF NORCROSS RESIDENTS  
ARE FOREIGN-BORN

Approximately 47 percent of the ethnic population in Norcross is born outside of the United States with almost half of the population entering the U.S. between 1990 and 1999 and the other half immigrating after 2000. Sixty-three percent of households speak a language other than English at home. Immigrants come from a diversity of locations with 62 percent of foreign-born residents hailing from Latin America and 31 percent from Asia. The top five countries of origin are:

- Mexico (38%)
- Guatemala (12%)
- Vietnam (11%)
- India (8%)
- Bangladesh (5%)

## Occupation

Occupations between ethnicities are starkly different. Hispanic residents typically work lower skilled jobs while Koreans tend to be high skilled laborers. Chinese and Vietnamese work both high and low skill jobs. Below is a list of the top five occupations by ethnicity:

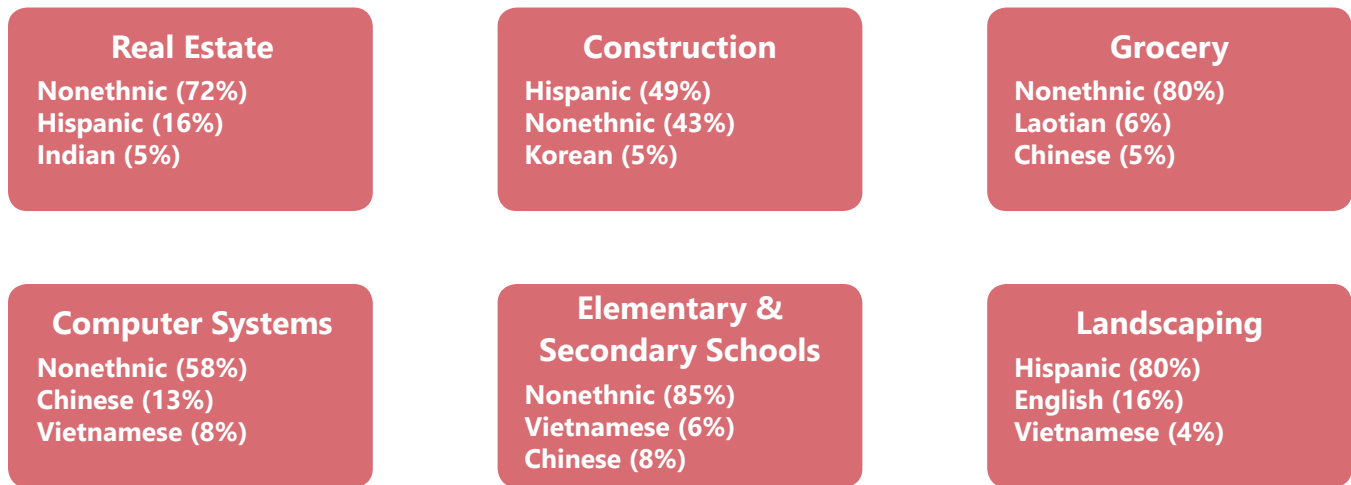
Figure 4 - Occupation by Language Spoken, Source: Public Use Microdata Samples

HISPANIC	KOREAN	CHINESE	VIETNAMESE
Grounds Maintenance Workers	Childcare Workers	Miscellaneous Food Preparation Workers	Miscellaneous Personal Appearance Workers
Maids and Housekeeping Cleaners	Construction Managers	Miscellaneous Managers Electrical and Electronics Engineers	Software Developers
Painters and Paperhangers	Chief Executives and Legislators	First-Line Supervisors of Retail Sales Workers	Hairdressers, Hairstylists, and Cosmetologists
Cashiers	First-Line Supervisors of Non-Retail Sales Workers	Cooks	Computer Occupations, all other
Carpenters	Cashiers		Elementary and Middle School Teachers

## Industry

Another way to analyze the numbers is to look at which ethnicities dominate a particular industry. A breakdown of several industries by top ethnicity of employees is below. The number located in the parenthesis describes the percent an ethnicity is represented within the industry.

For example, 16 percent of those working in the real estate industry are Hispanic and 6 percent of elementary and secondary school workers are Vietnamese.



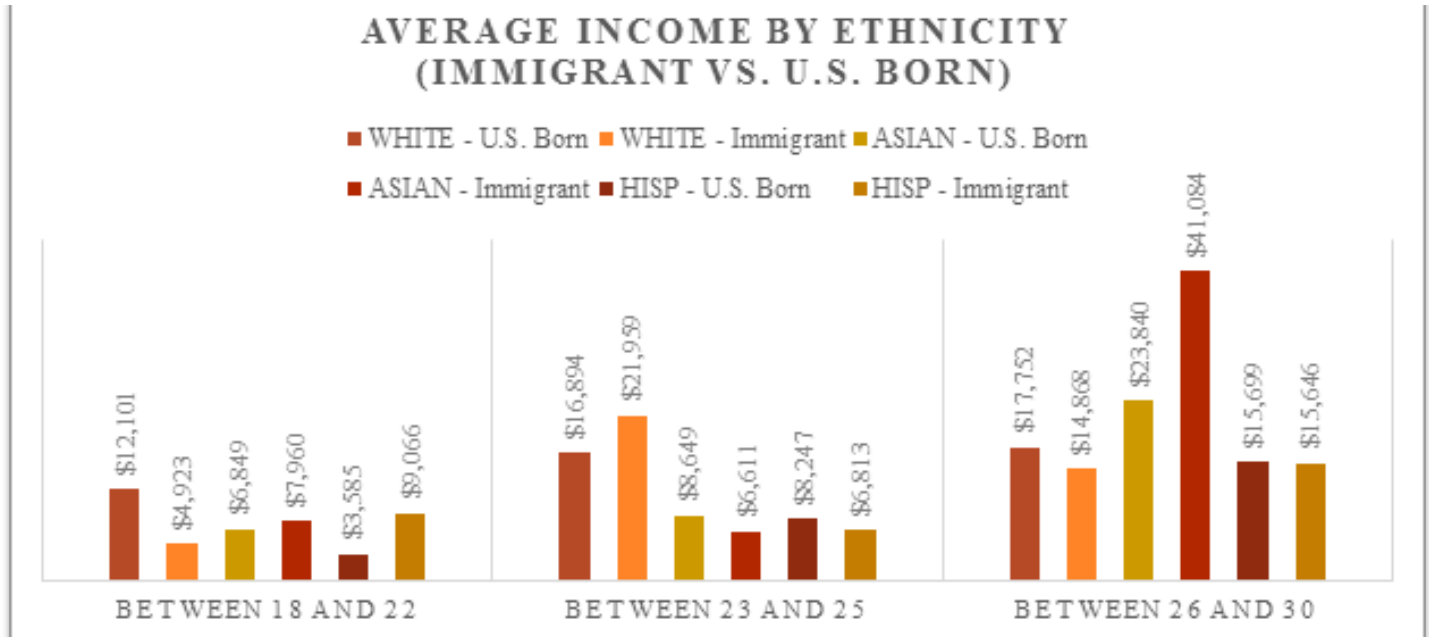
## Income

Immigrant and U.S.-born populations have very similar earnings throughout the age groups, with the U.S.-born population having higher incomes in the 18-25 age, while the immigrant population has a significantly higher income in the 26-30 group. However, the earning potential gaps are different across ethnicity.

In the U.S.-born population, the white population makes the most during 18-25 age group, while the Asian population makes the most during 26-30. The Hispanic population starts with a very low earning, and earns comparable amounts to the white population by the age group of 26-30.

In the immigrant populations, different trends are seen. The Hispanic population makes the most at the youngest cohort (18-22) and by age 26-30, the immigrant Hispanic population is making the same as U.S.-born Hispanics, suggesting both populations are filling similar jobs with similar education attainment requirements. The immigrant white population makes large earning in the 23-25 age group, but then makes significantly lower income in the 26-30. Finally, the Asian population has low earning in the 18-26 cohorts, but then increases sharply in the 26-30 age range to \$41,000, which is the highest income of any population in the analysis. This indicates the earning potential is rising steeply later in life due to high levels of educational attainment.

Figure 6 - Income by Ethnicity, Source: Public Use Microdata Samples



### A Community Divided

The study area for this project extends beyond the boundaries of Norcross and includes areas south and east of the city limits. The study area has a total population of approximately 25,644. While the population is united under the shared resource of Norcross, there are three distinct communities, divided physically by Buford Highway and Interstate 85.



The "Upper Tract" in the northwest, has a population of approximately 2,620 residents. The median income for this community is \$100,588, and 56 percent of its residents obtained a bachelor's degree or higher. This is very different from the "Middle Tract" with a median income of \$36,000 and 41 percent of residents not graduating from high school. The "Lower Tract" is similar with a median income of \$39,000 and 31 percent of residents not graduating from high school. Both of these communities have high percentage of residents that are non-citizens with 41 percent and 33 percent respectively. Further description of the community can be found below.

	<b>UPPER</b>	<b>MIDDLE</b>	<b>LOWER</b>
Population	2,260	15,439	7,585
White	59%	13%	9%
Asian	19%	7%	16%
Black	17%	15%	28%
Latino	4%	64%	47%
Citizens by Birth	82%	52%	57%
Median Income	\$100,588	\$36,000	\$39,000
Poverty Rate	8%	31%	22%
Median Home Value	\$248,000	\$105,000	\$101,000
Owner Occupied Homes	84%	31%	36%
Vacancy Rate	1.10%	14%	7.50%

# CHALLENGES FOR NORCROSS' IMMIGRANTS

## *Education*

Norcross public schools are part of the Gwinnett County Public School System. There are seven elementary schools, two middle schools, and two high schools serving the Norcross area. They are:

### **Elementary**

- Beaver Ridge
- Meadowcreek
- Susan Stripling
- Norcross
- Simpson
- Peachtree
- Rockbridge

### **Middle**

- Pinckneyville
- Summerour

### **High**

- Meadowcreek
- Norcross

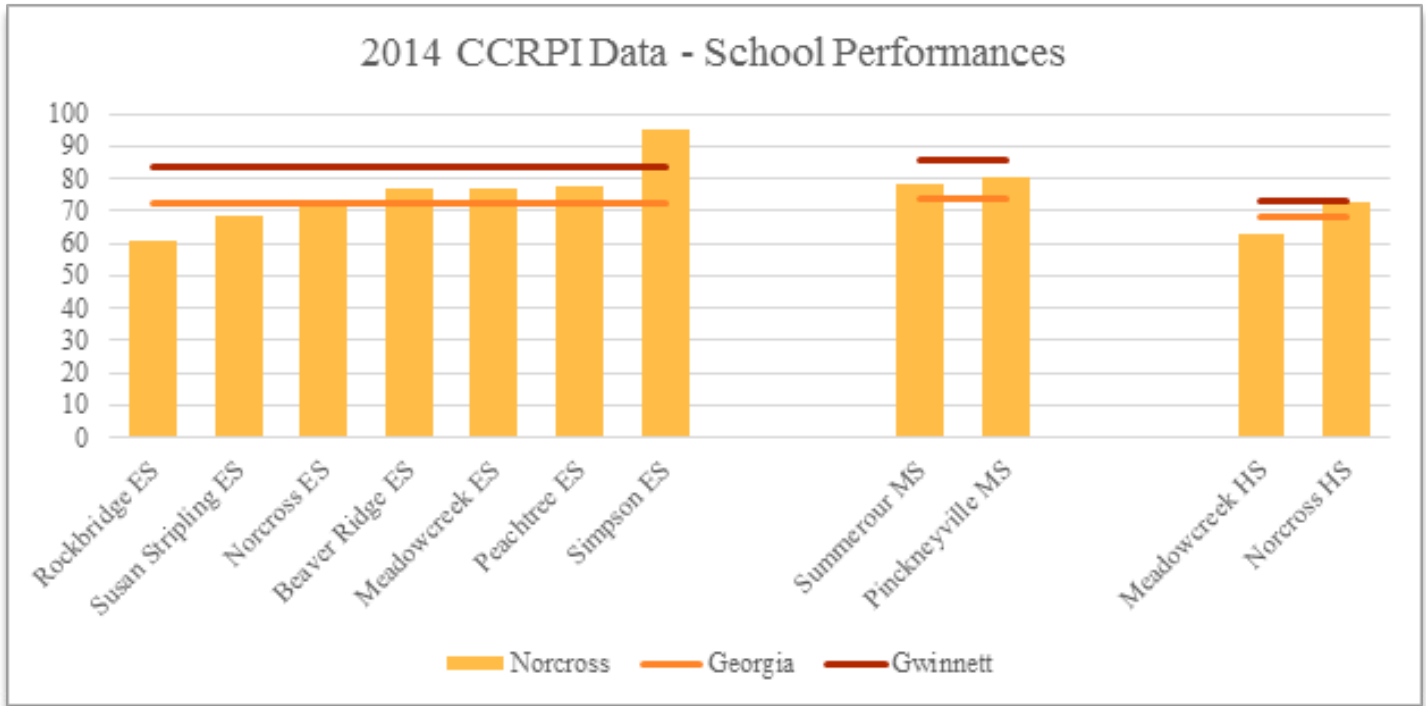
Quality schools was a theme that continued to reappear throughout the survey and interview process, as respondents stressed that good schools influenced their decision to move in or out of a particular area. Interviewed business leaders particularly stressed the importance of good schools when recruiting companies to the area. Gwinnett County schools is recognized for having a top education system. For example, U.S. News ranked Gwinnett School of Mathematics, Science, and Technology as the fourth best school in the nation in 2015.

*15% OF NORCROSS RESIDENT SURVEY RESPONDENTS ANSWERED THAT SCHOOLS WERE A PULL FACTOR FOR MOVING TO NORCROSS*

While the county has elite public schools, both interviewees and focus groups had the perception that schools in Norcross were declining in quality. This decline may explain why only 15 percent of Norcross resident survey respondents answered that schools were a pull factor for moving to Norcross.

While residents felt schools were underperforming, it is important to understand if perception matches reality. The most accurate data describing school performance is the Comprehensive School Improvement, Accountability, and Communication Platforms (CCRPI), which is a state standardized set of tests. Standardization allows schools to be cross-compared as well as internal comparison between years. The overall CCRPI is a 1-100 point score based off a number of criteria including percent of students who meet or exceed scores for various content areas such as English, math, and science.

Figure 7 – School CCRPI Scores, Source: Georgia Department of Education



In 2014, the average for elementary schools in Gwinnett County had higher CCRPI scores (83.7) than Georgia elementary schools (72.7). In Norcross, Simpson Elementary School (95.4) far exceeded Gwinnett and Georgia scores. The majority of other Norcross elementary schools scored between Gwinnett and Georgia’s scores, except Susan Stripling and Rockridge Elementary Schools with scores well below both Gwinnett and Georgia. When looking at these scores through a time-series, the trend was for Georgia and Gwinnett schools to remain constant, while Norcross elementary schools had decreasing scores.

The middle school average CCRPI score in 2014 for Gwinnett County was higher (85.7) than Georgia middle schools (73.8). Both Norcross middle schools fell between the Georgia and Gwinnett scores. The two Norcross middle schools scores drastically improved over time, while Georgia and Gwinnett schools remained constant.



*STUDENTS IN  
10 OUT OF 11  
ELEMENTARY  
SCHOOLS ARE  
DISADVANTAGED*

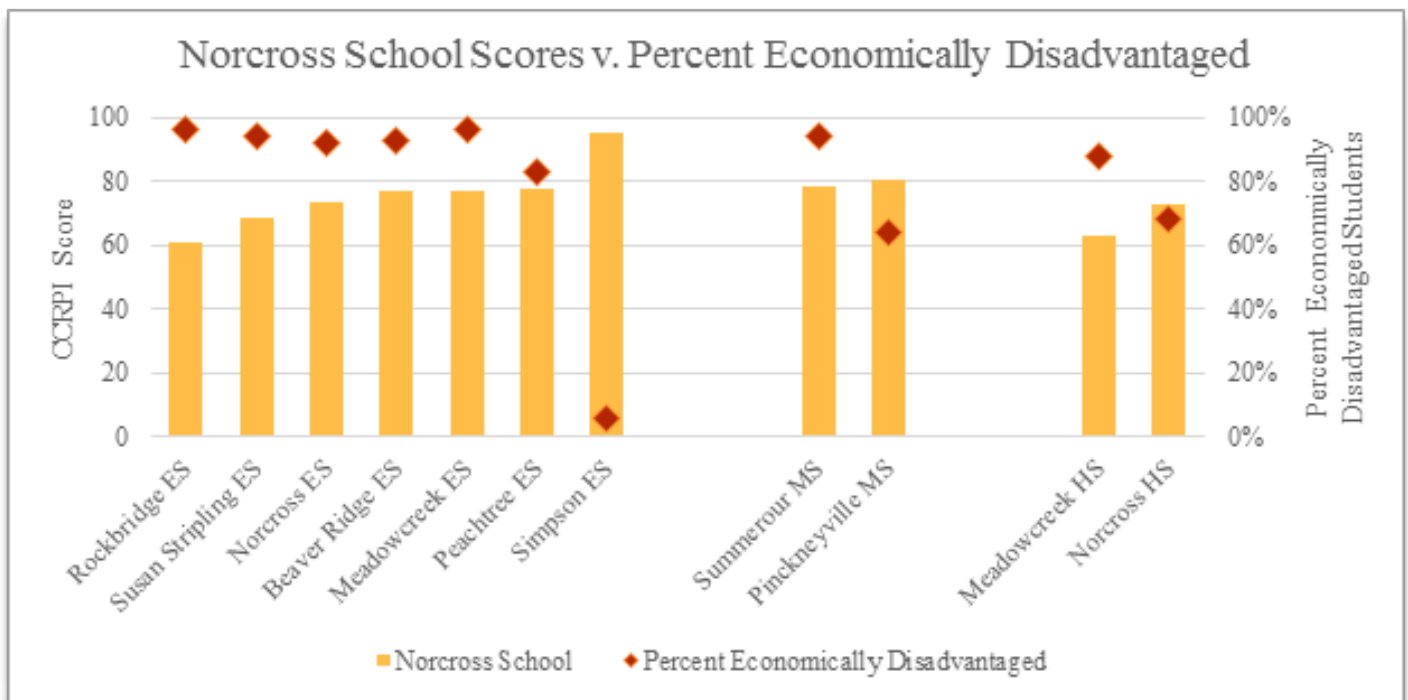


In 2014, the average high school score in Gwinnett County (73.2) was higher than Georgia high schools (63.2). Meadowcreek High School is below both Georgia and Gwinnett (63.2) while Norcross High School is above Georgia yet below Gwinnett level. However, Meadowcreek High School has made significant improvements over time, while Norcross High School scores have remained stable, as has Gwinnett and Georgia scores.

State standardized test scores are not the only defining factor for a school. Residents are also interested in diversity. The school with the greatest diversity is Peachtree Elementary School with 3 percent Asian, 47 percent black, 36 percent Hispanic, and 10 percent white. Norcross High School also has strong diversity with 7 percent Asian, 35 percent black, 37 percent, and 18 percent white. The least diverse school is Simpson with 75 percent of the population white.

It is recognized that both economic disadvantage and language barriers can hurt a student’s long-term educational success. All ten of the schools except Simpson Elementary have a majority of students economically disadvantaged. At the elementary school level, five of the schools have a majority of students that are classified as limited English proficient. No middle schools or high schools have a population with more than 50 percent limited English.

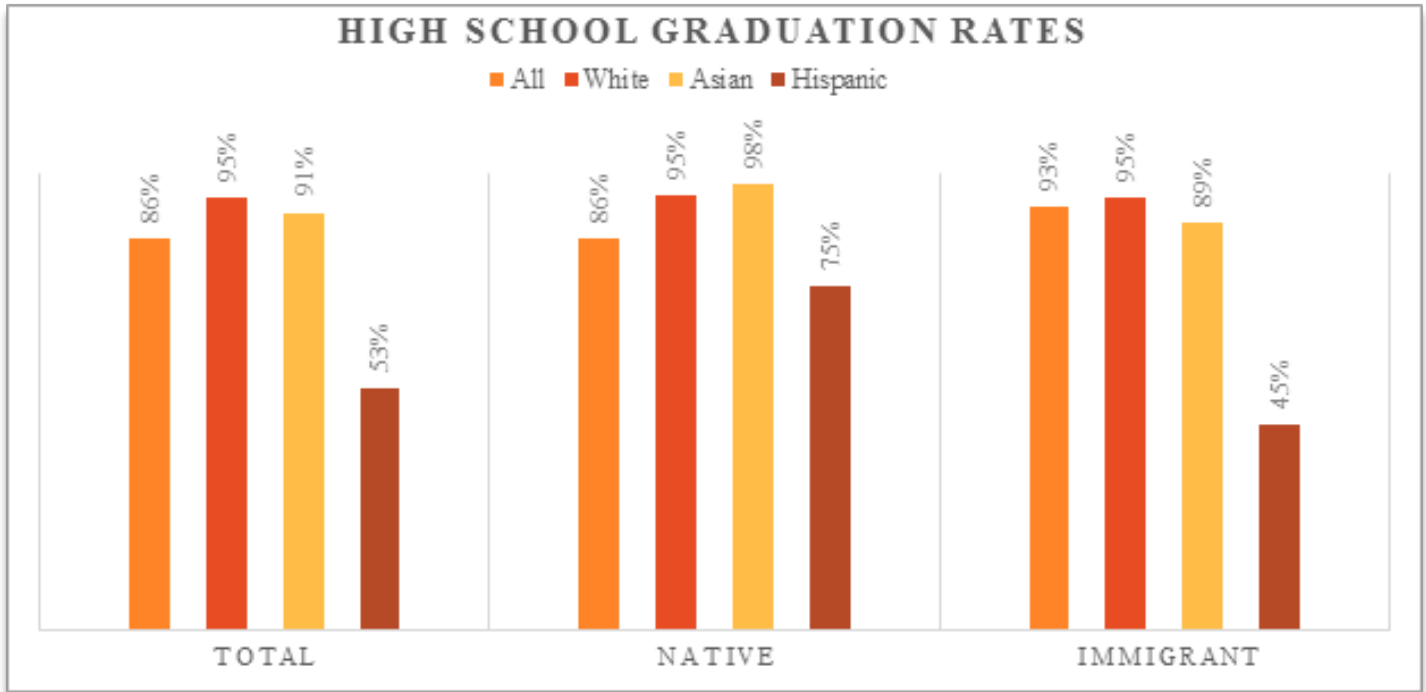
Figure 8 - Scores vs. Economic Disadvantage, Source: Georgia Department of Education



### Barriers for Workforce Development

Workforce development describes the process of ensuring the resident workforce has the skills necessary to fill available jobs in an area. It is an important part of any economic development strategy. As educational attainment is a strong indicator of workforce skill development, an analysis of educational attainment helps describe the skills of the local workforce.

Figure 9 – High School Graduation Rates, Source: Public Use Microdata Samples



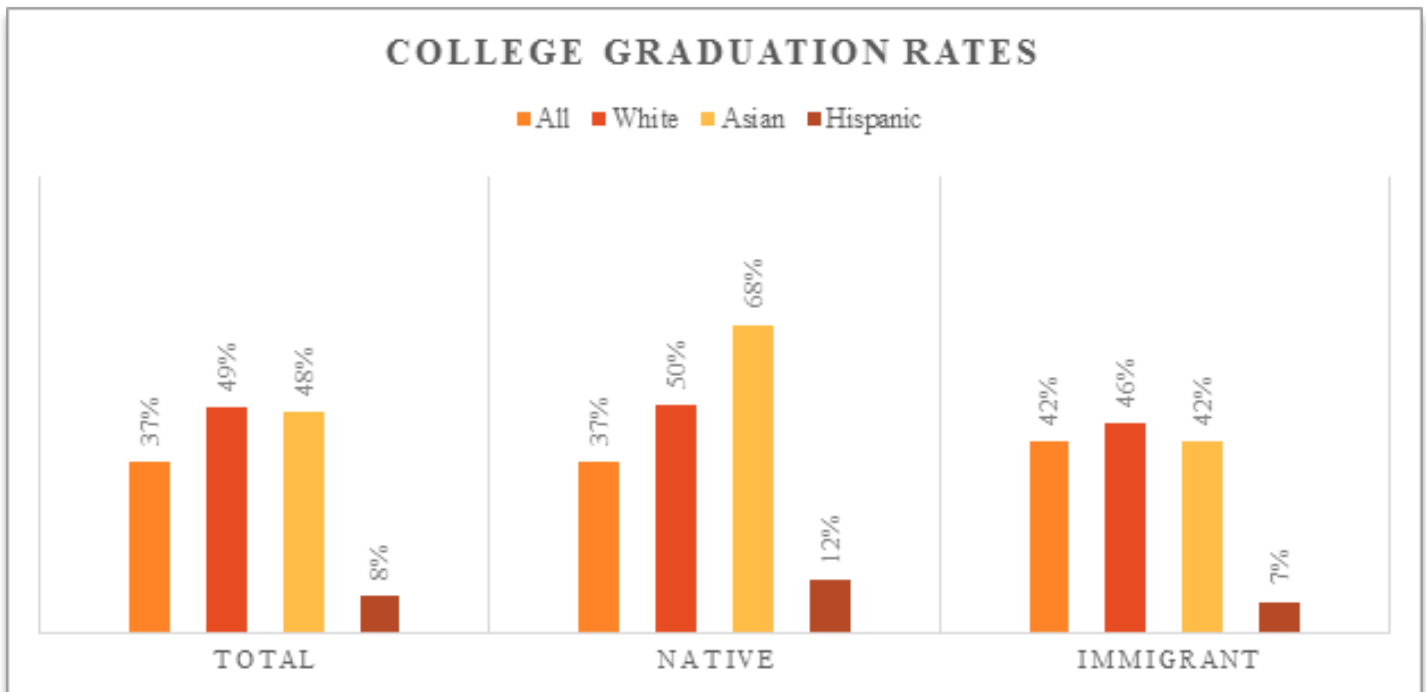
The white population and the Asian population have very similar educational achievement. The white population has a graduation rate from high school of 95 percent, and a graduation rate from college of 49 percent, while the Asian population has a graduation rate from high school of 91 percent, and a graduation rate from college of 48 percent. Further breaking the attainment down to citizenship status, the native-born Asian population has high educational attainment with 98 percent graduating high school and 68 percent graduating college, while the immigrant population has 89 percent graduating high school and 42 percent graduating college.

Major educational attainment differences between ethnicities becomes apparent when examining the Hispanic population, as 53 percent of Hispanics graduate high school, while only 8 percent graduate college. Further breaking the attainment down to citizenship status, the native-born Hispanic has higher educational attainment with 75 percent graduating high school, compared to only 45 percent of immigrant Hispanic students graduating high school.

Overall, regardless of race or ethnicity, a large number of students who start college do not earn an Associate’s Degree. This trend is especially pronounced in the Hispanic population, as three quarters of the student who enter college drop out before earning their Associate’s Degree.

Numbers from the local Gwinnett Community College reinforces the data. Only 58 percent of students return after their first year of classes and overall only 28 percent of students graduate. Administration at the school has taken steps towards reduction of the dropout rate by using intrusive advising and remedial classes for at-risk students.

Figure 10 – College Graduation Rates, Source: Public Use Microdata Samples



The educational gap is especially a concern because the fastest growing industries in metro Atlanta are health care, professional services, and administrative (Atlanta Regional Commission 2014). To find employment in these industries, job applicants must have advanced degrees. As immigrants lag behind in education, their ability to find employment in these growing industries will be difficult, leading to higher unemployment and less stability.

*Transportation*

Another major factor that influences the fabric of the community is the transportation network. Interstate 85, which travels from Alabama to Virginia, connects Norcross to Atlanta and multiple six-lane roads crisscross the city. As Gwinnett has repeatedly voted no on extending MARTA, into the county, Norcross is only served by Gwinnett County Transportation System.

Business leaders mentioned repeatedly that access to Atlanta and North Gwinnett from I-85 was a crucial reason their businesses were located in Norcross. With the location of businesses, came an increase in employees. Norcross also experiences a significant increase in day-time population as the area employees a large number of people. According to the Census, in 2011, almost 18,000 people worked in Norcross who did not reside there. Compare this to the 5,700 individuals who live in Norcross but commute out for work.

*NOT HAVING  
MARTA  
IN NORCROSS IS  
A "KILLER FOR  
THE BUSINESS  
COMMUNITY"*

*- BUSINESS  
LEADER  
INTERVIEW  
RESPONDENT*

This draw of businesses puts a lot of pressure on the road infrastructure especially due to the lack of public transit. Transportation congestion and aging road infrastructure present problems in Norcross. Over 70 percent of all business leader survey respondents listed infrastructure as important or very important to the success of their business. Traffic issues can keep customers away from businesses, hurt wholesalers trying to get products to market, and make it difficult for employees to get to work.

PUMS data show that commute times vary greatly between ethnic immigrants and ethnic U.S.-born populations. Asian immigrants average 124 minutes in commute times, compared to U.S.-born Asians who average 58 minutes. Similarly, Hispanic immigrants average 168 minutes of commute time compared to Hispanic natives who average 33 minutes. The large difference in commute time between immigrants and U.S.-born populations is likely due to the often necessity of immigrants to rely on public transit. This creates a struggle to get to work in reasonable amounts of time thus immigrants would benefit from additional transportation options such as transit.

Many survey respondents expressed an interest in increased transit service. Thirty-five percent of residential respondents living in Norcross were unsatisfied with the public transportation in Norcross. Sixty-two percent of business survey respondents stated that more bus and rail service would be the most beneficial infrastructure improvement for their businesses. This finding is in line with other surveys done recently, as the Gwinnett Chamber of Commerce found 63 percent of likely voters support expanding MARTA into Gwinnett when they conducted a survey in note.

*“IF YOU WANT A HOUSE WITH  
GOOD VALUE, YOU NEED TO PICK  
A GOOD SCHOOL”*

*- FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT*

While there are many infrastructure needs within Norcross, some initial steps have been taken to alleviate congestion and improve roadways and pedestrian access. The Gwinnett Village Community Improvement District (CID) has done a great deal of work to fund transportation improvement projects, notably the diamond interchange under construction on Jimmy Carter Boulevard. The Gwinnett Village CID has also been instrumental in a number of pedestrian and sidewalk improvements throughout the area. This is a good use of funds as fifteen percent of immigrant businesses listed improved sidewalk/pedestrian access as their top desired infrastructure improvement for their businesses. Additionally, the Gwinnett Village CID in coordination with governmental partners has funded a number of transportation studies since 2007. Residents and business leaders are grateful for the work the Gwinnett Village CID has done, as improvements were positively regarded in focus groups.

## *Housing*

All the aforementioned issues around low performing schools, workforce development barriers, and poor transportation directly interact with housing. For example, the quality of the school system affects housing values. A participant in our Hispanic community leaders focus group explained her decision to live outside of Norcross, despite working in town: "I learned this when I moved from Florida, when I was about to buy my home... the teachers talked to me pretty open[ly] and said, 'If you want a house with good value, you need to pick a good school.'"

Survey respondents view the Norcross housing stock as aging and unaffordable for the level of quality. Another recurring theme in the community leader focus groups was that buying a house outside of Norcross was a better investment, and that they are larger and in better condition for the price. A participant in the Multi-Ethnic Focus Group mentioned this: "I mean it's just simple economics. I could safely say that out further, there's more newer development, more bang for your buck." Participants further discussed how they view buying a home as an investment in which local amenities play a large role in affecting quality of life and home value: "He doesn't want to buy something and then it's going to be hard to sell... We need to be somewhere where the schools aren't completely bad, one. Two, we wanted infrastructure, but it's not just roads. We want to live in a nice neighborhood where there's parks, where we can walk on sidewalks. We did actually look in and around Norcross but we just didn't see homes [we liked the look of]."

Community perception is reinforced by data. Rent is unaffordable and most units are quite old. In the majority of Norcross, 60 percent of household are rent burdened, which means they pay more than 30 percent of their income on housing costs (ACS 2009-2013). This is despite the fact that the median home value is only \$105,000, an average of 3.5 people share the costs of a unit, and the median house is close to 40 years old (ACS 2009-2013). Affordability is clearly an issue because only 23 percent of residential survey respondents said they liked living in Norcross because of affordability.

However, 13.6 percent of owner-occupied units in Norcross are vacant, most of which are rental units (ACS 2009-2013). High vacancy rates have hazardous spillover effects and are linked with increased rates of crime, depressed neighborhood housing values, and declining tax revenues (HUD 2014). The hazards that vacancies create in a neighborhood compounds the problem by increasing the likelihood that more properties will become vacant. Usually the prevalence of vacant rental properties can be connected to those units being in poor condition and disrepair (HUD 2014). Thus, rent is high for those units in better condition, because demand is higher. Despite high poverty rates, the only two developments that provide subsidized housing for low-income families also have high vacancy rates, likely due to age and poor living conditions (Department of Community Affairs; Affordable Housing Online).

The distribution of renters and homeowners is uneven throughout Norcross. Overall, 59 percent of units in the majority of Norcross are renter-occupied, compared to the 84 percent of homes in the "Upper Tract" that are owner-occupied. Of mortgage applications in 2013 for Norcross, only 8 percent were from Hispanic applicants, while 59 percent were from non-Hispanic white applicants, which is disproportionate compared to population numbers (HDMA). Immigrant populations traditionally face many barriers to homeownership. Immigrants typically have less

access to funds they can use as a down payment. Often they are building “precautionary savings” so they have a reserve they can use for a variety of more pressing reasons: to send back to families in foreign countries, for protecting against labor market instability, for financial and health-related crises, and because they are more distant from social networks that could otherwise offer assistance (Shobe and Narine, 2005). Nationwide, only 46 percent of immigrants own their own homes, compared to 70 percent of nonimmigrants (Shobe and Narine, 2005). Home Mortgage Disclosure Act data for Norcross in particular reveals that the top reason mortgage applications are denied for Asian and Hispanic applicants is inadequate credit history (2013).

As discussed previously, most Norcross residents plan to stay long-term, and thus would potentially be interested in homeownership if more options were available. Allowing more households to overcome barriers to homeownership would help families be stable in their living and financial situations. Funneling rent payments into mortgage payments allows families to build equity in their homes, which is one of the few ways low-income families are able to accumulate wealth. (Herbert 2013). Homeownership allows families to hedge against housing inflation, use the property as collateral for other loans, and gain increases in property value if they sell (Herbert 2013). If families have stable housing -- without having to worry about landlords, leases, or increased rents -- they are able to stay in one place.

Homeownership also encourages greater pride and investment in maintaining properties. Home-owners can save money on repairs by investing their own “sweat equity”, and do so because they have a direct interest in maintaining and improving their properties, to preserve their home values (Collins 2007). Perceptions from the focus group confirms this. One participant, who works with local code enforcement, discusses how translation and understanding of local codes plays some part in the ability of local renters to adhere to upkeep standards. Better upkeep of properties -- both through extended homeownership and through less vacant units or absentee landlords -- translates into higher home values for the whole neighborhood (Herbert 2013). Homeownership also promotes greater civic engagement and more social support among neighbors.

## IMMIGRANT CONTRIBUTIONS

Like native-born residents, immigrants choose to move to Norcross for a variety of reasons. Understanding what first drew them and what keeps them is very important. Thirty-two percent of survey respondents reported finding the location attractive. This is one of the likely factors that drew the first immigrants to the area. Forty-six percent of survey respondents, meanwhile, indicated they were attracted to Norcross because of the connections to friends and family already present within the area.

Survey respondents identified similar reasons as to what they liked about living in Norcross. Forty-seven percent enjoy the location, 36 percent enjoy being close to family and friends, 35 percent enjoy the atmosphere of Norcross, and 31 percent enjoy the park network. Interviewees indicated the importance of the welcoming atmosphere within the City, and noted positive interaction with the City of Norcross and the Norcross Police Department.

Clearly, immigrants have an emotional draw to the city but the availability of resources are also very important. There are organizations that work to strengthen the community as well as businesses that cater to their needs. The location of these entities will continue to attract more immigrants who will in turn will open new businesses and bring in additional revenue to the city.

As immigrants have opened businesses, they employed other immigrants. This created a strong labor market with twenty-five percent of survey respondents were attracted to Norcross because of job opportunities. As more businesses open, there will be a greater need for employees that can speak multiple languages and understand a variety of cultures.

### *Civic Organizations*

Norcross residents are active within the local community in a number of ways and through a number of outlets. Understanding the level and distribution of community engagement is key to understanding where and how residents are interacting. The community engagement survey showed that 56 percent residents are most active in religious organizations. Additionally, 33 percent participate within their children's schools and 32 percent with community organizations.

Civic organizations are not only places of friendship but also work to serve the needs of the community. Having civic organizations within close proximity to the city further draws resident immigrants as well as nonresident immigrants. Additionally, community organizations are already offering a number of widely utilized services to the local community.

*"IF I WERE TO GUESS, I WOULD SAY FAMILY CONNECTIONS. I DON'T THINK THERE'S A LOT OF JOB OPPORTUNITY COMPARED TO OTHER PLACES. THE POPULATION SEEMS TO BE WELCOMING. ALL THIS IS JUST SPECULATION, BUT THE GENERAL IDEA THAT THIS IS A GOOD PLACE TO LIVE. FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS AND A WELCOMING ENVIRONMENT.*

*- ALEX VILLASANA, CHRISTOS COMMUNITY CHURCH*

Religious institutions aiding the Norcross community offer a number of services. Many local churches offer educational and recreational after-school activities, such as tutoring services, soccer, basketball, or chess. Some, like Christos Community Church, also work to encourage cultural and political awareness and engagement. Large churches like the Norcross First United Methodist Church offer English as a second language (ESL) and GED classes.

Organizations like the Center for Pan Asian Community Services (CPACS) offer a wider range of services. CPACS manages a federally qualified health center, offers health education, substance abuse and anger management counseling, DUI classes, employment training, government program application assistance, transportation services, housing programs, immigration services, community education, English and civics classes, children and youth services, research, and advocacy.

Similarly, the Latin American Association (LAA) offers comparable services to the Latino community. LAA offers immigration assistance, employment services, domestic violence counseling, family and youth programs, parenting classes, leadership classes, ESL classes, and translation services.

Asian Americans Advancing Justice (AAAJ) offers direct legal assistance on immigration related issues. They develop and publish public policy and legal education briefs that are translated into multiple Asian languages and disseminated to the local community. AAAJ also works to encourage voter registration and offers candidate training.

Community organizations have been meeting the needs and challenges of the immigrant community for years. Besides the services listed above, many organizations come together to provide cultural celebrations such as the Tet Lunar New Year festival celebration held in Norcross. The City of Norcross should encourage the success of these organizations and partner with them to reach the diverse Norcross community.

56%  
OF RESIDENTS ARE MOST  
ACTIVE IN RELIGIOUS  
ORGANIZATIONS

### *Entrepreneurship and Economic Generation*

Similar to the residential population, Norcross has a diversity of ethnically run businesses. Approximately 20 percent of City businesses are ethnically owned and of that 20 percent, 13 percent are Asian and 11 percent are Hispanic. Ethnic business owners run an assorted range of establishments that generates considerable revenue for Norcross. Although some businesses cater to a specific culture, many ethnic companies have a diverse client base. Besides the classification of ethnically owned, there are few differences between ethnic and nonethnic businesses.



In Norcross, there are three major ethnic shopping hubs – Plaza Latina, Global Mall, and Hong-Kong Supermarket. Plaza Latina (as well as the adjacent shopping center) includes 24 businesses that cater to the Latin community with an annual revenue of \$3.75 million. Global Mall is located along Interstate 85 and includes 52 businesses for an annual revenue of \$47.77 million. Across Interstate 85 is HongKong Supermarket. It includes 36 businesses with an annual revenue of \$5.4 million. Businesses in each of these shopping centers have been in business for an average of close to nine years and have an average of just below three employees per business.

While each of these centers focus on a particular ethnicity, many cater to a diverse population. For instance, HongKong Supermarket specifically carries Hispanic products to accommodate the Latino population. Surveys indicate 42 percent of Norcross businesses serve a customer base beyond their own ethnicity while 75 percent of businesses wanted to expand their customer base beyond their ethnicity.

Ethnic retail centers do not just draw across ethnic lines but also from beyond the city limits. For example, when surveying at HongKong Supermarket, it was found that customers drove from neighboring states to shop there. One family that took the survey stated they came to Norcross monthly from South Carolina, because Norcross is the closest place to buy many products they use regularly. This indicates the ethnic community draws outside money into the economy of Norcross. This is further supported by scientific literature which state immigrant-run businesses



help cities recapture tax revenue from suburban shoppers by becoming destination shopping districts for the region, attracting second- and third-generation immigrants who live outside the city to eat and shop.

While there are shopping centers concentrated by ethnicity, ethnic Norcross businesses can be found throughout the City. Figure 10 shows that ethnic businesses are scattered throughout the city.

While the visible businesses in Norcross are retail, ethnic businesses cover a wide range of sectors. They bring in \$897 million in annual sales for the Norcross economy and employ approximately 9,500 people. The largest sector by number of establishments is professional, scientific, and technical services at 349 businesses or 19 percent of ethnic establishments. This is followed by 242 administrative sector establishments or 13 percent of ethnic establishments.

Figure 11 – Businesses by Ethnicity, Source: Dun and Bradstreet

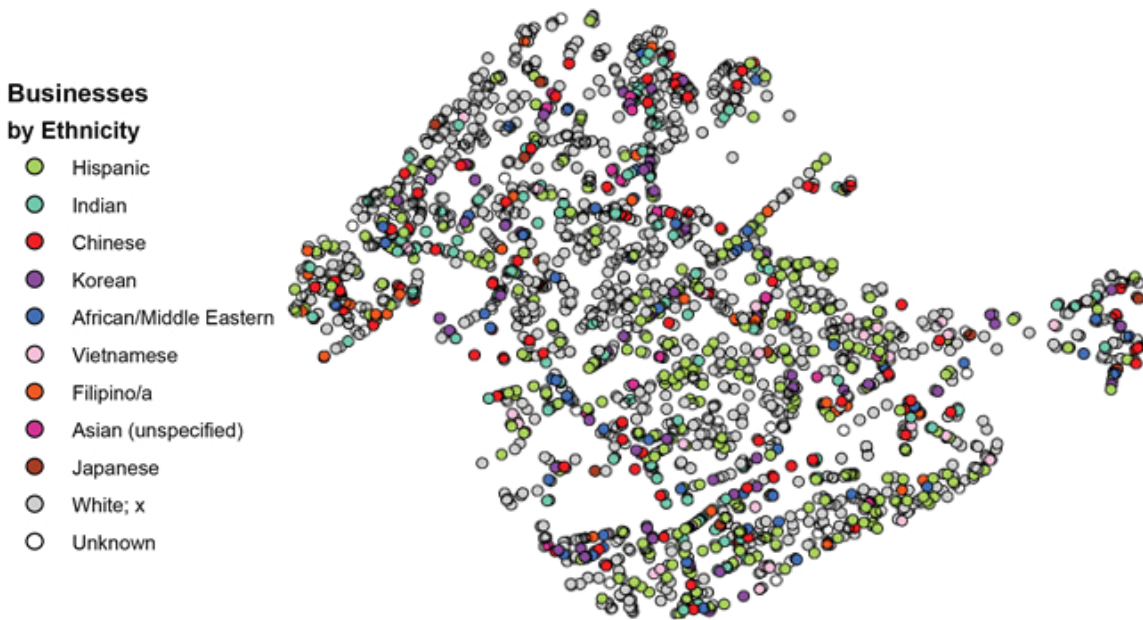


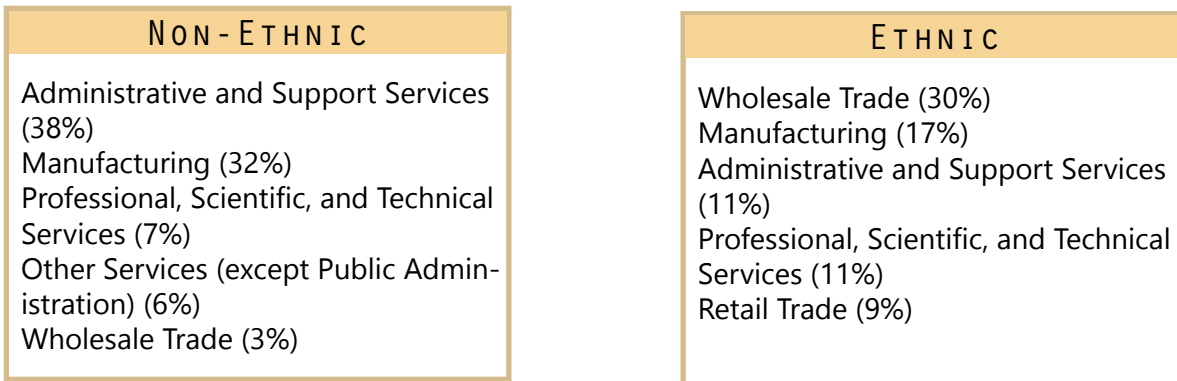
Figure 12 – Top sectors by number of establishments, Source: Dun & Bradstreet

NON - ETHNIC	ETHNIC
Administrative and Support Services (22%) Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services (18%) Wholesale Trade (8%) Retail Trade (8%) Other Services (except Public Administration) (7%)	Administrative and Support Services (19%) Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services (13%) Retail Trade (11%) Other Services (except Public Administration) (9%) Construction (9%)

These numbers are similar to nonethnic businesses whose largest sectors are also professional and administrative services.

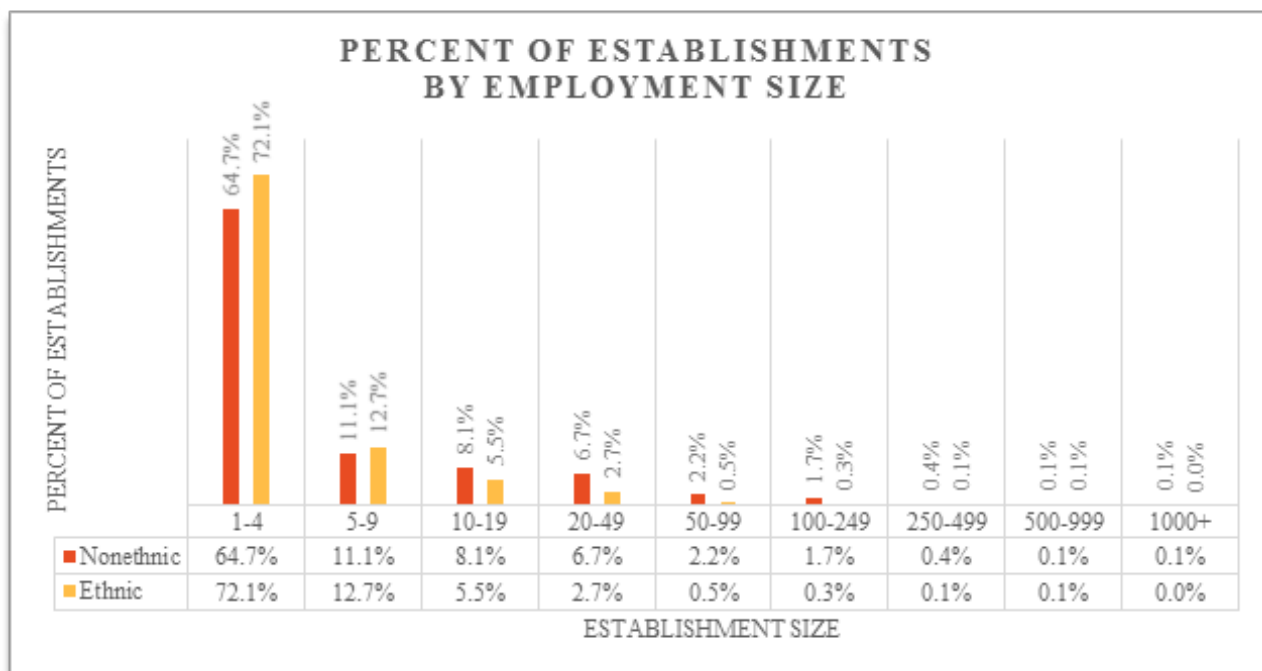
A large number of establishments does not always equate to highest revenue. For ethnic businesses, the largest sector for revenue is wholesale trade, which accounts for 30 percent of ethnic revenue sources. This sector brings in \$269 million in annual revenue for the city, which is 13 percent of all wholesale trade revenue for Norcross. Wholesalers in Norcross sell a wide range of products including computer equipment, electrical wiring, and industrial machinery.

Figure 13 – Top sectors by annual revenue, Source: Dun & Bradstreet



The second largest revenue stream for ethnic businesses is manufacturing at 17 percent of total ethnic revenue or \$150 million. Due to a handful of nonethnic businesses that bring in over \$1 billion in revenue, the ethnic businesses only account for 1 percent of Norcross' overall manufacturing revenue. While this may make ethnic manufacturers appear insignificant compared to the entire sector, the \$150 million in revenue is still noteworthy economic dollars for the city.

Figure 13 – Top sectors by annual revenue, Source: Dun & Bradstreet



Manufacturing jobs are also typically well-paying so this is a good sector for the city to help promote. Top ethnic manufacturing facilities produce computer and electronic products as well as furniture. The computer and electronic manufacturers focus on communications equipment as well as audio and video equipment.

Ethnic and nonethnic establishments tend to be small in size with the majority employing 1-4 employees with 72 percent of ethnic establishments employing less than five people compared to 65 percent of nonethnic. Both ethnic and nonethnic establishments follow the same trend in establishment size as seen in figure 13. While small businesses do not singularly employ a large number of employees, when taken as a whole they are central to a resilient economy.

The parallels across ethnic and nonethnic businesses extend beyond just the types of businesses that owners are engaged in and the size of the business establishments. Both groups have similar credit worthiness, ownership of business space, as well as number of years in business. According to Dun and Bradstreet’s credit worthiness scale, 72 percent of nonethnic and 66 percent of ethnic businesses are considered low risk. This helps improve their chances of being able to take out business loans or apply for business credit. While ownership of business space can often reduce costs, this is still risky for a business owner. That is an explanation as to why only 20 percent of nonethnic and 18 percent of ethnic businesses own their property. Finally, both ethnic and nonethnic businesses have been open for an average of nine years. This indicates a significant number of establishments survived the Great Recession.

Looking to support ethnic industry means understanding both the similarities and differences between ethnic entrepreneurs. Indians bring in the largest revenue at \$211 million while Hispanics have the second highest revenue at \$202 million. Indians’ highest revenue source is in manufacturing specifically semiconductors and other components while Hispanics is wholesale trade. Chinese, Hispanic, and Vietnamese all have their highest number of establishments in administrative and support services.

	<b>Highest Number of Establishments</b>	<b>Highest Revenue Source</b>
Chinese	Administrative and Support Services	Wholesale Trade
Hispanic	Administrative and Support Services	Wholesale Trade
Indian	Professional, Scientific, Technical Serv.	Manufacturing
Korean	Retail Trade	Retail Trade
Vietnamese	Administrative and Support Services	Administrative and Support Services

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### ***Education***

School systems significantly affect the fabric of a community. Quality school systems can lead to increased housing values, lowered crime rates, higher educational attainment for students, and greater economic opportunity for residents. It is recognized that early education can meaningfully influence outcomes throughout adulthood thus; importance of strong school systems begins at the pre-kindergarten level (Anderson et al., 2003). The Norcross school system acts as a pipeline from pre-kindergarten and up through college and the subsequent workforce. The schools should be positively influence residents' lives and improving their long-term quality of life but instead Norcross schools currently have low test scores and a concentration of economically disadvantaged students. The following recommendations address the need to improve the schools in Norcross. While we acknowledge many school system decisions, happen at the county level, Norcross leadership should work to influence the county school board where necessary.

1. Utilize the strengths of teachers, administrators, and school-based social workers. These individuals are well connected to many members of the community and understand day-to-day concerns that residents face. The city should support these individuals through recognition while engaging them as connections to the immigrant community.

2. Redraw school boundaries to include a diversity of students, both in race and economic status. While this is a radical suggestion that the city cannot control, the city can support redistricting to benefit all students, as Decatur, GA did in 2010. Important to its success, the Decatur School Board redistricted its school boundaries with the goal to maintain similar proportions of non-white students, free/reduced lunch students, and use of class-room space at each school. Notably, Decatur elected to cluster Limited English Proficient students to one elementary school finding that a majority of students requiring additional language support lived in one location—the Decatur Public Housing. In Norcross, Hispanic students make a much larger proportion of overall student enrollment and reside more widely dispersed than Hispanic students in Decatur. Accordingly, along with maintaining similar proportions of non-white students, free/reduced lunch students, and use of classroom space, the redrawn districts should also evenly distribute Limited Proficient students.

3. Promote safety and inclusion at Norcross High School. While in focus groups, safety issues were mentioned by parents of children who go to Norcross High School. A woman's child stayed home from high school due to fear of a large-scale fight that was alleged to happen at school. This incident could be indicative of a larger safety issue at the high school level.

4. Teach diversity in schools. Do not shy away from understanding children's diverse backgrounds; celebrate them. Getting children to accept diversity at a young age helps them to grow up to be worldly citizens.

## ***Workforce Development***

As discussed above, the immigrant community contributes significantly to the Norcross economy. Immigrant business leaders make up 27 percent of the business owners in Norcross. These business owners were attracted to Norcross because of the strong ethnically owned business hubs, such as Global Mall, Plaza Latina, and HongKong Supermarket that are in Norcross. Additionally these leaders have a strong immigrant labor pool to draw from in Norcross, as many businesses require employees to speak a language such as Spanish or Vietnamese. Overall, immigrants are more likely to be entrepreneurs and start new businesses (Fairlie, 2012). Stakeholder interviews also indicated that immigrant business owners fared better during the recession. These longstanding contributors to the city economy must have a workforce that matches their needs, can speak multiple languages, and has unique skillsets to set them apart from others. These recommendations address ways that City leaders can support current immigrant business owners and attract new immigrant business leaders to Norcross while encouraging strong workforce development.

1. Partner with non-profits to have a language translator in the Norcross business office, i.e. contract with LAA to have one day per week where someone comes to the business office to provide language translation for immigrants seeking information on zoning requirements, business licenses, or any other services that the city provides.
2. Provide business license translation in Vietnamese, Korean, and Spanish.
3. Create local hiring incentives at the City Governance level that aim to reflect the diversity within Norcross.
4. Have a business entrepreneur from the ethnic business community, i.e. the owner of HongKong Supermarket; give a business start-up workshop in the City of Norcross.
5. Add an internship portal that links high school and college students with the Gwinnett Chamber of Commerce, who is working to link with the Bi-National Chambers of Commerce.
6. Norcross should actively pursue strong reciprocal relationships with colleges and technical schools in Gwinnett County. For example, Georgia Gwinnett College has an educational pipeline program that aims to recruit students from Gwinnett High Schools, train these students in collaboration with Gwinnett County, and then place the graduates back within the Gwinnett County School System as teachers. Many of these graduates teach elementary grades and reflect the diversity within Gwinnett County. Norcross leaders should actively promote this program in Norcross High School and set up a fund to help pay for college tuition for those enrolled in the program who plan to teach in Norcross after they graduate.
7. Ask the Gwinnett Village CID to host property management classes that teach owners how to properly care for investments, improve safety, and increase property values.
8. Begin a newsletter highlighting successful businesses/individuals within Norcross to gain familiarity between immigrant population and native population, and better market investment in Norcross to international business owners.

## ***Transportation***

To continue to be an economically strong community, Norcross must continue to invest money in transportation infrastructure. While many individuals were attracted to Norcross because of its location to I-85, many immigrant respondents are not happy with the aging infrastructure in the city. In Norcross, there is often heavy traffic on many of the main thoroughfares, but there are few alternatives, such as public transportation or bicycle lanes, to give residents and employees other travel options. This limits those without drivers' licenses and impedes their ability to find accessible long-term employment. Our recommendations regarding transportation infrastructure are:

1. Utilize transportation studies completed in the last few years. As stated above, there have been a number of transportation studies done on the Norcross area since 2007. These studies provide a thorough analysis of Norcross with strong recommendations for necessary infrastructure improvements. The Gwinnett Village CID has led the way in studying infrastructure improvement potential, and they should continue to be at the table with the City of Norcross, Gwinnett County, and the Georgia Department of Transportation, as well as potential transit providers.

2. Publicly support initiatives to fund transit in Gwinnett County and Norcross. Norcross stands to benefit greatly from transit dollars in Gwinnett County. City leaders and business leaders must publicly endorse transit. Transit can connect the workforce in Norcross with employment opportunities around the city and the region.

3. Continue to invest in pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure. The Gwinnett Village CID has begun to invest in pedestrian infrastructure throughout the study area. This pedestrian infrastructure is crucial for immigrants who have no choice but to travel throughout Norcross on foot.

## ***Housing***

Housing issues influence quality of life in a city. If housing stock is old and not well maintained, property values decline, particularly when a few homes in a small area go into decline. As people move out of the homes they own, they choose not to sell as prices are declining. This means more homes are for rent in areas with a declining, aging stock. Many people who might want to buy homes in the neighborhoods cannot afford to because of a lack of credit or a small down payment. Thus, rents are high. High rents can drive vacancy up, as people cannot afford to live in expensively priced rental homes in neighborhoods with aging housing. This cycle can be seen throughout much of Norcross. Norcross has the opportunity to address housing issues through several initiatives.

1. Norcross can promote new affordable housing developments by aggressively pursuing funding sources. The Norcross Housing Authority-- or a separate committee like the Redevelopment Initiative, the Norcross Progressive Development Committee, or a new advisory board-- can actively seek out subsidized funding for subsidized development.

a. Norcross is a competitive location to attract developers to build a new development with Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) financing. Additional points are given to developers who receive city support for the project, as well as developments that are incorporated into an existing revitalization plan. Norcross has had only one LIHTC-funded development that was funded ten years ago, although there is a high demand of income-eligible renters. The state agency that awards tax credits, the Department of Community Affairs, puts high priority on developments that do not have competition from recently funded projects, so this makes Norcross a good candidate for new developments.

b. Applying to be part of the Georgia Initiative for Community Housing (GICH) could result in a three-year partnership between the city and this organization to provide “collaboration and technical assistance” in order to “help communities create and launch a locally based plan to meet their housing and neighborhood revitalization needs” (GICH website).

c. The Community HOME Investment Program (CHIP) awards rehabilitation assistance to existing low-income homeowners, as well as down payment assistance for low-income households to purchase homes. This program could thus be useful in promoting homeownership as well as enabling existing homeowners to make repairs on their house.

d. The HOME Investment Partnership Program can providing funding for a variety of affordable housing options: multi-family rental developments and small rental housing, as well as low-income homeownership.

e. The Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD) Multi-Site Bond Program enables “quality experienced developers to explore partnerships through a facilitated interaction with smaller Public Housing Agencies (PHAs) and their public housing properties.” This could allow the Norcross PHA to convert their existing public housing into Section 8 housing, which would allow it to be more easily recapitalized, allowing more funding available for maintenance or new housing.

2. Norcross can support asset management and savings for immigrants so that they can better access housing on the local rental and ownership markets.

a. This can be achieved through partnering with or promoting the outreach of existing nonprofits and institutions. Clearpoint Credit Counseling Solutions of Greater Atlanta, which has a local program in Norcross called the “Hispanic Center for Financial Excellence,” was awarded the majority of 2015 HUD funding in Georgia for housing counseling “to help families and individuals with their housing needs and to prevent future foreclosures.” Supporting and helping expand this program would help Clearpoint in assisting with applications for mortgages, associated translation services, establishing credit histories, and increasing credit scores for local families.

3. Norcross can also work to improve the existing housing stock through addressing abandoned/vacant homes.

a. Following the same recommendations for improving code enforcement as in



a local research study for Atlanta could aid in holding noncompliant property owners accountable (Center for Community Progress 2014). Norcross' existing code for "unfit building, dwelling, structure, or property" can be amended to include the costs to the city for pursuing enforcement in lien against the property (Sec. 26-51). These costs primarily deal with attempts to contact and follow up with non-compliant property owners, and regaining these costs will increase funds available to continue code enforcement and demolition of hazardous properties. These in rem liens should also be "super-priority", not subordinate to existing liens. The code should continue to be a civil charge, not criminal, in order to increase the likelihood of voluntary compliance. Changes to the code should also support low-income or vulnerable owner-occupants who need assistance to remediate or sell code delinquent properties.

b. Establishing a Community Development Corporation or Land Bank Authority could also aid in addressing vacant properties. Land banks are agencies that aggregate properties, then secure then release them to developers for strategic re-use (Samsa 2008, 213). They are technically private entities, but they carry out public policies and thus do not act completely independently (214). In cases where noncompliant owners may still not "fix up or pay up" liens against their property, and the property is determined to be abandoned, the CDC or Land Bank would either bid on properties (if there are no private bids) or automatically hold the property in receivership. Obtaining abandoned properties directly allows land banks to redevelop neighborhoods on a large scale, especially if the tax foreclosure process is too lengthy to revitalize a neighborhood at an acceptable rate. In addition to proceeds from sale of these properties, land banks can be funded through a state tax foreclosure fee, tax increment financing, foundation grants, and federal or state development programs (Alexander 2011, 118).

4. Norcross can improve neighborhoods through sponsoring beautification days. Local non-profits or community organizations can help organize cleanups, in which residents are encouraged to come out to pick up garbage and remove overgrown greenery from common grounds, as well as help each other beautify their own lots. The city can partner with these organizations by providing on these days dumpsters, gardening equipment, or other tools to aid in cleanup. Making this a fun community event, with food and entertainment, would encourage participation. Neighborhood art installations, like sculptures or murals, would also aid in beautification and community pride. Vacant lots could also be turned into gardens, parks, or other community assets, in order to negate their hazardous spillover effects.

### ***Civic Engagement***

Currently, Norcross immigrants are underrepresented in all levels of government and civic participation. Active engagement with the city can help residents feel connected to Norcross, their communities, and neighborhoods. This connection can help them invest time, money and energy into the city at all levels, from individual residential property upkeep to large investment in new parks and better schools. In order to encourage active civic engagement within the Norcross community, several recommendations should be considered.

1. Continue to support and recognize the cultural and economic immigrant centers that already exist within the City of Norcross. These centers draw people from all over the South to come together and connect in one location. Often, residents who no longer live in Norcross

continue to come back to Norcross only to visit these centers. The City of Norcross must recognize that their citizens are already engaged at these locations and figure out a way to connect with them there, rather than asking them to always come to City Hall.

2. Promote local schools as places for community development. Residents who do not feel comfortable going to City Hall may be more amenable meeting at the common ground of their kids' schools. Organize meet and greets where community members get to meet political and community leaders at informal gathering tied into the schools.

3. Provide City ID Cards to immigrants, which would allow all immigrants to have official identification. With this identification, immigrants can set up bank accounts and perform other day-to-day operations that are highly difficult without identification.

4. Establish a permanent advisory committee to facilitate interaction between the City of Norcross and its immigrant community. This committee would include leaders from established immigrant communities to forge successful community integration. Recruitment efforts for the advisory committee should first be focused on the many community leaders interviewed for this studio. A list of interviewees may be found in the appendix of this report. Additionally, our survey identified religious organizations as a place where immigrants volunteer the most. Further recruitment efforts to find potential leaders from the Norcross immigrant community for the advisory committee should be focused on the many religious organizations in Norcross. Establishing pathways to engagement for all Norcross residents is a critical step to achieving an increased level of participation.

5. Augment successful programs such as the Citizens Police Academy. The academy could be expanded to include multiethnic groups and could benefit from the addition of a more detailed civic engagement component. Additionally, the city could partner with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services to establish citizenship corners in public libraries.

6. The City of Norcross should establish collaborations and partnerships with local community organizations that are already successfully reaching the Norcross immigrant community. For example, the City of Norcross can house multi-lingual materials translated by the Latin American Association and Asian Americans Advancing Justice-Atlanta about the importance of voting in different city departments. Further, the City of Norcross visit Norcross middle and high schools with different community organizations to discuss the importance of civic participation and engagement.

7. Provide voter registration forms to all city departments to distribute to citizens when conducting city business.

## GENERAL IMMIGRATION TRENDS

The ethnic population in Gwinnett County has rapidly increased over the past decade. Between 2000 and 2013, Gwinnett County had the fourth highest shift in racial demographics at 25 percent. While Gwinnett's rate was faster than most of the country, the trend is not unusual. During the same period, 78 counties around the United States made the shift from majority white to a population with whites comprising less than 50 percent of the population (Krogstad 2015). A large part of that change is due to an increase in immigrant residents.

Populations have shifted from traditional immigrant destinations like New York City and Los Angeles to untraditional ones like Charlotte NC, Nashville TN, and Norcross GA. This has created a unique set of problems. Traditional immigrant destinations like New York City and Los Angeles are already equipped with infrastructure that supports a culturally diverse population. Staff is already in place at government buildings and hospitals to help English as a second language population and teachers are accustomed to ethnically varied classrooms. The receiving community is accustomed to encountering a population that is different from their own. Cities like these have been handling immigrant populations for decades.

*"AS IMMIGRANTS, WE ARE USED TO GOVERNMENTS BEING ABUSIVE. THE FACT THAT WE HAVE FREEDOM AND OPPORTUNITY HERE IN NORCROSS TO SPEAK OUT IS AN AMAZING FEELING."*

*- ALEX VILLASANA,  
CHRISTOS COMMUNITY  
CHURCH*

For new immigrant destinations, the receiving community feels pressure, as schools are crowded with students that have different needs, the appearance that jobs are stolen from the original population, and already limited resources are shifted around to accommodate the need for translation services. This often creates a backlash towards the incoming population. This can be in the form of many things including changes in laws, policies, and attitudes.

Not all cities support these xenophobic actions but rather embrace the diversity. A number of cities have acknowledged the economic and cultural value of a large immigrant population

and declared themselves a "Welcoming City". Charlotte NC for example, created an inter-agency Immigrant Integration Task Force to "maximize immigrants' economic and civic contributions to the city" (City of Charlotte 2015). Other cities including Dayton OH, Roanoke VA, and Norcross GA have joined the "Welcoming America" campaign to create a community that recognizes the "contributions that immigrants make to the U.S." and "advance the principles upon which the United States was founded" (Welcoming America 2015).

One of the greatest challenges for cities is the fact most anti-immigrant laws come from higher governmental offices thus cities are required to follow them. Many cities have found creative solutions to sidestep these laws including the creation of municipal identification cards to give immigrants a valid form of id.

## NORCROSS AS A LEADER

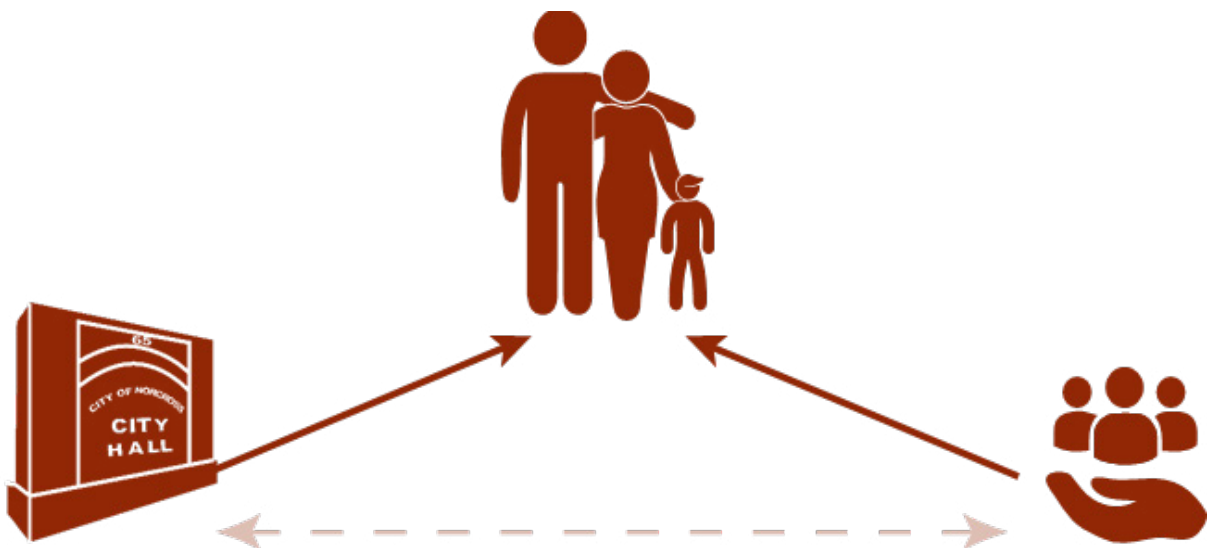
As the data prove, immigrants are a central part of the Norcross economy and civilian life. However, interviews and surveys show that even with the efforts made by Norcross leaders including the mayor and the police chief, there are a number of immigrant residents that do not feel welcome. Although they have established roots, immigrants are willing to move if necessary. Officials need to work harder to keep immigrants satisfied or else they could lose the residents as well businesses that attract shoppers from all over the southeast.

Some of the feelings of being unwanted in Norcross are due to state and federal policy. While it is true that Norcross is legally required to follow state and federal law, the city leadership can still take steps to be a welcoming community. Norcross has already done this by creating the police run citizen academy, declaring itself a welcoming community, and even the commission of this report is a declaration of its commitment to the immigrant community.

The recommendations outlined in this report are not high cost and do not require a large increase in administrative staff. This can be best accomplished by collaborating with organizations that are already doing outreach to various immigrant groups. Rather than compete with these establishments, the Norcross government can form interdependent partnerships. By supporting each other's efforts, this action will further uplift the immigrant population and help to create a more stable Norcross.

*"LOOK AT WHAT HAPPENED TO DORAVILLE, CHAMBLEE, AND DEKALB. FOR A LONG TIME, THEY WEREN'T FRIENDLY. SO ALL OF US ASIANS, WE LEFT FOR GWINNETT. IT WILL TAKE SOME TIME, BUT, YOU KNOW, TIME WILL TELL. IF YOU'RE NOT FRIENDLY TO OUR BUSINESS, WE'LL TAKE OUR MONEY ELSEWHERE."*

*- MULTI-ETHNIC FOCUS GROUP*



By following these recommendations, as well as others outlined in the report, Norcross can become a leader in immigrant integration. As the United States continues to diversify, other cities will be looking to understand how to make a smooth transition. Norcross can be on the forefront of this wave of change.

***Our primary recommendations:***

- Take advantage of the ethnic business and cultural centers that currently exist in Norcross. Immigrant groups are gathering at specified locations - Global Mall, Plaza Latina, and HongKong Supermarket. City leaders should connect with leaders at these locations to build bridges between different communities.
- Work to improve aging and inadequate transportation infrastructure, both at the local level, continuing improvements on Jimmy Carter Boulevard, and by supporting county-wide transit options, including possible MARTA expansion.
- Continue ongoing efforts to reach out to immigrant communities, such as the Spanish-language Citizens Police Academy, and establish new ones, such as an advisory board staffed by representatives of immigrant communities.
- Take advantage of existing affordable-housing incentives to replace old, undervalued housing stock without driving out existing residents.
- Increase connections between immigrant business communities and mainstream business communities through networking, marketing and promotion, and business assistance.

## CONCLUSION

Over the last two decades, Gwinnett County and the city of Norcross have both witnessed dramatic shifts in population. The city of Norcross prides itself on a strong community, anchored in a peaceful and vibrant town center, and an involved citizenry—all of which may seem threatened by rapid change, and the arrival of new residents with different backgrounds, traditions, and languages.

In some respects the immigrant population and its needs present new challenges which the city will do well to address. Immigrant residents are less likely to have on-demand access to cars and are more likely to rely on public transportation, which Gwinnett has historically shunned. They have a hard time building capital to afford their own homes. In many cases, limited English proficiency makes it difficult for them to build the credentials that would help them get better jobs, or participate more fully in the broader civic discourse in which Norcross residents justifiably take pride.

*"NORCROSS DOES A GREAT JOB WELCOMING THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY. THEY BELIEVE WITH THEIR HEART AND THEIR SOUL AND THEY DO WHAT THEY CAN."*

*- NORCROSS BUSINESS OWNER*

But it is important to recognize the similarities, as well as the differences, between Norcross's immigrant and native-born populations. Like their native-born counterparts, immigrants are attracted to Norcross by its location and easy access to economic opportunities, by the ability to join family and friends, and by community organizations, especially churches. Both groups put a high value on good schools and public amenities. Similarities can be found, too, in immigrants' economic contributions. The economic activity of immigrants is surprisingly long-lived, given how short a time the immigrant population has been contributing to Norcross: the businesses in the three major immigrant-focused shopping centers are an average of nine years old. Both in terms of residence and in terms of economic activity, Norcross's immigrant population is not transient, but looking to make a home in the city.

Norcross has already established it as a leader among cities in Georgia with its initiatives, including its decision to self-brand as a "welcoming community" and its police department's farsighted and humane efforts to engage with the immigrant community. But as this report has highlighted, immigrants in Norcross nevertheless face significant disadvantages. Further efforts to reach out to the immigrant population will benefit Norcross by further enhancing the business environment, allowing for greater population in civic life, increasing trust, and helping its immigrant residents build better lives for themselves. It is up to the city to work towards bridging the gap with its im-migrant population and establish itself as truly "welcoming."

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- Georgia Latino Alliance for Human Rights,
- Georgia Vietnamese American Chamber of Commerce
- Global Mall,
- Gwinnett Chamber,
- Gwinnett County Youth Project
- Indo-American Chamber of Georgia,
- Korean American Association of Greater Atlanta,
- Latin American Chamber of Commerce,
- Latino Caucus of the Democratic Party of Georgia
- HongKong SuperMarket,
- NDI Development,
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- 45 South Café,
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