

## MERIT

Students exhibiting high achievement in academics, community service, and extracurricular activities at Thomas County Middle School may participate in an accelerated academic program of study. Known as the MERIT program (**M**aximizing **E**ducation to **R**ealize **I**ntellectual **T**ransformation), the program consists of an academic team of students at each grade level in grades 5-8 and a series of advanced courses for students in grades 9-12. MERIT students receive advanced content and accelerated instruction in academic subjects with “Honors” classes for students in their identified area(s) of strength. MERIT offers ***the most comprehensive and flexible*** academic options for gifted and accelerated study in our area. The program allows MERIT students to enroll in accelerated classes and select up to four areas for advanced academic study while continuing to be part of the same exploratory or elective schedules as their peers who are not in the accelerated program.

The purpose of the MERIT program is to challenge students to achieve their maximum academic potential while providing a supportive learning environment for advanced study and recognition for outstanding academic achievement.

The MERIT teams offer students in grades 5-8 the option to take “Honors” level classes in their area(s) of identified strength. For example, there will be an accelerated class offered in mathematics for students who score at or above the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile in their grade in mathematics. This class is intended for students with a very strong interest in math or science who are interested in seeking admission to highly competitive science or engineering programs after high school. Students who enter this math track in fifth or sixth grade will be able to take two courses of college calculus before high school graduation. While this may not be a goal for every student, the path will be available for those who have the ability and interest to work at that level. MERIT students are encouraged to take at least two “Honors” level classes, but these placements depend upon the students’ area(s) of strength and interest.

Beginning in sixth grade, students will receive an academic course in Spanish each year, allowing students who begin the program by sixth grade to earn two full years of high school Spanish credit while still in middle school. Middle school MERIT students will have the opportunity to earn high school credits in English, math, foreign language, and science.

Middle school students who have taken Spanish classes during their exploratory blocks are able to continue their foreign language program on their academic teams in classes that are designed to meet them at their current level of proficiency.

Students on a MERIT team have exploratory classes with their grade level and have full access to all exploratory classes offered.

Students who wish to be designated a “MERIT student” must complete a minimum of 20 hours of community service per year, and they must participate in at least one academically oriented extra-curricular activity and two academic competitions per year.

To qualify for placement on a middle school MERIT team, the following criteria will be considered:

- Meet or exceed expectations on every section of the most recent Georgia CRCT
- Have no serious disciplinary referrals within the last year and/or no more than two minor referrals within the last year: a serious referral is one which resulted in a home suspension of three days or more
- Submit an application
- Provide a letter of support (Parent/Student Compact) signed by the parent and the student
- Gifted eligibility **OR** three of the following :
  - Achievement at or above the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile on the reading and math sections of the most recent ITBS
  - All A's or all A's and one B in core academic classes for the previous year
  - Achievement at or above the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile on the most recent CogAT or other test of mental ability
  - Exceed expectations in a minimum of three areas on the most recent Georgia CRCT

**To be considered a MERIT student at Thomas County Middle School:**

1. Must take academic classes designated as part the MERIT Program with at least one “Honors” class in an area of identified strength. MERIT students will be encouraged to take a minimum of two “Honors” courses, and they may take up to a full load of “Honors” classes based upon their achievement, interest, and motivation
2. Must take foreign language as a class each year beginning in sixth grade
3. Must complete 20 hours of community service each year
4. Must maintain an exemplary disciplinary record

**Middle school students wishing to be assigned to a MERIT team should complete an application and return it to the middle school or the Central Office.**