



2022-2023

# MERIT Handbook

Meaningful Educational Resources for the  
Intellectually Talented

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# Table of Contents

DEFINITION .....	3
DISTRICT MISSION .....	3
DISTRICT BELIEFS .....	3
GRADE 2: PREPARING FOR ACADEMICALLY GIFTED IDENTIFICATION.....	4
SC IDENTIFICATION of ACADEMIC GIFTED AND TALENTED STUDENTS .....	4
Screening and Referral.....	4
Assessment for Eligibility .....	5
Evaluation for Placement .....	5
Dimension considered for Eligibility .....	5
GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT MERIT .....	5
All Elementary Grades 3-4 & Grades 5-6 @ HGSES .....	6
GRADES 5 – 8 (YIS & YMS).....	8
General Characteristics of Gifted & Talented Students .....	9
Questions to Ask.....	10

## **DEFINITION**

(From SC State Board of Education Regulation No. R. 43-220)

Gifted and talented students are those who are identified in grades one through twelve as demonstrating high performance ability or potential in academic and/or artistic areas and therefore require an educational program beyond that normally provided by the general school program in order to achieve their potential.

Gifted and talented abilities for these regulations include

- (a) **Academic and Intellectual Ability:** Students who have the academic and/or intellectual potential to function at a high level in one or more academic areas.
- (b) **Visual and Performing Arts:** Students who have the artistic potential to function at a high performance level in one or more of the fine arts.

In York School District One, Academic Gifted and Talented students are served in grades 3-8 in the MERIT program. Artistic Gifted and Talented students in dance, drama, music and visual arts are served in grades 6-8 through the ST-ARTS program at Winthrop University.

## **DISTRICT MISSION**

Our mission is to cultivate a service-oriented community of learners who strive for personal growth and excellence as communicators, collaborators, creators, and critical thinkers.

## **DISTRICT BELIEFS**

- Learning is a life-long, ever-changing process for students and staff.
- Each child is unique and should have the opportunity to reach his/her full potential.
- A safe, orderly and nurturing environment is essential for learning.
- Education is a collaborative effort between schools and the community.
- Technology is a tool that should be leveraged to enhance the teaching and learning process.
- Teaching and learning should be relevant, individualized, and intentional to equip students for success.

The gifted and talented learn best in an instructional environment that encourages and nurtures inquiry, flexibility, critical and creative thinking.

## **GRADE 2: PREPARING FOR ACADEMICALLY GIFTED IDENTIFICATION**

### **BRAIN BOOSTERS**

The Brain Booster program developed by Spartanburg School District Seven is an instructional model designed to prepare students in grade 2 for academic gifted and talented identification. Lessons focus on thinking skills that enable students to demonstrate intellectual and academic strengths. Lesson responses indicate students who demonstrate speed of learning and transfer of knowledge.

The model began operation in the fall of 1995 as a way of supporting and strengthening student ability. In turn, the District is more readily able to identify, through the S.C. identification process, young children needing gifted and talented services. A Brain Booster teacher visits every 2<sup>nd</sup> grade classroom for a 30-minute lesson per week. Brain Booster lessons focus on two types of activities: (1) thinking skills lessons which are related to curriculum standards and standardized test performance and (2) more open-ended activities which should enable students to demonstrate intellectual and academics strengths outside of those measured on the standardized assessments.

The program was co-written by Mrs. Suzanne McDaniel, former district administrator and Director of Secondary Instruction and Mrs. Cindy Henderson, Director of Gifted and Talented Programs for Spartanburg School District Seven.

## **SC IDENTIFICATION of ACADEMIC GIFTED AND TALENTED STUDENTS**

The purposes of identification are:

1. to find students who display characteristics of the gifted and talented,
2. to assess the aptitudes, attributes, and behaviors of each student, and
3. to evaluate each student for the purpose of placement.

Identification is a multi-step process that consists of screening and referral, assessment of eligibility, and placement.

### **Screening and Referral**

1. Districts shall screen all students by reviewing census aptitude and achievement test scores.
2. Referrals from administrators, parents, teachers, and students must be accepted.
3. All students with the potential for eligibility after screening and all students with referrals must continue into the Assessment and Eligibility phase of the identification process.

Initial screening does not in itself guarantee placement.

## Assessment for Eligibility

No private testing will be accepted for eligibility, but those results may be considered for referral purposes.

## Evaluation for Placement

1. Automatic Eligibility for Placement in Grades 3-8: A composite score of 96<sup>th</sup> national age percentile or higher on a nationally normed aptitude or intelligence test.
2. Eligibility Through Criteria in Two of Three Dimensions:

## Dimension considered for Eligibility

### **Dimension A: Reasoning Ability**

Score at the 93<sup>rd</sup> age percentile or higher on verbal/linguistic, quantitative/mathematical, nonverbal, or composite on a nationally normed aptitude or intelligence test (e.g. OLSAT, TCS, CogAT, NNAT)

### **Dimension B: High Achievement in Reading and/or Mathematical Areas**

For placement in grades 3 and 4: a student must have a score at the 94<sup>th</sup> percentile or higher in reading and/or mathematical concepts and problem solving on a nationally normed achievement test.

For placement in grades 4 - 8: a student must score exemplary on reading and/or math on the South Carolina statewide assessment instrument (ACTAspire/SCReady). A required score within this performance level will be determined after the state standard setting procedures are completed for ACTAspire/SCReady.

### **Dimension C: Intellectual/Academic Performance**

For placement in grades 3-6: Performance Tasks Assessment

- primary verbal or nonverbal: 16 or higher for students entering grade 3; 18 or higher for students entering grade 4
- intermediate verbal: 16 or higher for students entering grade 5; 18 or higher for students entering grade 6
- intermediate nonverbal: 22 or higher for students entering grade 5; 25 or higher for students entering grade 6

Placement for rising 6<sup>th</sup> graders and above: Grade point average in academic areas 3.75 or higher on a 4.0 scale on the uniform grading scale.

## GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT MERIT

- Permission – Parent/Guardian’s permission to participate in the MERIT program must be granted in writing prior to admission to the program.
- Withdrawal – Parents may withdraw students from the program by submitting a written request. The student will be required to attend the program until the request is on file at the District Office with the Department for Gifted and Talented Programs. Students are also

withdrawn upon the recommendation of the Review Committee at the end of the probationary period.

- Re-Entry – Students who were in the program and have previously withdrawn may re-enter the following year upon request. Students who were dropped from the program due to behavioral offenses automatically re-enter on probation.
- Conferences – Parents are encouraged to meet with the GT teachers at mutually convenient times. Teachers also are available on district conference day.
- Parent Organization – A parent organization/resource group for the District GT Program will be put into place and updated annually through collaboration with School Improvement Council (SIC).
- Curriculum: Interdisciplinary Units are utilized within the MERIT classes. Resources include, but are not limited to, Mentoring Mathematical Minds, Engineering is Elementary, and William & Mary Units.

### All Elementary Grades 3-4

- Program Schedule – MERIT classes will begin the second week after school begins. The school days prior to this will be spent readjusting students to the school environment and providing MERIT teachers planning and preparation time. Students will be assigned a specific day to attend prior to this time.
- Probation – Students may be placed on probation by classroom or MERIT teachers. The reasons for probationary recommendations are:
  - Regular classroom performance inconsistent with the student's ability
  - Consistent or flagrant disruptive behavior
  - Poor school or MERIT attendance
  - Deficient skills or behind in work for grade level
  - Refusal to actively participate in program activities.

The probation is for one nine-week period that coincides with grading periods. A probation form should be completed and sent to the parent. Copies should go to appropriate teacher, program coordinator and principal. Students will continue to attend the program while on probation. At the end of this period the student will either be reinstated in the GT program if the problem has been solved; or if a problem continues, the student will be referred to a GT Evaluation and Placement Team. This committee will decide whether the student should be dropped from or reinstated in the academic GT program.

With the recognition of extreme inappropriate behavior, and the documentation of efforts to correct the misbehavior including a parent conference, the recommendation of immediate withdrawal can be made. This recommendation with the supporting data will be presented to the academic GT Review Committee which will make the final decision.

- Regular Class Requirements – Academic GT students who attend MERIT classes are to be held responsible for objectives and work covered during their absences. Student Progress Reports – Students will receive a hard copy of a MERIT report card at the end of the 9 weeks. This will be an evaluation of the student's work and study habits. Please review and let the MERIT teacher know of your questions.

- Attendance – Because the MERIT program requires students to miss regular class once a week, it is imperative that these students exhibit exemplary attendance in regular school. Probationary proceedings will be initiated by the regular program administration/teachers if in their opinion the student’s attendance is not consistent enough to justify an additional day out of the regular classroom for MERIT participation.
- Special Events – Because special events occur throughout the year that may be beneficial to the MERIT students, it will be the decision of the Director of the Gifted and Talented Programs and the school principal to determine participation.

Without prior approval, MERIT students are not permitted to choose to miss MERIT class in order to participate in special activities. Approval must be obtained at least two weeks prior to class meeting.

- Miscellaneous
  - Lunch – Students will eat lunch at a specifically scheduled time determined by the school principal.
  - Dress Code – Students will follow the dress code of their school
  - Field Trips - A day field trip for all MERIT students will be planned each year to enhance unit work. Parents will be notified at least one week prior to the trip. An overnight field trip is planned for 4<sup>th</sup> grade.
  - 4<sup>th</sup> grade students will attend an overnight field trip to Camp Thunderbird. This trip will be scheduled in the spring. Overnight trips are subject to School Board approval.
  - Homework – Generally, there will be no assigned homework from the MERIT teacher. Students may choose to work on some projects at home. In-class assignments are an integral part of the MERIT instructional programs; however, some units of study may require additional time at home.
  - Daily Schedule – Students will report to their respective homerooms to be counted for attendance on the day he/she attends MERIT. They should then report to the MERIT class for instruction.
  - Instructional minutes will be consistent with each program.

## GRADES 5 – 8 (HG-S, YIS & YMS)

- Program schedule – MERIT classes will begin the first day of school.
- Curriculum
  - The GT curriculum for grades 5-8 consists of a subject-oriented program of ELA, math, science and/or social studies. In grades 5-8, students will receive a grade in accordance with the district grading scale.
- Probation – Students may be placed on probation by classroom or MERIT teachers. The reasons for probationary recommendations are:
  - Regular classroom performance inconsistent with the student's ability
  - Consistent or flagrant disruptive behavior
  - Poor school attendance
  - Deficient skills
  - Refusal to actively participate

The probation is for a 4 ½ week period that coincides with grading periods. A probation form should be completed and sent to the parent. Copies should go to appropriate teacher, program coordinator and principal. Students will continue to attend the program while on probation. At the end of this probation period, the student will either be reinstated in the GT program if the problem has been solved; or if a problem continues, the student will be referred to the Evaluation/Placement Team. This committee will decide whether the student should be dropped from or reinstated in the academically GT program.

With the recognition of extreme inappropriate behavior, and the documentation of efforts to correct the misbehavior including a parent conference, the recommendation on immediate withdrawal can be made. This recommendation with the supporting data will be presented to the academic GT Evaluation/Placement Team which will make the final decision.

# General Characteristics of Gifted & Talented Students

## Cognitive or Affective Characteristics

Learns rapidly and easily; retains extraordinary quantity of information when interested.

High levels of verbal ability.

May be lopsided intellectually.

Average to poor in

- Arithmetic computations
- Spelling
- Handwriting

Capable of deep concentration and persistence when interested.

Above average reasoning ability.

Varied interest and curiosity.

Sense of humor.

High expectations of self and others.

Sensitive to world problems, moral issues.

Heightened self-awareness and emotional depth.

Early development of an inner locus of control.

Seeks intellectual peers.

## Possible Classroom Behaviors

Easily bored; impatient with others; exhibits off task behavior.

Dominates discussions with extra information and questions deemed negative by teachers and fellow students.

Exceptional abilities and interest in one subject area, with only average or below average performance in others.

Rejects or omits detail; considers linear tasks boring; makes numerous “careless errors” in homework assignments or lengthy tests.

Refuses to attend to assignments that are perceived as uninteresting or as unimportant “busy work”.

Questions others’ logic – including the teacher’s; frustrated with others’ lack of understanding.

Asks lots of questions, often not related to current topic; has difficulty staying focused on current task.

May be gentle or hostile; “class clown”; makes puns and sees the humor in abstract situations.

Perceived as highly critical; becomes discouraged from high levels of self-criticism.

Lack of understanding from peer group.

Feeling “different” or isolated; moody.

Difficulty conforming; rejection of external evaluation.

“Teacher’s shadow” at recess; enjoys older students and adults.

Adapted from Growing Up Gifted, by Barbara Clark

## Questions to Ask

Does the student:

- Ask a lot of questions?
- Show a lot of interest in progress?
- Have lots of information on many things?
- Want to know why or how something is so?
- Become unusually upset at injustices?
- Seems interested and concerned about social or political problems?
- Often has a better reason than you do for not doing what you want done?
- Refuse to drill on spelling, math facts, flash cards, or handwriting?
- Become impatient if work is not “perfect”?
- Seem to be a loner?
- Seem bored and often have nothing to do?
- Complete only part of an assignment or project and then take off in a new direction?
- Stick to a subject long after the class has gone on to other things?
- Seem restless, out of seat often?
- Daydream?
- Seem to understand easily?
- Like solving puzzles and problems?
- Love metaphors and abstract ideas?
- Have his or her own ideas about how something should be done? And stay with it?
- Talk a lot?
- Love debating issues?

**This student may be showing giftedness cognitively.**

Does the student:

- Show unusual ability in some area? maybe reading or math?
- Show fascination with one field of interest? and manage to include this interest in all discussion topics?
- Enjoy meeting or talking with experts in this field?
- Get math answers correct, but find it difficult to tell you how?
- Enjoy graphing everything? seem obsessed with probabilities?
- Invent new obscure systems and codes?

**This student may be showing giftedness academically.**

Does the student:

- Try to do things in different, unusual, imaginative ways?
- Have a really zany sense of humor?
- Enjoy new routines or spontaneous activities?
- Love variety and novelty?
- Create problems with no apparent solutions? And enjoy asking you to solve them?
- Love controversial and unusual questions?
- Have a vivid imagination?
- Seem never to proceed sequentially?

**This student may be showing giftedness creatively.**