



# Merit Academy Parent- Student Handbook

2023-24



## ***Welcome to Merit Academy***

*The concept of Merit Academy began with families and local community members, for families and the greater Ute Pass community. It started with conversations among families and area members about a different education choice, one that embraces a classical and content-rich approach, involves parents to a much greater level, and allows area experts to teach in their field through charter waivers. This school is the culmination of these conversations and efforts.*

*Merit Academy's unique academic model utilizes the Core Knowledge sequence, long recognized for its rich content and academic excellence. This classical school has five virtues, upon which our character and citizenship programs are founded: Valor, Responsibility, Perseverance, Goodness, and Friendship.*

*We recognize that parents must "choose in" to attend our school. With a highly qualified and well-trained staff, a knowledge-rich academic environment, and a commitment to character training, MA is a great place to be.*

*We realize that this is not possible without dedicated teachers and staff. You are essential to our success – and more importantly, to the success of our students and their families. You bring skills to use in training young minds that will become future leaders.*

*Welcome to Merit Academy!*

## CODE OF HONOR

Moral character is the cornerstone of our educational model. In order to properly reason and make the best decision, one must be able to discern what is good, beautiful, and true. Virtue requires a trained mind and a benevolent heart, uniting our ability to reason with our passions.

Our five virtues are the guiding principles used to foster character: valor, responsibility, perseverance, goodness, and friendship. Students, staff, parents, and volunteers are expected to conduct themselves honorably in word and deed, to live by the virtues, and to encourage others to do so.

**Valor:** *Valor is courage, strength, and bravery. It is the ability to stand for oneself and choose what is right and good, even when a different decision may lead to an easier path. I pledge to be courageous in choice and conduct, to display valor in pursuit of good, beauty, and truth.*

**Responsibility:** *Responsibility is a core tenet in a character of excellence. It guides students to take ownership of action and learning, to do what is difficult but right, even if the task is not theirs to complete. Responsibility links to deadlines, assignments, study, and civic mindedness. It prepares students for a world where self-discipline, accountability, and quality of work are not only expected, but required. I pledge to be responsible in conduct, academia, extra-curricular activities, relationships, and civic activity.*

**Perseverance:** *Perseverance encompasses grit, determination, and tenacity. It emboldens students to continue when it may be easier to quit or give in to unproductive habit. I pledge to practice perseverance in my goals, responsibilities, character, and choices for good, beauty, and truth.*

**Goodness:** *Goodness is kindness, beauty, and generosity. It is an exercise of compassion and integrity, even when unobserved. It is an excellence of quality, not only of character but of expression, works, and decisions. I pledge to pursue goodness and act accordingly to bring goodness to others.*

**Friendship:** *Friendship is the active cultivation of meaningful, trusting, and joyful relationships. It is beyond being friendly. Friends support one another to engage in what is good and right. A friendship encourages people to hope the best for each other, to promote spirits, and to foster happy hearts. Nourishing friendships empower human beings to thrive, even during challenging or discouraging times. I pledge to not only be friendly, but to be a true friend as is described herein.*

Merit Academy students, staff, and volunteers strive to be virtuous in conduct, to cultivate scholarship, and to practice civic responsibility. Merit Academy students, staff, and volunteers will not lie, cheat, or steal, and will discourage others from such actions.

The required parent/guardian and student agreements can be found with the registration packet.  
These must be signed and returned with the registration forms.

# PARENT LETTER OF COMMITMENT

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*All parents who enroll their children at Merit Academy will be expected to read and sign the following letter:*

We believe that by taking shared responsibility for learning, we can ensure that the children enrolled at Merit Academy will be successful learners and members of our community. By registering with Merit Academy, we are choosing into Merit's vision, mission, programs, rules, and expectations.

The Board of Directors, staff, parents and students pledge to work together to meet the Merit Academy's mission, which is to cultivate the minds and nurture the hearts with instruction in the principles of moral character and civic virtue, employing time honored foundations of classical education and Core Knowledge®.

Specifically, parents agree to:

- Ensure that their child(ren) are in school every day, except for illness or other legitimate reasons. Parents agree to make every attempt to schedule appointments after school whenever possible.
- Support the expected code of conduct: actions and consequences
- Ensure that their child(ren) come to school each day on time, properly dressed, and prepared to learn.
- Provide a regular time and quiet atmosphere for child(ren) to complete homework.
- Support learning at home providing opportunity to read every night.
- Assist their child(ren) with projects and attend student presentations and performances whenever possible.
- Attend parent-teacher conferences each year.
- Support the school's programs by volunteering when possible.
- Purchase the school supplies required by the teacher and agree to pay, on time, any fees associated with field trips, the before/after school program, or other fees \*. Parents unable to pay these fees should contact the Dean to discuss financial assistance.
- Support the intensive, deep, Core Knowledge curriculum of excellence by regularly asking their child(ren) about their activities at school.
- Discuss classroom concerns or conflicts with the teacher(s) before going to the Dean or an administrator.
- Support MA's policies, procedures, code of conduct, academic processes, and philosophy.

## **Parent Commitment:**

By signing this Letter of Commitment, I \_\_\_\_\_ (parent/guardian) acknowledge that my family is committing to MA and that MA is committing to my family. I understand that this is not a legally binding document for my family or MA, but does represent an understanding of and agreement to the information presented in the Parent Handbook.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please list the names and grades of all children you have enrolled at the school:

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\*If you qualify for free or reduced lunch per federal guidelines, your fees will be waived. \*\* Fees waived for deployed families, families with serious illness, or other exemptions through meeting with the Dean.

THIS HANDBOOK IS DESIGNED TO ACQUAINT YOU WITH MERIT ACADEMY AND PROVIDE YOU WITH INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR STUDENT'S ENROLLMENT HERE. THE HANDBOOK IS NOT ALL-INCLUSIVE BUT IS INTENDED TO PROVIDE YOU WITH A SUMMARY OF MANY OF OUR GUIDELINES.

THIS EDITION REPLACES ALL PREVIOUSLY ISSUED EDITIONS. IN ADDITION, THE NEED MAY ARISE TO CHANGE THE GUIDELINES DESCRIBED IN THIS HANDBOOK. MA THEREFORE RESERVES THE RIGHT TO INTERPRET THEM OR TO CHANGE THEM WITHOUT PRIOR NOTICE.

NO PARENT-STUDENT HANDBOOK CAN ANTICIPATE EVERY CIRCUMSTANCE OR QUESTION. AFTER READING THE HANDBOOK, IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS, PLEASE TALK WITH A MEMBER OF OUR ADMINISTRATIVE TEAM.

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# SCHOOL CONTACT INFORMATION

Kindergarten – 10<sup>TH</sup> Grade (adding Pre-K and 11<sup>th</sup> grades during year 3 until we are PK-12 in year 5)

## LOCATION

Merit Academy  
500 E. Kelley's Rd.  
Woodland Park, CO 80863

## PHONE

719-686-2274

## FRONT OFFICE HOURS

Monday – Friday: 7:40 AM – 3:45 PM

## SCHOOL HOURS

Grades K-10  
Monday – Friday: 7:55 AM - 3:25 PM

## WEBSITE

<https://merit.academy>

## UNIFORMS

See the Parent /Student handbook or FAQ page on the MA website

***Please note: For safety all parents and visitors to MA's building must enter through the front door and be processed through the security system.***

# PHILOSOPHY & GENERAL INFORMATION

## WHAT IS A CHARTER SCHOOL?

Merit Academy (MA), a tuition-free public school chartered by the Woodland Park School District. Charter schools were created in Colorado to offer parents the chance to create innovative schools and run them. They are public schools and receive the state Per Pupil Revenues (PPR) based on number of students served. Charter schools are tuition-free public schools. By law, they may not discriminate on the basis of race, socio-economic status, gender, or ability.

The charter stipulates authority and responsibilities given to the charter school's governing board, and as approved by Woodland Park School District (WPSD). Charter schools operate with autonomy while being held accountable for results. Students in charter schools take the same required academic tests (MAS and others) and School Performance Framework for each school are available on the Colorado Department of Education website. Periodically, typically during a renewal period, charter schools undergo an external evaluation. Additionally, charter schools are ultimately responsible to their consumers—the parents and students who choose to attend. A charter school must earn and keep its “customers”.

Public charter schools are mission-led schools with a specific emphasis. MA's emphasis includes the Core Knowledge curriculum, Singapore Math, and classical education along with STEM and hands-on activities. Emphasis on character education and citizenship and the integration into real life is a priority.

## A BIT OF HISTORY

MA was founded by a group of parents from the Ute Pass area who believed passionately in children's education. They consulted with leaders from successful charter schools along the Front Range. They believed that the Ute Pass area offered a unique opportunity for education with its rich natural beauty and deep pool of people resources. With a desire to serve our rural population, they created this unique school. Core Knowledge education was a natural fit to prepare students for success along the Front Range and in the wider world.

## VISION

*Students prepared for success in a free society, promoting civic responsibility and contributing their talents in a flourishing republic by pursuing beauty, truth, and good.*

## MISSION

*Merit Academy will cultivate the minds and nurture the hearts of K-12 youth in the Ute Pass/Woodland Park region with instruction in the principles of moral character and civic virtue, employing honored foundations of classical education and Core Knowledge®.*

## HONOR CODE

*“A Merit Academy student will not lie, cheat, steal nor tolerate such actions.”*

## **OUR COMMITMENT *and* STATEMENT OF COMPELLING INTERESTS**

Merit Academy recognizes that while there are other school models available in the Ute Pass area, we are committed to the moral character and civic virtue emphasis we have chosen. We will ensure academic excellence within our chosen framework. This model is not for everyone, but it is at the core of what we do.

The statements and purposes that follow here define the identity of Merit Academy. They inform the community of what we are about. They guide those who would enroll students in our school and those who would seek employment with us. They are central to our mission and activities. They will define and be the measures of our success.

Merit Academy has a compelling interest in maintaining the integrity of the school and its mission. This includes an insistence that persons associated with the school are committed to its educational principles and maintain lives that model strong moral character. This alignment is congruent with and complementary to the statements above that guide our work.

## **PRINCIPLES THAT GUIDE OUR SCHOOL**

**EDUCATION IS, FIRST OF ALL, A RESPONSIBILITY OF PARENTS.** We recognize that parents are education consumers and must choose the product and delivery method that they determine is best for their child and family. We operate as a business that respects that duty of parents.

**INTENSIVE ACADEMICS** through the use of the Core Knowledge sequence, Singapore Math, classical readings and other curriculum tools that challenge students is a priority. We will not waste our students' time with meaningless busywork or mediocre content. We will not be a warehouse of children or a mere babysitting service.

**KNOWLEDGE-RICH PEDAGOGY**, core knowledge sequence, classical liberal arts curriculum, and Socratic method are the means by which our mission is executed

**APPLIED LEARNING** provides hands-on experiences. In conjunction with Core Knowledge, students will connect to core subjects through activities that make learning come alive.

**CIVIL AIR PATROL (CAP)** curriculum provides aerospace education and STEM projects. Students learn and abide by military customs and courtesies, obtain rank and promotion and learn to lead other students. They participate in flight opportunities and aerospace events. CAP membership is not mandatory, but CAP classes and events are restricted to CAP members only.

**CHARACTER EDUCATION** for the development of the whole child will include many traits or Core Virtues, which are Valor, Responsibility, Friendship, Goodness, and Perseverance.

Merit Academy has a compelling interest in maintaining the integrity of the school and its mission. This includes an insistence that persons associated with it are committed to its educational principles and maintain lives that model strong moral character. This alignment is congruent with and complementary to the statements above that guides our work.

Merit Academy will be divided into a house system. Each house will include students from all grades, wherein the opportunity for unique experiences in multi-age integration will be created. The house system will permeate through the entire school.

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## **GENERAL PHILOSOPHY**

Merit Academy is a Colorado nonprofit educational organization founded on strong principles. It is of utmost importance to the proper functioning of MA that our parents and students be committed to these principles as described above. Children believe what we do more than what we say. We encourage personal commitment to strong moral character and participation in the educational process with individual loyalty to these guiding principles.

Merit Academy views each enrolled family as a member of the MA community. Each of us, no matter what our role, must represent our school well whether at the school, at school-sponsored activities elsewhere, or in our lives outside of school hours.

## **HOUSE SYSTEM**

Merit Academy's House System is designed to encourage peer-to-peer supports for each student through vertical groupings to achieve specific academic and student-life objectives. The system compliments the typical horizontal placements of school class, age, and grade level by creating integrated communities of students within the school. It increases opportunity for healthy student and adult relationships throughout the school and emphasizes character development and virtues. For instance, there is opportunity for older or advanced students to tutor or mentor younger students. This House System also provides a means for student governance, promoting meaningful leadership and civic experiences.

Students from K-12 will be grouped into one of five separate groups, known as Houses. In these groups, students will work together on civic and community projects, school-wide activities, house events, team building activities or outings, and inter-House competitions. Each house is named after one of our core virtues: Valor, Perseverance, Responsibility, Goodness, and Friendship.

Additionally, during Year 1, each House will develop its own traditions, customs, mascot, colors, and other historical House narratives. Each year, the House will also decide which civic projects they wish to fulfill and work together to outline the competitions (add or change) among all the Houses.

There is also an annual House Cup competition. This award is given to the House that earned the most points in diverse competitions regarding academic, athletic, leadership, character, and school-spirit excellence. For instance, each quarter, Houses earn points by having the most students on the Honor Roll (3.0 GPA or higher),

achieving the best cumulative attendance, having the least discipline referrals, having the best community service record, having the greatest academic growth rate, and other extraordinary achievements. There is also a House competition day, where students from different Houses will compete against each other in fun and entertaining activities. Points are also earned by student attendance at athletic events, song competitions, and other incentive opportunities brought forth by MA leadership team.

House staff members oversee each house. They guide students in their House activities and help run elections of House captains. They are a resource to students as they learn and develop their familiarity with and experience in governance and relationships through the House system.

In the spirit of our vision, mission, and philosophy, Merit Academy is also dedicated to character development embedded within our virtues and House System. The House System component of our school will practice government, collaboration, and discussion of the concepts of liberty and virtues. It is a forum for active, responsible members of our school to articulate and uphold our nation's founding principles, to support our community through volunteer efforts, and to explore together what it means to live a joyful life pursuing beauty, truth, and good. These virtues will be taught throughout the curriculum, throughout the year. There may be House projects designed specifically around these virtues, with students involved in the presentations of these works. For example, in History or Literature classes the scenarios and decisions of main characters may be explored in terms of connection to these virtues (what decision did they make? What virtue was that connected to? How might the end have been different?)

## GOVERNANCE

### SCHOOL GOVERNANCE

MA is governed by a board of parents and community leaders. The Board shall have full control and responsibility for the affairs and operation of Merit Academy and may exercise any and all corporate and school powers, subject only to the requirements of the Articles of Incorporation and the Bylaws. In general, the Board shall exercise its powers through:

- Establishing general policies for the school;
- Approving the school budget;
- Reviewing and approving school curriculum;
- Negotiating, reviewing and approving the charter agreement and other major contracts;
- Causing the preparation and delivery of such reports, applications for renewal or other documents as may be required to continue charter status or otherwise comply with law;
- Contracting with or retaining advisors, employees or agents;
- Hiring and overseeing Merit Academy's Headmaster, who may act as the Board's advisor, community and WPSD liaison, and chief action officer;
- Overseeing and reviewing implementation of the budget, agreements and policies governing the operation of the school;
- Ensuring programs, methods, instruction, models, policies, and processes are founded in and support the school's vision and mission;
- Hiring and termination of personnel, often with the Headmaster's recommendation;

The current Board of Directors will be appointed following transition from Founding Committee to a Board of Directors organized in accordance with the Bylaws. Brief Founding Committee bios are below:

- John Dill is a retired Lt. Colonel from the United States Army. He continues in leadership roles with the United States Armed Services as a civilian. He has served on local non-profit boards, responsible for budgets, policy generation, and policy implementation. He is a father of two children.
- Jason Ledlie is a licensed therapist in Woodland Park. He has previously served as an elected member of the board of trustees of a Title 1 school district. He served two consecutive terms totaling 8 years. Jason is a father to five children.
- Mary Sekowski is a real estate agent and local business owner. She is involved with many local nonprofits, with focus on youth or community health. Her experience is in finance and real estate. She has two children.
- Nicole Waggoner is an entrepreneur and successful local business owner with flourishing companies in Florida and Colorado. She is experienced in both the marketing and financial management of business. She is a mother of three children.

Merit Academy's Headmaster, Dr. Gwynne Pekron, is also a founder. As Headmaster, Dr. Pekron is the Board's primary employee and principal advisor. Dr. Pekron has been involved in education since 1998 when she was a counselor and coach at Woodland Park High School. In 2003, she earned her Ph.D. in Industrial/Organizational Psychology. She coached and consulted with project managers and teams across the country regarding leadership development, performance, change management, communication, mediation, organizational development, and team cohesion. From 2005-2020, she also prepared and taught graduate organizational psychology and leadership development courses, as well as chaired numerous organizational psychology dissertations.

Dr. Pekron has proven her tremendous commitment to educational excellence in the Ute pass area. Furthering her experience in education, Dr. Pekron sat on the 2012 WPSD task force to address district challenges and helped develop innovative approaches to resourcing local educational needs. She subsequently served as a WPSD Board of Education Director and later Board Vice President for 7.5 years before becoming a Merit Academy founder, Headmaster, and perhaps most importantly, parent as she is a mom to four Merit Academy students.

As Headmaster, Dr. Pekron is akin to an organization's CEO or Superintendent. The Headmaster suggests and implements policies; makes major decisions; ensures organizational vision, mission, curriculum, and purpose; oversees the Deans and other administrative personnel, and delegates operational work to employees. The Dean handles discipline and daily tasks, oversees curriculum implementation and staff evaluations. This person is thus usually onsite and accessible without appointments. Much of a Headmaster's time is spent off campus, advocating for the school, sharing the "brand" of the school, recruiting, meeting with donors and other leaders, and ensuring organizational health and future growth and stability. The Headmaster spends time assessing organizational morale, making various "course corrections" toward excellence, networking community relationships, and hiring staff. In short, the Headmaster focuses on the big picture facets of the



organization that ensure holding true to the school’s founding and foundation. Dr. Pekron brings to the Headmaster position a rare and deep foundational knowledge of Merit Academy and a rich experience in education and organizational psychology.

## **BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETINGS**

Board meetings are held the first Wednesday of the month, beginning at 6 PM. Meetings are open to the public and posted at the school and on our website. Work session meetings may be held on the third Wednesday of the month, beginning at 6 PM. Occasional Executive Sessions to discuss personnel matters, confidential student matters, various negotiations and the like are closed to the public, per CO law.

## **BOARD COMMITTEES**

A number of standing committees will be meet during the 2022-23 school year. Openings will be posted in the main office and on the website.

School Accountability Committee

Parent Teacher Committee

## **GOVERNING DOCUMENTS**

The Board is given direction through the vision and mission statements, through evaluation of the MA assessment trends, and through its established goals and philosophy. Additionally, the board implements the vision through establishment of policies and procedures for the administration, staff, and students.

All corporate documents (e.g. by-laws, articles of incorporation, Board policies) are in the school offices and are available for public review.

## **SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION**

The leadership team of Merit Academy will consist of the Board of Directors, Headmaster, and Deans (Principals): Upper School and Grammar School.

Implementation of day-to-day administrative operations of the school and policies established by the Board and holding true to the founding principles shall be the responsibility of the Headmaster, Deans and other Merit Academy leadership employees, faculty, staff, committees, agents or others identified by the Board. The Board is responsible for developing policies and performing consistent oversight of the organizational health and fidelity to mission. The Board oversees the mission, values, goals, and fiscal well-being of MA. The MA leadership, with the advice and consent of the Board, will be responsible for staffing, programing management, and decisions related to internal systems, so long as the affairs of the School are exercised under the Board’s ultimate jurisdiction.

# **PARENT INFORMATION**

## **PARENT COMMITMENT FORM**

Merit Academy is a choice-in school, with parents choosing the whole of the educational experience for their child. Parents are asked to agree to and sign the MA Parent Commitment form (sample at back of handbook)

when enrolling their student. This identifies parents' support of and cooperation with all MA policies and guidelines, especially in the areas of dress, discipline and academics. Parents should encourage students in all their academic endeavors and should give assistance when deemed necessary without doing the work for the child. Special attention should be given with support activities such as oral reading at home and math facts practice.

The responsibility for good behavior rests on the individual student and his/her parents. It is critical that parents assist the school in promoting, developing and maintaining good behavior from each child.

While the Parent Commitment form is not a legal requirement for enrollment at MA, we believe it identifies a moral commitment to MA's principles and direction and to its community.

## **PARENT CONTACT INFO**

Please make sure your address, phone and email information are current so that the school can easily keep you informed and contact you in case of an emergency. If you need to inform us of changes, please contact the main office.

## **PARENT / TEACHER COMMUNICATION**

Teachers will communicate with parents on a regular basis through classroom newsletters, Infinite Campus, Google Classroom, or individual emails. Look for classroom news in your child's folder or backpack every week. Information will also be posted on our website.

In addition, parents are encouraged to communicate with teachers frequently, through notes, emails, and personal visits. You may call our main number (719-686-2274) and leave a message for any teacher. The standard email address format is [FirstInitialLastName@merit.academy](mailto:FirstInitialLastName@merit.academy).

Parents are the primary educator with their student's education. We have full collaboration and open dialogue with parents and Merit staff. Your communication is welcomed as we assist your student in the learning process. Your participation is vital to your child's success.

## **CONFLICT RESOLUTION PROCESS**

MA asks that the following protocol for student concerns be followed:

Take the concerns to the supervising teacher first. Note: a parent may NOT approach another parent's student to address an issue. The teacher must be involved.

- If assistance is further needed, a parent/guardian may take the concerns to the appropriate Dean.
- A joint meeting may be scheduled.
- If resolution is not reached, parent may take the problem to the Headmaster.
- If a resolution is still not reached, the parent may bring the problem to the Merit Board.
- Issues that are not resolved may be taken to MA's authorizer.

The staff and Board of Merit Academy are committed to this process and will remind parents or other individuals who try to circumvent the steps listed above.

## **PTO – PARENTS AND TEACHER ORGANIZATION**

The purpose of MA's PTO is to:

- Expand the community feeling among the parents and faculty

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- To promote working together and volunteerism for the education and general welfare of the students
- To give financial support to school projects chosen by the membership, in cooperation with the officers, teachers, and committees
- To be an advocate for the school's mission, vision, and goals

Examples include raising funds for playground equipment, hosting a teacher appreciation potluck, assisting with Field Day festivities.

## **PARENT VOLUNTEERS**

Parent volunteers are appreciated at MA. While volunteer hours are not a requirement for your child's enrollment, assistance in the classroom and in the office can help the school stretch its finances just a bit farther. Speak to your child's classroom teacher, to the office manager, or to the PTO president if you wish to volunteer.

# **GENERAL INFORMATION**

*For the most up-to-date information, see the Merit Academy website at <https://merit.academy>*

## **SCHOOL HOURS**

Grades K-10                      Class Times: Monday – Friday: 7:55 AM – 3:25 PM

Classrooms are open 10-15 minutes before and after school. If your student needs extra help, please contact and schedule it with the appropriate teacher at least 24 hours in advance when possible.

## **ATTENDANCE PROCEDURES**

If your student will be absent from school, please call the office and leave a message for the attendance clerk. If you do not inform us of an excused absence, we will mark your student "unexcused." This in turn means that schoolwork cannot be made up for credit. (Further information in the Academic Section on make-up work.) You can check on your student's attendance information through the Infinite Campus portal.

## **HEARING AND VISION SCREENING**

MA will conduct hearing and vision screen each year in the fall. If abnormalities are noticed, the school nurse will conduct a second screening and parents/guardians will be notified.

## **ILLNESS AT SCHOOL**

MA employs a part-time School Nurse and a full-time Health Aide, whom the nurse supervises. Basic first aid is available if needed. All medications must be left with the Health Aide or front office's trained workers by a responsible parent or guardian. The school will administer medications that need to be taken during school hours. Children may not carry medication to or from school.

If a child becomes ill at school, a parent will be called to come and pick the student up. If a parent cannot be reached, the school may call 911 for transportation to the nearest medical facility. If the illness is mild, the child may rest in the health room and be returned to class later.

Please do not send your student to school if any of the following is present:

- A temperature of over 100.4 degrees F or higher, with no other symptoms present, prior to fever-reducing medications being taken. The student's temperature must be normal for 24 hours without the aid of fever-reducing medications (such as Tylenol) before returning to school.
- Abnormal color or abnormal consistency of nasal or eye discharge.
- Persistent, uncontrolled cough or unusual cough.
- Vomiting or diarrhea in the last 24 hours with other symptoms. Symptoms must be resolved for 24 hours before a student may return to school.
- If antibiotics are prescribed for an illness, the student must have been taking them for 24 hours before the student may return to school.
- Undiagnosed skin rashes and/or open lesions

If your child is suspected to have pink eye, head lice, or other highly contagious concerns, parents will be called to pick up their child from school.

## **TARDIES**

Students are to be in line to meet their teachers at the above start times, ready to begin "Bellwork". A student who is 5 minutes late each day loses over 15 hours of instructional time each year. Teachers will not allow the student to make up the "Bellwork" at another time. Exceptions may be made for late bus arrivals, which are beyond the control of the families or school.

Additionally, if your student is late you will be required to sign your student in at the front desk before they may go to class. Parents of habitually tardy students will receive a call from the Dean of School to resolve this situation.

## **CALENDAR**

Our annual school calendar can be found at: <https://www.merit.academy/calendar>

## **SNOW DAYS**

For the most part, MA observes the same snow days as WPSD. Please check local news sources and the MA website early in the morning. Snow days may be listed as remote learning days and will be communicated by the teachers.

## **EMERGENCY SCHOOL CLOSURE**

In case of loss of utilities or other safety emergency, parents will be called to pick up students. Please be sure to keep your emergency contact information current with our Main Office.

## **DRESS CODE / UNIFORMS**

See the Uniform page on our website and the "Student Discipline and Code of Conduct" section in this handbook. Basic uniform code: Polos, oxfords, or Merit hoodie shirts with khaki, slacks, longer shorts, skirts, or dark, uniform jeans.

## **BUS / TRANSPORTATION**

MA does not offer bus service. Occasionally, bus service may be chartered for a field trip. Costs will be divided among students attending as part of the field trip fee.

## **CARPOOL / TRAFFIC SAFETY**

The building is open for drop-off at 15 minutes prior to school start. Pick-up must be completed within 15 minutes of the end of school activities.

Please note the low speed-limit and traffic directions during carpool drop-off and pick-up. Directions on specifics of drop-off and pick-up will be provided to parents over the summer. Staff will be present to assist students as needed.

## **PARKING**

Unless otherwise marked, all parking spaces are available on a first-come, first-served basis. Park your vehicle at your own risk. MA will not be responsible for theft or damage to any vehicle parked on or near MA property. MA will not be responsible for personal property left in vehicles that is lost, damaged, stolen, or destroyed.

## **TRAFFIC RULES**

Observe all posted traffic signs in the neighborhood in which MA is located. Be familiar with and observe requested traffic patterns during carpool times. Extra caution is needed for small students and their quick movements.

MA is not responsible for loss or damage to vehicles or for personal injuries occurring on the premises resulting from negligence or noncompliance with posted requirements.

## **EARLY RELEASE**

Please do not come to the office seeking to pick your child up just prior to carpool. This is a busy time for the office staff, and they will decline to go retrieve students during the hour prior to student release unless you have proof of a planned medical or similar appointment .

## **INCLEMENT WEATHER RELEASE**

- If weather is 20 degrees or less (with chill factor), students will be released from indoors.
- Form carpool line as with normal pick up. Please allow extra time (15-20 minutes) compared to our normal carpool procedures.
- We will provide parents with weather release pick-up guidelines.
- Please do not come to the office asking staff to get your children from their classes.

## **STUDENTS WHO WISH TO WALK HOME**

Due to safety concerns, please do not instruct your student to walk home without notifying the school in writing. We are responsible for turning them back over to you and will not allow them to walk away from the premises without your prior consent or our notification of the authorities. Please fill out and return the permission slip available from the office.

## **HAVING SOMEONE ELSE PICK UP YOUR STUDENT**

Due to safety concerns, only approved persons may pick up students. If you wish to have a friend, relative, or other MA parent pick up your child, arrangements must be made in advance with our office.

## **LUNCHES**

Per the passing of Proposition FF in 2022, MA offers breakfast and lunch to our students, at no cost to families. Students may be charged for additional “add ons” purchased with the Upper School lunches. These will be charged to your account on Infinite Campus.

## **RECESSES**

Kindergarten through Fourth Grade students will be given a morning and an afternoon recess by their teachers. These are not scheduled exactly, but may be determined by the teacher and what activities are being accomplished.

Fifth and Sixth Grade students should have at least one recess during the day. Upper School will all have recess in association with their lunch time.

Please be sure your student wears a warm coat on cold days – recess and outdoor carpool happen as long as the temperature and wind chill factor are 20 degrees or above.

## **CELL PHONE & ELECTRONICS USE**

The Board of Directors of MA acknowledges that parents may wish to be able to get in touch with their child at pick up time or in case of an emergency. Students may bring cell phones or other types of electronic communication devices for emergency or after school purposes. Phones (or other electronic devices) must be kept in their locker during school hours.

They may not be used in the classroom or during lunch or recess without the permission of the teacher. Upon the first offense, the phones (or other electronic devices) will be returned to the student at the end of the day. The subsequent offenses will require parents to pick up the phone (or other electronic device) at a later time. Students may not text message, chat, play games, or communicate via electronic means, or take photos of other students during school hours.

Violations will be handled in accordance to the discipline matrix.

## **SCHOOL-TO-HOME COMMUNICATION**

MA’s teachers post assignments and announcements in the Infinite Campus information system. Please check for this info each week. If you are unsure of how to access your parent portal, please contact our front office for instruction: 719 686 2274.

We provide weekly email updates. If you do not have access to email, contact the front office to receive regular print versions.. If you do not receive it, contact our office to place your email on the LISTSERVE.

## **WEB-BASED GRADE INFORMATION**

*Infinite Campus*, our web-based grade book program is accessible for parents & guardians with a password obtained through the front office. Students may access their own information as well. Please have your student walk you through his/her grades regularly.

Teachers post attendance (current as soon as attendance is taken in the classroom), assignments, homework information, and grades for assignments completed. MA asks teachers to post this information within 3-7 days of the assignment, with extra time allowed for grading major projects or large writing assignments.

Please contact our Infinite Campus administrator to receive a login for the program at [kwhite@merit.academy](mailto:kwhite@merit.academy). There is also a phone app version.

## **PARENT VISITS AND CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS**

We know that sometimes parents would like to visit or observe their student's classroom. Please arrange that with the front office and with the classroom teacher.

For security, all visitors must wear a badge, provided after information is submitted to our security Raptor system. We reserve the right to delay your visit if the teacher has plans that are not conducive to visitors (such as testing) or if other parents are slated for that day / time.

## **FIELD TRIPS**

Field trips occur several times throughout the year. There may be some cost involved, to be shared by students. Parents will receive at least 2 weeks' notice of activities. A signed permission slip will be required. Students on Free and Reduced Lunch status will attend without charge based on that status.

## **SPORTS AND EXTRA CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES**

Fees are charged for participation in sports teams, and may be charged for extra-curricular activities. This varies by sport, and information will be available at the beginning of each season. Students who qualify through the free or reduced lunch form will have these fees waived. Students participating in school or district athletics or extra-curricular activities will be able to make up assignments/tests due to games or competitions. It is the student's responsibility to discuss and plan said make-ups with the teacher prior to missing class for these events.

## **BAD CHECK FEES**

Parents whose checks returned by our bank, as "not sufficient funds" will be charged a \$35.00 NSF fee. No further checks may be written to the school until the matter is cleared up.

A second bad check will require that all financial matters are handled in cash for the rest of the school year. This includes field trip fees and activities.

## **REPLACING LOST TEXTBOOKS OR MATERIALS**

Textbooks are signed out to each student by name and book number. Your student is responsible to keep a book cover on the book at all times and to return it in good condition. Teachers will explain to students how to

cover books using paper bags or other sturdy paper. Covers need not be purchased. Replacement costs for books can be obtained through the purchasing office.

For information on replacement costs of computers, see below.

## **FUND-RAISING**

MA does a few fund-raising school-wide projects per year, less than one per quarter. We encourage your support in these efforts and do our best to choose projects that pay high levels of profitability to the school.

While there are many worthwhile causes, fund-raising for outside events is not permitted at school.

**Thank you for your support!**

## **MIDDLE SCHOOL & HIGH SCHOOL LOCKERS AND BACKPACKS**

Lockers are available for all students. Lockers must be kept clean. Pictures may be posted, but lockers must be in good condition for the next user at the end of the year. Stickers or hard-to-clean off tapes/glues are not allowed. Fines may be charged to repair damages.

Upper School students will have locks on their lockers. School staff will have master keys to all locks, and contents will be monitored through random searches. Occasional random checks may also be made of student's backpacks to ensure safety of entire school population. Contraband will be seized and not returned.

## **PETS AT SCHOOL**

For the safety of students and staff, no personal pets (dogs, cats, birds, reptiles, rodents, etc.) are allowed inside the building or on school grounds. If you use a service animal, please check in at the front office.

## **LOST AND FOUND**

Lost and found is kept near the front office. Please check periodically for any items you might be missing. Items left more than one month will be donated to a local charity or to our Sharing closet. (We recommend you label your student's sweaters, jackets, and other items.)

## **PROHIBITED ITEMS**

While we are teaching our students high levels of honesty and integrity, it is unwise to put temptation in the path of someone. Do not bring electronic devices or other valuable items to school unless they are part of an academic project. Large sums of money should be left at home as well. MA will not be held responsible for loss, damage, or theft. Prohibited items may be seized and not returned.

State law prohibits the use of any tobacco products (cigars, cigarettes, e-cigarettes, vaping, chew, etc.) on school property. Students who bring such things to school will be subject to discipline, up to and including suspension. Possession or use of drugs, whether over-the-counter, prescription, or illegal is prohibited and will lead to suspension or expulsion. Medication is to be kept and administered by the main office.

Possession or use of alcohol is prohibited and will lead to suspension or expulsion.



Weapons or any item that might be construed as a weapon is prohibited and will lead to suspension or expulsion.

## **COMPUTER/INTERNET USE POLICY**

The smooth operation of computers, networks and the internet depends on users agreeing to and adhering to standards of proper conduct. These guidelines are necessary for the efficient, ethical, and legal utilization of all computer resources. If a MA user violates any guidelines, he/she will be held responsible for the violation and could face disciplinary action and/or lose access to computer, network and internet resources. The use of computer, network, and internet resources is a privilege not a right.

Students and parents will be required to sign a "User Agreement" when enrolled in programs that require computer access. Be advised that internet safety firewalls are in place at the school.

## **LIBRARY**

Books may be checked out for two weeks. If returned late, cost is \$.10 per day. Fines and replacement costs will be charged if books are unreturned, or damaged. No additional books may be checked out until fines are paid.

## **CHILD PROTECTION AND SAFETY POLICY**

MA staff, volunteer and charter workers are placed in a position of trust, therefore, must act with the highest standards of moral conduct. MA is committed to the safety of children under its care. Fingerprinting and background checks on MA and charter staff are conducted through the Colorado Bureau of Investigation.

Law prohibits inappropriate interaction with students. MA requires that its staff, volunteers, and charter workers follow the following guidelines as well:

- Staff may not transport students other than their own, or those with whom they have carpool agreements.
- Windows in classroom doors are not to be blocked out, except in the case of lockdown drills or similar emergencies.
- Staff and volunteers are encouraged not to meet privately with students unless another adult is nearby or present.
- All field trips will be conducted with multiple adult chaperones present at all times.
- Staff should use good judgment to avoid situations that might be questionable or leave room for accusations of misconduct.

Complaints or concerns are to be reported immediately to the Dean who will investigate and document the allegations. Under state law, this is a mandatory reporting situation. Law enforcement will be called. The Dean will maintain records of all complaints.

Annual training for prevention of child molestation will be conducted during the review of the Staff Handbook at the beginning of the year. Signed acknowledgement of staff handbook page constitutes knowledge of this policy.

If complaints of child abuse arise, staff will contact the school counselor and the appropriate Dean or Director of Student Behavior and Discipline, who will report it to the county Department of Human Services or law enforcement. All our staff are mandatory reporters.

## **ATHLETIC PROGRAMS**

MA CHSAA athletics programs will begin and grow as the school also grows. For the first two years as a charter school, athletes will need to participate on WPHS/WPMS athletic teams, until we have CHSAA approval as an established school.

Athletic clubs will dependent on student interest, sponsorship, and availability include but are not limited to:

Cross Country/Track

Rugby

Shooting Club

Basketball Team

Volleyball Team

Swim Team

Participation in athletics will require maintaining at least a C average in all academic classes and have no behavior referrals. Students will be required to obtain a weekly sign-off from all their teachers.

Beginning of the year information meetings, tournaments, and fundraisers will be scheduled. Check the MA website for news after August 1. Be watching for announcements about VIP guest speakers.

## **AFTER SCHOOL CLUBS**

MA offers a number of after school enhancements for Merit Academy students, such as Student Government, Yearbook, Landsharks, basketball and other athletic clinics, creative writing, and more. These will not all be ready on opening day, but as the school develops and as we continue to train sponsors/coaches, these programs will continue to grow in offerings. Check the bulletin for more information.

# **ACADEMIC INFORMATION**

## **INSTRUCTIONAL GOALS**

Core Knowledge is the foundation of our academic program. It is a content-rich body of knowledge. We use “real books,” project-based learning, and group activities to carry out that learning. curriculum is based on the Core Knowledge Sequence for grades K-8 (which can be purchased on the Core Knowledge website <http://www.coreknowledge.org>). Portions of it can be found in the book series *What Your 1st Grader Needs to Know*, *What Your 2nd Grader Needs to Know*, etc. It establishes the “master plan” for content to be explored at each grade level. Resources are obtained from many varied sources. The 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade classical honors program builds upon the Core Knowledge Sequence with intensive academics and promotion of the Thinking Framework.

In Reading and in Math, homogeneous groupings of students will be utilized. Students will learn, beginning at their ability level, in groups across grade levels. Periodic assessment will allow students to move to higher or lower groups as needed.

MA's staff is trained in differentiating instruction. Assignments to enrich the gifted and talented student or to strengthen students are a part of the classroom experience. Our NWEA Measure of Academic Progress is an electronic testing system that aids us in determining students' needs and projected growth.

## **KNOWLEDGE**

Merit Academy has selected the Core Knowledge Foundation's Curriculum Sequence as the framework of its curriculum. The Core Knowledge is distinguished by planned progressions of specific knowledge in history, geography, mathematics, science, language arts, and fine arts. The high school classical honors program includes US History; biology, college composition & literature; algebra I, geometry, algebra II and college algebra; college-credit core courses. Our students also have the option to take courses in foreign language, Latin, physical education, band, choir, computer technology, and woodworking, welding and other electives.

Children learn by building on what they already know. Thus, it is important for them to begin building foundations of knowledge in the early grades when they are most receptive to attaining an organized body of knowledge. Children are by instinct driven to construct a contextual view of the world. Thus, it is important to provide them an educational framework that assists them in developing the constructs upon which their viewpoints will be based. Academic deficiencies in these areas in the first nine grades can permanently impair the quality of later schooling.

By specifying the knowledge that all children should share, all students can achieve equal access to that knowledge. At risk children especially suffer from low expectations, which often translate into watered-down curricula. In schools using the Core Knowledge Sequence, however, all children are exposed to a coherent core of challenging, interesting, interwoven knowledge. This knowledge not only provides a foundation for later learning but also defines a common heritage and establishes a common ground for communication and cooperation in a diverse society.

In addition to its specificity, the Core Knowledge curriculum is characterized by knowledge that is shared, solid, and sequenced. Literacy in every subject requires a set of mechanical skills and a shared background. The shared, many-cultured knowledge that promotes effective classroom learning also promotes cooperation and respect among students, both in the classroom and in society. Merit's teachers will be able to rely on that shared background knowledge about the students, which will enable them to build sequentially on that knowledge year by year. The ninth grade classical curriculum continues the goals of this curriculum with rich knowledge and skills that build on previous knowledge and prepares students for further high school study.

As used above we define knowledge not in the simplistic sense of mere facts but in the broader sense of the word, as follows: Knowledge consists of the facts, the relations between them, the thinking about them, and the effort to understand and connect them. It is not out of ignorance that we discover understanding. It is exactly because of what we already know that we can know more, that we can discern organizing principles, make and test hypotheses, and act rationally.

## **HOMEWORK**

Merit Academy is proud to have a challenging, deep curriculum. This is one of the many things that make Merit a great school. With such a rich and intensive curriculum, the students need time to work at home. We are aware that the student is involved with other interests and activities outside of school. The staff and administration will attempt to coordinate their schedules and calendars so the students are not inundated with work on the same day. It is understood that homework will be given and will vary depending on the work assigned on a given day, the students' organizational skills and study habits, and the nature of the assignments. Students are expected to learn how to use their free time effectively to complete the required work at each grade level. Parents are expected to support their children in this endeavor. Advanced classes may require additional homework time.

*Homework is the responsibility of the student.* It is not the parent's job to remind the student to do the homework. Young students may need help at first but encourage students to take initiative in doing homework shortly after school or after dinner. School planners and notes home for parent signatures are students' responsibility. Students should ask parents to sign paperwork, rather than parents carrying the responsibility to remember. A good prompt for an inexperienced student would be, "Do you have anything for me?" rather than the parent rummaging through the backpack or folder to find the item and then sign it. This will assist in promoting responsibility and capability.

## **HOMEWORK TURNED IN LATE**

Teachers explain to students at the beginning of the year what their policy is on homework turned in late (other than for excused illness). Consequences may include grade reduction, or loss of credit for the assignment. Repeat offenses may result in Detention. (See page 49 for more on Detention).

## **MAKE-UP WORK**

If a child is absent from school, it is the family's responsibility to contact the school office to request make-up work for the day(s) missed. Please call no later than 9:00 a.m. to request make-up work on the day of absence. You may pick up the make-up homework at the school office at the end of the school day or we can send it home with a sibling.

Students participating in school or district athletics or extra-curricular activities will be able to make up assignments/tests due to games or competitions. It is the student's responsibility to discuss and plan make-ups with the teacher prior to missing class for these events.

Assignments may also be posted on the Infinite Campus or Google Classroom portal.

## **READING AT HOME**

Students who are learning to read need time to re-read the stories and selections they have read at school during the day. This improves fluency and comprehension. All student should have 15-20 minutes reading time in the evening after school. Family reading time is a joy! Try a continued story or a cliffhanger to get your child hooked on reading. Read aloud while traveling or use audio books to help engage imagination and creativity.

## **REPORT CARDS AND MID-QUARTER PROGRESS REPORTS**

MA is on a semester calendar, with mid-quarter reports. Parent-Teacher conferences as scheduled on MA's yearlong calendar. Grades and assignment status are available in Infinite Campus to keep parents well informed about students' progress and give opportunity for improvement well before the quarter report and semester grades are posted. Please let us know if you need assistance with connecting to Infinite Campus.

## **PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES**

Parent-teacher conferences are held each quarter by scheduling an appointment with the teacher. **At least one parent from each family is highly encouraged to attend.** Both are welcome. Please bring your student to participate in the discussion. If you cannot be there during the requested time frame, another time may be scheduled with your teacher.

**MA welcomes the attendance of students at Parent-Teacher conferences as well.** This is an opportunity to complete the loop of conversation and ensure that all parties are hearing the same reports, affirmations, and concerns. Students' participation is encouraged.

## **GRADING SCALE**

MA uses the following grading scale.

A 94-100; A- 90-93.99;

B+ 87-89.99; B 84-86.99; B- 80-83.99;

C+ 77-79.99; C 74-76.99; C- 70-73.99;

D+ 67-69.99; D 64-66.99; D- 60-63.99;

F 59.99 and below

Although a 70% might appear to be passing at grade-level understanding, test scores under 70% will require additional work to be determined by the teacher. Projects might include correcting missed work, covering a weak area over again, or similar activities designed to ensure students do not continue in subject matter and create "gaps" in their learning.

## **ENHANCEMENT CLASSES**

MA offers "Enhancements" classes such as Art, PE, Music, Latin, and more for grades K-5. Middle school and high school electives include language (Latin, Spanish, German, French), Art, PE, Music, Computer Technology, Woodworking, Welding, Animal Range Science, Engineering, and much more.

## **ASSESSMENTS**

Merit Academy administers several tests, which currently includes the CMAS (Colorado Measure of Academic Success), the PSAT, and the SAT tests. MA will also provide the NWEA MAP (North West Evaluation Association Measure of Academic Progress) and DIBELS, both of which are nationally normed instruments that helps us track how our students are doing.

We encourage families to participate and assist the school in managing academic growth. We understand that a test is a snapshot in time, and just like a photo, sometimes we have a bad one. Taken together over several tests and years, we can tell how students (and our staff) are doing.

MA does not “teach to the test,” but seeks a clear understanding of growth. Students may do some practice activities in advance to prevent test-taking fear or misfires with our computers.

## **PRE-ARRANGED ABSENCES**

Occasionally family events or medical procedures necessitate a pre-arranged absence. Parents are encouraged to plan such times for regularly scheduled school vacation days when possible. Because our funding to provide educational services is based on student count, it is important that students are in school as much as possible through a 10 day window, centered around October 1.

A form must be filled out at the office, and parents may request homework three or more days in advance. Teachers may provide it if it is available. If it is not available in advance, work will be given upon return to school, with one school day allowed for each school day missed before work is due back to the teacher. Absences or work spanning the end of a quarter may not be counted after that quarter is closed out and report cards issued.

Students with more than four unexcused absences per month or 10 days per school year will be termed “habitually truant” under Colorado law.

Absences during CMAS Testing will not be excused except for illness. A doctor’s note may be required. Testing dates will be announced in the parent newsletter.

## **PLACEMENT, RETENTION AND PROMOTION**

Incoming students may be tested for placement. MA Administration and staff will decide on placement in math and reading groups, and on promotion and retention of students through the use of various assessment tools, some nationally standardized and some teacher-created.

Promotion to a higher-grade level is viewed and determined on two areas: academic performance and emotional and social readiness. Students who show decided and documented deficiencies in both areas will be considered for retention. Retention decisions will be based upon:

- Teacher documentation and anecdotal information
- Parent anecdotal information
- Developmental and achievement test scores.
- Consistently scoring 60% or less in assessment instruments (test, quizzes, CMAS, MAP, etc).

Retention concerns will be discussed beginning no later than third quarter by staff and with parents. MA reserves the right to determine final placement of any student. **“Social promotion” of students who have not completed/mastered academic work is not allowed.** We recognize the social and emotional pressures created by retention, but affirm the priority of academic success for each students’ future well-being.

### School of Logic (Grades 7-8)

It is our goal for parents, teachers, and students to work together during the year to insure students are developing responsible work habits and achieving at passing levels. We do not force a bell curve. A student with a failing year-end grade (F) in a core course (Math, English, History, or Science) may be required by the course instructor to remediate his/her grade by successfully completing a summer school packet prior to promotion to the next level course in the fall.

Students with a cumulative failing grade at year-end in any three or more classes (including specials and electives) will fail the grade and will not be promoted to the next grade.

Students receiving special education services will be considered on a case by case basis.

### School of Rhetoric - High School (9 –12)

Student must have a minimum amount of credits from the proper courses in order to be promoted to the next grade. To be promoted to a sophomore a student is required to have 6 credits, to be promoted as a junior a student is required to have 12 credits and to be considered a senior a student is required to have 18 credits. All students must meet the minimum credits required for each core content area as detailed in the high-school graduation requirements.

We do not force a bell curve. A failing grade is defined as an F in a subject. If a student fails the indicated class or classes, he or she may not have earned enough credit to move on to the next grade level at the end of the year, and will need to repeat any failed semester of a required course.

Course credit is awarded for all courses on a semester basis, whether the course is a semester or year-long course. Students earn 1/2 (.5) credits for each semester course completed with a 60% or higher. However, with a score less than 70%, students may be required to complete additional work to improve comprehension and knowledge base.

### **CONTROVERSIAL TOPICS**

From time to time, topics may arise in class or coursework that need to be approved or reviewed by parents ahead of time. Teachers will make every effort to inform parents so that they may discuss the material with the student. If a parent / guardian wishes to have a student opt out of that content, MA asks that he/she make the request in writing. An alternative assignment may be suggested by the parent that would satisfy our standards for that lesson. Please know that we believe the family is the primary educator of family values, religion, sexual topics, and political beliefs, among other controversial subjects. We will not incorporate content to take the place of these family lessons.

### **VIEWING OF MOVIES**

MA has approved no movies for viewing with stronger than a PG rating. Parents will be notified 24 hours in advance of scheduled viewing. Content must be pertinent to academic subjects and objectives and align with school standards in all other areas.

### **GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS**

The following chart shows comparisons of what Colorado universities currently require. If you go to college without the proper requirements already met, you will be required to take remedial courses, for which you will be billed by the college.

To receive a high school diploma from MA, student must:

1. Meet or exceed the state and school academic standards by completing the school's minimum course and credit requirements, **AND**
2. Complete an Individual Career and Academic Plan (ICAP),

3. Demonstrate College and Career Readiness through one of the following: a.) meet or exceed the cut score or criteria on a state-approved measure of College and Career Readiness in English and Math, OR b.) Complete the requirements and goals as listed on a student's Individual Education Plan (IEP), English Language Development Plan (ELDP), or Advanced Learning Plan (ALP), **AND**
4. In culmination of training and education, graduating seniors at Merit Academy will be required to design and orally defend a senior thesis. This defense will encompass the trivium of grammar (facts, research, and principles), logic, and rhetoric. Each senior will answer a question that transcends typical essay questions found in other courses. It may be a question that encourages thought and preparation of responsible citizenry, discussion of a core virtue, or promotes deep reflection (i.e. "Describe what a life of goodness means to you"). A satisfactory performance on the senior thesis will be required for graduation. Each thesis will be defended (presented with Q & A) in front of members of their House.

The required minimum number of credits for graduation are presented in the Career/Military Enlist Path for each subject. However, if students are considering attending a university or military academy, the recommended minimum number of courses is noted in the College/Academies path.

#### **ENGLISH**

- College/Academies Path: 4 Credits
- Career/Military Enlist Path: 4 Credits

*Includes but not limited to: Concurrent Enrollment English Courses, Literature & Composition I, II, III, IV (including AP), Mythology, Creative Writing & Others*

#### **MATH**

- College/Academies Path: 4 Credits
- Career/Military Enlist Path: 3 Credits

*Includes but not limited to: Concurrent Math Courses, Algebra 1, Algebra II, Geometry, Trigonometry, Pre-Calculus, Calculus, Statistics, Business Math, Accounting, Financial Literacy & More.*

#### **HISTORY**

- College/Academies Path: 4 Credits
- Career/Military Enlist Path: 4 Credits

*Required: US History: Founding & Foundations (1.0); US History: Confronting Critics & Challenges (1.0); World History: Through the Lens (1.0); Western Civilization (.5) & Civics (.5)  
Transfer-in credits will be reviewed to satisfy requirements.*

#### **SCIENCE**

- College/Academies Path: 4 Credits
- Career/Military Enlist Path: 3 Credits

*Includes but not limited to: Concurrent Enrollment Science Courses, Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Astronomy, Aerospace, Aeronautics, Genetics, Geology, Zoology, Integrated Science, Science Olympiad & More. (at least one lab science required, prefer two labs)*

#### **FINE ARTS/PERFORMING ARTS/INDUSTRIAL ARTS**



- College/Academies Path: 2 Credits
- Career/Military Enlist Path: 1 Credit  
*Includes but not limited to: Concurrent Enrollment Arts, Theater, Art, Performance, Choir, Band, Music Appreciation, Metals or Wood Works, & More.*

**LANGUAGES**

- College/Academies Path: 2 Credits Modern Language; 1 Credit Latin
- Career/Military Enlist Path: 2 Credits (1 must be Latin)  
*Students who passed Latin in both 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades with a C or better will have met the Latin requirement. Due to scheduling, Class of 2026 require .5 Latin instead of 1.0*

**Additional Requirements**

- .5 Senior Capstone/Rhetoric
- 1.0 PE or PE/Athletic Waiver
- Enhancements to Total a minimum of 24 Credits:

Civil Air Patrol, Forensics, PE, CTE, STEM, Internship, Additional Courses (may include concurrent enrollment courses)

**Individual Career and Academic Plan (ICAP)**

The ICAP program works with the student in developing a plan that prepares students for a successful life after high school. In terms of Merit Academy’s vision, it is a plan that works with students in planning for a successful life as responsible citizens, contributing their talents to a flourishing republic. According to CDE, ICAP has a strong, intentional connection with readiness for career and college.

**College and Career Readiness Demonstrations**

The Colorado State Board of Education has adopted state graduation guidelines that identify college and career readiness measures in English and Math. The Board has selected its own measures from these state graduation guidelines.

Students must complete at least one of the following measures and meet or exceed the measure’s corresponding cut score or criteria to demonstrate college and career readiness in each of the content areas: English and Math.

Measure (Assessment Tool)	English Cut Score/Criteria	Math Cut Score/Criteria
<b>Accuplacer</b> computerized test that assesses reading, writing, math and computer skills. The results of the assessment, in conjunction with a student’s academic background, goals and interests, are used by academic advisors to place students in a college courses that match their skill levels.	Score of at least 62 on Reading Comprehension	Score of at least 61 on Elementary Algebra

<p><b>ACT</b> national college admissions exam. It measures four subjects - English, reading, math and science. The highest possible score for each subject is 36.</p>	<p>Score of at least 18 on ACT English</p>	<p>Score of at least 19 on ACT Math</p>
<p><b>ACT WorkKeys</b> assessment that tests students' job skills in applied reading, writing, mathematics and 21st century skills. Scores are based on job profiles that help employers select, hire, train, develop and retain a high performance workforce. Students who score at the bronze level in applied mathematics, mapping and reading earn the ACT's National Career Readiness Certificate.</p>	<p>Score of at least 3 (Bronze level) on Locating Information and Reading for Information</p>	<p>Score of at least 3 (Bronze level) on Applied Mathematics</p>
<p><b>Advanced Placement (AP)</b> AP exams test students' ability to perform at a college level.</p>	<p>Scores range from 1 to 5 (highest).</p>	<p>Score of at least 2</p>
<p><b>Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB)</b> comprehensive test that helps determine students' eligibility and suitability for careers in the military. Students who score at least 31 are eligible for service (along with other standards that include physical condition and personal conduct). Students who take the ASVAB are not required to enlist.</p>	<p>Score of at least 31</p>	<p>Score of at least 31</p>
<p><b>SAT</b> college entrance exam that is accepted or required at nearly all four-year colleges and universities in the U.S. The</p>	<p>430 on Evidence-Based Reading and Writing</p>	<p>460 on Math</p>

current SAT includes sections on reading, writing and math. The highest possible score for each section is 800.		
<b>Concurrent enrollment course</b> courses that allow students to simultaneously earn high school and college credit. A passing grade is determined by School Board and higher education policy for concurrent enrollment. An eligible concurrent enrollment course is 1) the pre-requisite directly prior to a credit-bearing course or 2) a credit-bearing course. Grade of at least a C.	Grade of at least a C	Grade of at least a C
<b>Industry certificate</b> School approved industry certificates that demonstrate competency in an approved Career and Technical Education Program offered by the school.		

**MA capstone project**  
multifaceted body of work that serves as a culminating academic and intellectual experience for students. School team are developing Capstone criteria to be approved.

School Team developed criteria to be approved.

School Team developed criteria to be approved.

**Early Graduation and College Opportunity**

Merit Academy believes that most students benefit from four years of high school experience and are encouraged not to graduate early. However, in some cases, students are ready for postsecondary education or other opportunities at an earlier age, which is why MA will also partner with and offer concurrent or dual enrollment with Pikes Peak Community College or UCCS. This provides students the opportunity to earn both high school and college credit at the same time, saving parents from high college tuition and providing students a chance to earn college credit from the comforts of MA’s building.

Merit Academy may grant permission to students wishing to graduate early, provided the student has met Merit Academy graduation requirements in accordance with this policy.

## **CAP PROGRAMS & SQUADRON MEETING INFO**

Merit Academy students are not required to participate in CAP. MA believes that the CAP program offers a treasure trove of opportunities to our students so encourages and supports participation. Students in Civil Air Patrol meet during school, during which they learn about military history, aerospace and flight, cyber security, emergency rescue procedures, and other facets of CAP service. (For more information go to <https://www.gocivilairpatrol.com/> and click on “Programs.”) Parent involvement is encouraged. Parents can join as senior members and assist with managing various parts of the program.

## **CIVIL AIR PATROL UNIFORMS**

MA endeavors to provide one to two free CAP uniform for each student. These are used uniforms which have been donated and in good shape. This does not include boots, belts and hats (required). For smaller students, some tailoring may be needed. Parents are encouraged to purchase at least one additional uniform. Students are responsible for regular laundering of uniforms. For CAP grooming standards, refer to Code of Conduct section of this handbook.

## **PREPARING FOR POST-GRADUATION MILITARY OPPORTUNITIES**

Special events such as Military Academy Night and ASVAB (military entrance exam) Prep will be offered at various times to assist students in preparing for careers in the military. Students who are making good grades and advancing in CAP rank may be matched up with a mentor to assist them in their path for the future.

# **STUDENT INFORMATION**

## **PERMANENT RECORDS**

Report cards, assessment results, conference data and other information about our students are maintained in a secure file. This information is for internal use. If you wish information released to others we must have your written permission.

## **MEDICAL CONDITIONS**

Please inform us of any medical conditions that might affect your child’s performance or safety. Staff who will work with your student is notified of any concerns including severe allergies or acute conditions that would require an adjustment of classroom activities.

## **SHOT RECORDS & SCHEDULE**

Colorado Law does not allow us to enroll students who do not have up-to-date immunizations. The law does allow waivers to be signed. Please check with the front office or the Teller County Health Department for the most current requirements.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Information regarding student performance and family information is confidential. MA reserves the right to discuss your information internally with those who work with your student. Information and records will only be shared otherwise with your written permission.

The **Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)** allows the use of your child's name and or "directory information" to be used in publishing school events (such as in drama playbills, yearbooks, and honor roll listings). If you do not wish your child's information to be included, you must notify the office in writing by Sept. 1 or upon enrollment. Parents and students may review their records and may request changes or amendments to those records. Please contact the Dean for assistance with this.

## **STUDENTS WHO DRIVE**

Beginning in 2024, all students who wish to drive must display a parking permit on all vehicles driven to school. Student parking is allowed only in the designated area. Parking permits are \$40 and must be paid for. Permits will be issued at the front office once the permit request form is completed. If it becomes necessary for a student to drive another vehicle to school, the student must transfer the parking permit to the temporary vehicle and inform the front office of the new vehicle information (make, model, plate #). It is the student's responsibility to inform the front office if there is a change in status with their permanent vehicle, i.e. a change in vehicles, a change in license plates, or a change from a temporary tag to permanent plates.

School administrators may make other reasonable parking and driving regulations as deemed necessary. There is concern for the safety of our students that drive to and from school. Inappropriate driving can result in a loss of parking/driving privileges. Careless or reckless driving is prohibited and could result in school discipline. Students may park only in designated areas and between the white lines. Students should not park in visitor spaces, reserved spaces, and/or designated handicapped areas. Violators will be issued MA citations and will be required to move their vehicle to an appropriate parking space. If deemed necessary, Teller County Sheriff's Department will be called and a ticket may be given.

Consequences for normal parking/driving violations:

- 1st parking/driving offense will be a verbal warning and documented
- 2nd parking/driving offense will be parent contact by front office

\*Further offenses will result in additional administrative action. Excessive violations can result in termination of student driving/parking privileges.

These are baseline guides and may be increased by the administration based on extenuating circumstances, such as severity of the incident, damage resulting from the incident, and safety concerns for all parties involved.

Reporting of accidents on MA school grounds: It is the responsibility of the student to report any accidents that occur on school campus. Accidents should be reported to the school through the main office, Administration and/or front office, so that the proper authorities can be contacted. The role of the school in any accident is to ensure safety and the proper notification of authorities and exchange of necessary information. The school is not responsible for investigating accidents.

Student vehicles are subject to search in accordance with local laws.

The privilege of bringing a student-operated motor vehicle on to school premises is conditioned on consent by the student driver to allow search of the vehicle when there is reasonable suspicion that the search will yield evidence of contraband. Routine patrolling of student parking lots and inspection of the outside of student automobiles shall be permitted at all times. Students may not return to or hang out in cars during the school day.

Refusal by a student, parent/guardian, or owner of the vehicle to allow access to a motor vehicle on school premises at the time of a request to search the vehicle shall be cause for termination without further hearing or appeal of the privilege of bringing the vehicle onto school premises. In such cases, there will be no refund of the parking fees paid. Refusal to submit to search also may result in disciplinary action and notification of law enforcement officials.

## STUDENT DISCIPLINE & CODE OF CONDUCT

### PHILOSOPHY

The Founders and Board of Merit Academy have created our school with an emphasis on character education and development as contained in our mission statement:

*Merit Academy will cultivate the minds and nurture the hearts with instruction in the principles of moral character and civic virtue, employing time honored foundations of classical education and Core Knowledge®.*

### CHARACTER EDUCATION

Our character education for the development of the whole child will include many traits or Core Virtues. Our Core Virtues are Valor, Responsibility, Friendship, Goodness, and Perseverance.

These traits are taught, discussed, modeled, and practiced. We value them as the **over-arching standard of behavior** at our school and in our daily lives. When you choice in to Merit Academy, you and your student choice in to these virtues and our standards of conduct.

### STATEMENT OF COMPELLING INTERESTS

The Board of MA recognizes that an atmosphere conducive to learning and high achievement must be promoted at the classroom level and throughout the school. That environment should be safe, encouraging, challenging, and have minimal distractions. While learning does not have to take place in silence, disruptive behaviors harm the learning of others. Priority will be given to maintaining the learning environment for all students. *An individual student's behavior will not be allowed to dominate or disrupt the learning environment for others.* Misbehavior will not be ignored.

It is in the best interests of the school, its staff and student body to help students develop skills and behaviors necessary for healthy social interaction, both present and future. Students must learn how their decisions affect the quality of their lives and the lives of others.

MA recognizes that the most effective way to teach students character requires the cooperation and participation of parents/guardians. Cooperation and consistency between the school and home, between teachers, administrators and parents is important for students to truly value good behavior.

MA and its Board reserve the right to set its own policies for student and school-wide conduct, and to enact disciplinary strategies on an individual basis. Behavior on or off school property that is considered detrimental

to the school community, reputation, or safety may be cause for disciplinary action, up to and including referral for Expulsion.

## **STUDENT CONDUCT**

- **Merit Academy operates on an honor system—students are expected to be truthful, honest, and upright in their words and actions.**
- Students will show respect to adults at all times. An appropriate title (Mr., Mrs., Ms., Coach, etc.) and appropriate tone must be used when addressing an adult.
- Students will treat each other with respect, kindness, integrity, and compassion. Bullying, intimidation, slander, verbal or physical abuse, or harassment of another student will not be tolerated in any form.
- Inappropriate displays of affection between students are not permitted at any time, whether on campus or at Merit Academy sponsored events. As an academic institution, MA encourages students to build friendships as a foundation to successful future life. Statistics show that students who delay physical involvement experience a much lower rate of teen pregnancy, STD's, and the emotional complications associated with teen relationships.
- There will be no horseplay, running, or rough play during or between classes. Fighting in any form is not tolerated.
- Use of profanity, inappropriate slang, or vulgarisms in spoken or written (including electronic) form, or the use of offensive gestures, is not permitted at any time, whether on campus or at Merit Academy sponsored events.
- Appropriate lunchroom and playground behavior. Students must follow guidelines expressed by staff in the lunchroom and on the playground. No rough-housing play fighting is allowed. Students must play in a way that includes others and is thoughtful.
- This is a no cell phone campus. Cell phone use is not permitted on campus, including during passing periods, instruction, lunch, recess, and class time. Cell phones may be used before the beginning of the school day, after the conclusion of the school day, or when authorized by a faculty or administration member. Violations in the school's cell phone use policy will result in a student's cell phone being confiscated and held by the office for parent pick-up.
- The school facility and grounds will be kept clean and orderly, reflecting an attitude of gratitude stewardship.
- All medication to be taken during school hours shall be delivered to the front office with the student's name on the container and dosage instructions. The taking of this medicine shall be monitored by office personnel. No medication shall be retained in the student's possession.
- Tobacco products, illicit drugs, and/or alcohol are not permitted on campus or at any Merit Academy sponsor event under any circumstances.
- Weapons (including but not limited to replicas, paintball guns, slingshots, BB or pellet guns, knives, martial arts paraphernalia, tear gas, explosives, bows and arrows etc.) are not allowed on campus or at any Merit Academy sponsored event at any time unless part of a school sponsored marksmanship or archery event.
- The Board of MA wants a safe and secure learning environment. Harassment, repeated teasing, gestures, intimidation, threats, or other action, whether written or verbal, are cause for disciplinary actions, including suspension or expulsion. This includes school grounds and events, before and after school, and at school-sponsored activities. Aggressive or violent behavior that threatens another student's safety or security is not allowed. All MA staff and

students will treat one another with respect and kindness. If differences of opinion or disagreements arise, students and adults will work through them with calmness and kind expression. If an adult is needed to mediate, a teacher or an administrator is available to assist. Students found to be bullying will be placed on a behavioral charter for improvement.

- Involvement, association, or identification with an illegal gang or other group that advocates illegal activity is prohibited and cause for suspension or expulsion.
- Students found guilty of theft, cheating, or plagiarism may be suspended or expelled.
- Harassment concerning ethnicity, sexual or gender orientation, or religion are prohibited by State and Federal law. Suspension and/or expulsion may result.
- Jokes, innuendoes or comments of a sexual nature, whether made to staff or students of either gender are not permitted.

## **UNIFORM DRESS CODE**

The uniform dress code is an important part of the culture of MA. We acknowledge that this choice is not for everyone, but the MA Board believes there are comprehensive benefits to this policy.

- Uniforms set a tone for disciplined learning.
- Uniforms minimize socio-economic differences and place all students on a level playing field, giving them the opportunity to prove themselves through performance and demonstration of character.
- Research has shown that learning increases in schools that use uniforms.

Uniforms must be worn during school hours, including field trips, except under special circumstances or as announced.

While most classical academies require a strict code of oxford shirts, ties, and khaki's, the dress code for Merit Academy will be a "rocky mountain version" of uniform attire. Living in the mountains, it is important to embrace the local culture and trends, including jeans and hoodies. This means the uniform code will also include khakis or jeans (not ripped, stained, baggy or tight fitting), Merit or other local team/club hoodies (i.e. if a student plays football with WPHS or a club team, s/he can wear that hoodie or jersey the day of/before a game), polos (red, white, blue, black), or other Merit Academy apparel.



# Overall Uniform Guidelines

## UNIFORM/DRESS CODE GUIDELINES

**\*\* We expect cheerful, consistent commitment to the dress code policy from all students, parents, and staff. This is designed to promote our focus on academics and group solidarity. \*\***

UNDERCLOTHING Always worn, never seen

SOCKS/TIGHTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leggings may not be worn in place of slacks, but may be worn under skirts</li> <li>Black, White, Navy preferred, but bold/bright/patterned socks/tights are acceptable</li> <li>No unwholesome phrases/visuals</li> </ul>
TOPS/SHIRTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Polos must be long enough to be tucked, but do not need to be tucked. Oxford and dress shirts must be tucked in</li> <li>Solid colors (red, white, navy blue, black) (black is an option for School of Rhetoric students)</li> <li>Polo, oxford shirts; cardigans, turtle/mock turtle necks, sweater vests, sweaters (see Gap/Old Navy/Child's Place for uniform tops)</li> <li>Merit Academy hoodies</li> <li>Local club or team hoodies or polos for whom the Merit student participates are permitted on the day of/before (if on a weekend) an event</li> </ul>
PANTS/SHORTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Must fit the student (not overly tight, not overly baggy)</li> <li>Longer than fingertip length</li> <li>Khakis and slacks</li> <li>Solid colors (red, navy blue, black, khaki/tan)</li> <li>Jeans (darker color, black or solid color blue denims are acceptable)</li> <li>Not acceptable:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sweatpants/athletic wear (can be worn for PE)</li> <li>Leggings, unless worn under skirt, see socks/tights for guidelines</li> <li>No pants/shorts with holes, rips, frays, decorations</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
SKIRTS/SKORTS/DRESSES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hem must be longer than fingertip length</li> <li>Solid colors (red, navy blue, black, khaki/tan)</li> <li>Cartwheel/bike shorts, leggings, tights to be worn under shorter (fingertip length) skirts/dresses</li> <li>Dresses must be polo-type, uniform layered, or sweater dresses, except on special occasion. No strapless, spaghetti strap dresses. Must adhere to above guidelines, colors, etc.</li> <li>Skirts/dresses may also be Red/Navy plaid only from French Toast</li> </ul>
SHOES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No shoes with wheels</li> <li>No flipflops</li> <li>Snowboots permitted, but must be worn only when outside (recess, lunch, etc.) Please bring indoor shoes to wear during winter months</li> <li>Heels must be 2" or less</li> </ul>

***Clothing should fit the student but not be tight or overly form fitting (including dresses, skirts, shorts, pants, tops, etc). Crop tops, off the shoulder tops, spaghetti straps, see-through material, low cut tops or similar types of clothing are not permitted. Our goal is modesty: promoting attention on excellence of academics and conduct.***

For families who request assistance in paying for uniform clothing (no financial documentation needed), a scholarship fund for gift cards will be available so families can purchase uniforms without issue. Several families have already committed to donating to this fund. As we grow, we will also have a “clothes closet” where families may donate to other families like new uniform items that their students have outgrown or new uniform clothing that they simply want to donate.

## **GENERAL CAP UNIFORM GUIDELINES**

The CAP uniform is authorized and encouraged for wear at Merit Academy. Students in Civil Air Patrol wear ABUs/BDUs on IAW the squadron requirements. It is the student /family’s responsibility to see that all uniforms are laundered regularly. Students who are enrolled in the CAP squadron will follow all CAP rules, regulations, and guidelines for uniform wear.

## **DRESS CODE FOR SPECIAL DRESS DAYS**

From time to time, MA has special dress days such as “Western Wear Day,” “Hawaiian Shirt Day”, or special historical days coordinated with Core Knowledge learning, such as “Civil War Day”. The following general rules apply at those times, unless otherwise published by the Dean.

- Picture Days
- No sleeveless tops. Midriffs, halter tops, spaghetti straps, backless clothing, tube tops, tank tops, or camisoles may not be worn. No visible lingerie.
- Skirts must be longer than the fingertips
- No sheer, tight or low-cut clothing. No immodest or provocative clothing.

## **APPROPRIATE ATTIRE FOR SPECIAL EVENTS**

Students may be asked to wear dress shirts and ties for boys or dresses for girls in honor of special events. Those in Civil Air Patrol may be required to wear “dress” uniform. Particular dress for music concerts or plays may also be required. Please note – general rules for special days dress applies.

## **RULE OF THUMB**

Parents, have your students look in the mirror and ask, “Where is attention drawn first? If I bend over, will I be showing something inappropriate?” Please help prevent embarrassment for your student and for others.

## **VIOLATIONS**

Students who choose not to be in compliance with these guidelines will be sent home for a change of clothing. Administration reserves the right to make the final judgment call on all clothing selections for the day.

- Parent may be called to bring student appropriate clothing.
- Student will serve after school community service detention. Parent will be notified, and detention will be served the following day

## **CLOSED CAMPUS**

MA has a closed campus. Students are not allowed to leave unless accompanied by an approved adult. When Merit Academy has a full K-12 course offering, the Board reserves the right to open campus for Juniors and Seniors. Considerations for this privilege will be discipline referrals, academic standing, and character behavior.

## **PUBLIC DISPLAY OF AFFECTION**

Behavior that simulates or otherwise suggests sexual situations is not to be tolerated. Brief hugging normally associated with an amicable greeting is acceptable. Visible space must be maintained between bodies of students at all times throughout the school day and at school-sponsored events/activities.

## **TRUANCY**

Unexcused absence, or truancy, is cause for suspension. Repeated or prolonged truancy may be cause for expulsion from MA. This is especially so when MA has a wait list.

## **DETENTION**

When Detention is issued by the Director of Student Behavior and Discipline or the Dean, a form will be sent home for the parent's signature. That form is to be returned to the front office the next morning before school starts. If the form is not returned, parents will be called to come to the school to sign the form.

During detention, students may be required to pick up trash on the school grounds, sweep walks, write essays on character topics or other improving activities as designated by the Dean or their designated representative.

## **MISUSE OF SCHOOL EQUIPMENT**

Misuse of school equipment that causes damage will require its replacement by parent / guardians. Misuse of computers or internet may cause student to be prohibited from using such equipment for up to one year.

## **SUSPENSIONS**

A suspension of one to five days may be instituted for a behavior problem. Schoolwork is allowed to be made up for partial credit. A re-entry conference with student, parent, and administration is necessary before returning to class. The conference may also include others as administration deems necessary.

## **FORMAL DISCIPLINE PROCEEDINGS**

Suspensions can be assigned only by a school administrator. Prior to suspension, the student's parent will be notified, and a parent conference will be required before the student returns to school. Notice of suspension shall be given in writing. According to CRS 22-33-105 2a) and b), a student may not be suspended for time exceeding 25 school days during a single school year.

## **SUSPENSION AND EXPULSION LEVELS**

If the student exhibits inappropriate behavior or actions, the student may be placed on a formal discipline level. Level 1 is an indication that the student is exhibiting behavior or actions that are not acceptable. Level 2 indicates that the student is continuing with the inappropriate actions or behavior. Level 3 will result in expulsion from the school and the school district. Merit Academy reserves the right to place the student at any level at any point according to the severity of the offense.

Level 1 – Students will be placed on Level 1 after a major infraction or a series of minor infractions, depending on the severity of the incident(s). This will include a minimum of one (1) day and a maximum of ten (10) days of suspension. A student-discipline plan may be created during the conference between parent, student, and school administrator depending on the severity of the infraction(s). A parent-student-administrator

conference may be required before the student is re- admitted to the classroom. Depending on the severity of the infraction, the student may or may not be placed on Level 1 at this point.

Level 2 – Students will be placed on Level 2 after one or two major infractions following initial suspension, depending on severity of offense and/or as a result of the student’s violation of his or her discipline plan. Level 2 will include a minimum of two (2) days and a maximum of no more than ten (10) days total of suspension.

A required parent-student-administrator conference will be held before student is allowed to return to school. If a discipline plan already exists, it will be reviewed and revised. If a discipline plan has not been created as yet, one will be created for the student at this point. Depending on the severity of the infraction, the student may or may not be placed on Level 1 or 2 at this point.

Level 3 – Students will be placed on Level 3 (officially classified as a declaration of “habitually disruptive”) after one or two major infractions following a placement at Level 2, depending on severity of offense and/or as a result of the student’s violation of his or her discipline plan. Merit Academy may move toward expulsion proceedings. Prior to expulsion proceedings, a student may appeal the decision and obtain a hearing from the Board of Directors. In addition, “The board of education of each district may deny admission to, or expel for any period not extending beyond one year, any child whom the board of education, in accordance with the limitations imposed by this article, shall determine does not qualify for admission to, or continued attendance at, the public schools of the district.” (CRS 22-33-105 2c).

*According to law, habitually disruptive students may face expulsion hearing and/or may not be permitted to re-enroll the following year. A student may be declared habitually disruptive after being suspended three times (3) within one year on the grounds set forth in CRS 11-33- 106 for causing a material and substantial disruption in the classroom, on school grounds, in school vehicles, or at school activities or events because of behavior that was initiated, willful, and overt on the part of the student, and the suspensions were made for:*

- Continual, willful disobedience or open and persistent defiance of proper authority;
- Willful destruction or defacing of school property;
- Behavior on or off school property, which is detrimental to the welfare or safety of other students or school personnel;
- Serious violations in a school building or in or out of school property;
- Repeated interference with a school’s ability to provide educational opportunities to other students;
- And other grounds found in CRS22-33-106(1)(a),(b),(c),(d), and (e).

Expulsion from Merit Academy shall be immediate and mandatory for the following violations:

- Carrying, bringing, using, or possessing a dangerous weapon (including a firearm or firearm facsimile, any pellet, or BB gun or other device, operational or not, designed to propel projectiles by spring action or compressed air, fixed blade knife with a blade that measures longer than three (3) inches in length or a spring- loaded knife with a blade longer than three and one-half inches, any object, device, instrument, material, or substance, used or intended to be used to inflict death or serious bodily injury. Non-lethal devices related to this section may be authorized by school administration for legitimate school activities – such as theatrical productions, sports or other school-sanctioned activity – prior to possession on school grounds);
- The sale or possession of a drug or controlled substance;
- Death threats to other students, faculty, administration, or members of the Board

- The commission of an act, which if committed by an adult would be robbery, or assault other than third-degree assault.

## STUDENT PLACEMENT

### ENROLLMENT

All families in the region are invited to carefully review Merit Academy’s website, philosophy, parent handbook, and policies and thereafter enroll their children if the parents value the school’s vision, mission, practices, programs, and educational offering.

When there are vacancies, the enrollment process begins when a parent submits a signed Letter of Intent to Enroll to our office. Forms may be obtained from the office or from our website: <https://merit.academy>

*Enrollment requires full completion of the registration process. A seat offer is not a final confirmation of enrollment.*

*Merit Academy is a WPSD choice-in charter school and part of the UP BOCES special education services network.*

### LOTTERY

No more than twenty percent (20%) of students will be offered enrollment using the preferences listed below:

- Children of the members of the Founding Committee for Merit Academy. Committee Members are those who contributed substantially to the development of application documents, grants, research, outreach, or requirements to found the school and attended and contributed to at least 75% of the Founding Committee meetings before the transition to a Board of Directors in July, 2021.
- Children of full-time teachers and staff of the Charter School. Full time employees work at least 30 hours a week and are in that status at the time of the lottery.

After the first year, students in good standing who would like to continue their education at Merit Academy will be offered enrollment status. Their placement will be determined by promotion, retention, and/or acceleration policies. MA will ask parents to complete an Intent to Return before February 10 annually.

The following lottery enrollment procedure will be implemented in the following order of precedence.

1. Currently enrolled students
2. Founding parents’
3. Children of full-time staff
4. Siblings of currently enrolled students and/or students in our homeschool enrichment or Aerolab program.
5. Students in the lottery residing within the Woodland Park School District (WPSD) whose parent/guardian attended an information night.
6. Students in the lottery residing within the WPSD whose parent/guardian did not attend an information night.
7. Students in the lottery residing outside the WPSD whose parent/guardian attended an information night.
8. Students in the lottery residing outside the WPSD whose parent/guardian did not attend an information night.
9. All other students on the lottery list

## **Lottery Procedures**

If the MA applications received during the open enrollment period exceed the spaces available, students shall be selected by a random lottery, subject to the enrollment preferences described above. The Merit Academy Board of Directors and Headmaster will oversee this lottery process.

The lottery will occur on or before the third quarter each year. The lottery will contain the names taken from the Intent to Enroll forms received by the school prior to the close of business on February 20th and the names that have not been removed by request of the parent/guardian or as a result of a previous offer that was declined or a non-response to an offer. In accordance with the priority discussed above a lottery number for each child in each grade will be randomly assigned for the upcoming academic year only. The lottery will be conducted from the highest grade level with available spaces in descending order down to the Kindergarten spaces. As a name is drawn, all younger siblings of that child will be given priority for their grade levels.

Placement in programs is prescribed by the student's age as of October 1 for children entering Kindergarten or First grade. Invitations to enroll will first be extended to families assigned the highest lottery number. After all spaces for each grade level have been filled by the lottery, remaining students will be placed on a waitlist for openings that may arise in the upcoming school year. This lottery-generated waitlist will be maintained until the following year. Lottery numbers are valid for one (1) lottery cycle.

To participate in subsequent year's lottery, families must indicate that they want to be considered for that future lottery and must update their enrollment form by completing the appropriate paperwork prior to February 20th. The Merit Academy Board of Directors and Administration will review the current lottery process and reserves the right to change the lottery application process to better meet the needs of the school and community.

If a parent/guardian whose child is on the waitlist declines or does not respond to an enrollment offer within the designed timeframe (typically three business days) as posted in the seat invitation, they will be removed from the MA database and a new Intent to Enroll form must be submitted to be included in future lotteries.

## **KINDERGARTEN REQUIREMENTS**

Any child who is five years of age on or before October 1 is eligible to enter Kindergarten at MA.

"Readiness" tests may be given to determine if a student is ready for the academic nature of the MA program. It is usually advisable for students who are not truly ready for school to wait a year for enrollment. It is better to be the oldest student in the next class than to be the youngest, least mature student the present class.

The following are skills we recommend that parents work on in preparation for kindergarten:

- Know the alphabet, such as the ABC song or other
- Begin writing letters
- Able to write own name
- Count to 10
- Begin to write numbers
- Able to sit still

## **WAITING LIST**

MA maintains a waiting list by grade. As soon as openings become available, the next family on the list will be called. Families who decline to enroll their student at that time must resubmit their Letter of Intent to Enroll and move to the bottom of the waitlist.

## **CLASS PLACEMENT**

Class placement is at the discretion of the administration. Prior student assessments are required in the registration process and will be considered for placement. Students entering from homeschooling or other schools may be given a placement test to determine grade level.

# **OFFICE PROCEDURES**

## **PARENT VOLUNTEERS**

Parent volunteers must sign in and sign out at the office. An identifying badge must be worn. Confidentiality of all student and internal school matters must be maintained.

## **VISITORS**

Visitors must sign in and sign out using picture ID at the office. Tours may be scheduled in advance. Visitors unaccompanied by a staff member are not allowed.

## **CHANGE OF ADDRESS OR PHONE**

If you move, please notify our office of your new contact information as soon as possible. Our office must be able to contact you in case of emergency.

## **TRANSFER OR WITHDRAWAL**

You may fill out the withdrawal form at our office. All fees and/or fines must be paid and school materials returned. Permanent student records will be forwarded to the new school at your written request.

## **PERMANENT RECORDS**

Permanent student records are confidential and kept secure. Parents or guardians may request copies or transfer of records in writing. Records may not be withheld due to unpaid fines or fees.