



## GEORGIA LIGHTHOUSE SCHOOL TO WATCH MIDDLE SCHOOL—VISITOR'S GUIDE

### Riverside Middle School



#### Designated in: 2016

Riverside Middle School • Columbia County  
School System • Evans • GA • Yvette Foster,  
Principal •  
1095 Fury's Ferry Road  
Phone: (706)868-3712 Fax: (706)854-5824  
Website: <http://www.edline.net/pages/RiverMS>

### 2017-2018 School Statistics

**Community:** Surburban

**Grade Levels:** 6-8

**School Schedule:** Regular

**Student Demographics**

Hispanic: 5%

White: 71%

African American: 14%

Asian: 6%

American Indian: .1%

Multi-race: 4%

Male: 53%

Female: 47%

Free/Reduced Lunch: 13%

English Learners: .1%

Gifted: 19%

**2014 CCRPI SCORE: 89.3**

**2015 CCRPI SCORE: 84.8**

**2016 CCRPI SCORE: 86.0**

**2017 CCRPI SCORE: 87.2**

## School Characteristics and Replicable Practices

### Academic Excellence

Riverside Middle School promotes academic excellence through different grade levels, in different academic areas, and within interdisciplinary units. We participate in after school clubs as well as enrichment during the school day. Within our core classes, we offer a lot of opportunities for students to challenge their minds. Close to 40% of our students participate in gifted and advanced classes. Four of these classes allow students to earn high school credit as 8th graders. They can receive credit in Coordinated Algebra, Physical

Science, Honor's chorus, and High School Band. Students are required to take the same End of the Course tests which the high school students participate in. In addition to high school classes, students can participate in Gifted and Advanced in grades six through eight.

Another part of encouraging a student to challenge their mind is to have them participate in competitions within the school, county, and state. Our students can participate in Cyber Patriot competitions which they did this year. Students also participated in the county Spelling Bee as well as the Young Georgia Authors competition for writing. Our business classes participated in multiple classes across the state centered on business and public speaking. Chorus and Band placed in state and county performances with Superior rankings.

Outside of the normal school day, Riverside Middle School offers students an opportunity to enrich and grow. Our school currently participates in the Duke Talent search, Math Team, FBLA, Beta Club, Technology club and Images (writing and newspaper development). Students have opportunities to use their talents and gifts in ways which promote growth, learning, and most importantly fun.

As you can see, Riverside Middle takes great pride in offering our students an opportunity to challenge themselves to use their minds in an academic environment. We offer enrichment and remediation during our academic period as well as promoting academic excellence within the core classes. Students have opportunities after school and during their career connections in which they can focus on areas of academic strength and areas of interest to compete and grow. Riverside Middle School has a great tradition of academic excellence and we take pride in continuing it in the future.

## **Developmental Responsiveness**

Riverside Middle has developed what is called a "House System" that divides the entire population of the school which includes all staff into different houses. The purpose of each house is to guide and support the academic, social and the personal development of each student during their time at Riverside Middle. Students have the opportunity to mix with students in all grade levels as well as faculty and work individually as well as collaboratively for their assigned house. The House system encourages teamwork, friendship, cooperation,

leadership, and ethics, among many other positive qualities and opportunities. The faculty in each house are mentors for their assigned house and stay with the students throughout their time at Riverside Middle. Thus, encouraging and fostering a trusting relationship among the students and adults.

Administrators, Counselors, Nurses, and Teachers all work collaboratively at Riverside Middle to foster healthy physical, social, emotional and intellectual development. They are also required to attend trainings, workshops, and other continuing education to stay at the top of their specialty in order to provide students the best support possible at school. Teachers and Counselors work together as well as with parents to provide support for all students and meet their individual needs as well as identify and implement appropriate accommodations. Teacher/parent meetings are a staple at Riverside Middle as well as Parent Portals via internet to help foster timely communication between educators and parents.

Counselors and Teachers work directly with GCIS to educate students about possible careers as well as help them identify areas of interests through different surveys. Teachers encompass “real world” activities into their lessons and help students understand the correlation between the concept they are learning and how it applies to specific careers. STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) Day was created at Riverside Middle where students spent the day engaged with speakers in the local community work force related to the fields of Science, Technology, Engineering and Math as well as attended hands on workshops throughout the day to help enhance their knowledge of these careers. These workshops and speakers helped to draw a correlation between lessons they learn at school and how they can/will use those concepts in careers after graduation. All subjects were encompassed into STEM Day as well. Teachers collaborated together to pull in social studies and ELA into STEM Day in an effort to cross content boundaries.

Riverside Middle has a wide range of co-curricular activities including team sports, clubs, a student band and chorus that all serve to meet the wide variety of student’s interests. These activities also create a relationship among students while they are able to pursue interests that they enjoy. One of Riverside’s most beneficial qualities is the strong support of parents. Parents at Riverside play a vital role in supporting the school and students, and are always informed and included in decisions that are made on behalf of the

betterment of the school. Riverside views parents as partners in their children's education and always appreciates the strong support that they provide.

## **Social Equity**

Riverside Middle School administration, faculty and staff are dedicated to creating rigorous and academically challenging learning environments for students of all abilities and backgrounds, including but not limited to, students with disabilities, gifted and accelerated students and students who are at risk. Riverside Middle School embraces the reality that diverse abilities, experiences, and interests have a tremendous impact on student learning. Teachers have high expectations for all students and believe that all students can learn from a rigorous curriculum, instructional materials, and instructional practices that are aligned to the standards.

Testimony of this steadfastness involves Academic Achievement Periods (AAP) for acceleration and remediation, peer tutoring, mentorships, Response to Intervention (RTI), small group counseling, a House System, and gifted/accelerated core classes. During integral grade-level planning, teachers work together to identify strengths and weaknesses related to social/behavioral performance, how students are achieving academically, how students are coping with the demands of the classroom and discuss present and future interventions and strategies to use in the classroom. Through differentiated instruction, Riverside Middle School teachers create learning environments that address the variety of learning styles, interests, and aptitudes found within the classrooms and school. Teachers continually collaborate to ensure that gifted students, average students, students with special needs and those considered "at risk" all receive challenging and engaging grade-level lessons.

Riverside Middle School is committed to serving students with special needs in their least restrictive environments. Through the co-teaching model, teachers provide an inclusive setting in which to provide greater teacher/student ratio and bring additional 1-1 support for students in the classroom. Students are heterogeneously grouped by mixed abilities and interests. Riverside Middle School also serves students with the most severe and profound intellectual, physical, and behavioral disabilities. While the least restrictive environment for these students is typically a self-contained classroom, the entire school embraces each of them

with acceptance and understanding and includes them in all extracurricular activities , club days, assemblies and social gatherings.

Riverside Middle School is dedicated to ensuring that its policies and methods advocate a positive school atmosphere for all of its students. A whole community approach is embraced, involving educational, community and familial partners to build a school community where each of its students has an equal opportunity to reach their full academic potential. In addition, Riverside Middle School faculty and staff are very cognizant of the significant role that parents play in the academic, social and behavioral development of its students. There are multiple ways for parents to be involved in their child's education such as joining PTSO (Parent Teacher Student Organization), becoming a volunteer, chaperoning after-school activities and field trips, or joining the athletic boosters club. Teachers at Riverside strive to keep an open line of communication with parents, at all times, to keep them informed of student progress in all facets of their child's educational experience.

Riverside Middle School faculty and staff work meticulously to ensure that all of its students "Soar to New Heights". While academic and athletic achievements are recognized and celebrated, Riverside Middle School participates in a "Student of the Month" program, which is sponsored and supported by community partners. Monthly, each team of teachers selects a student to be honored based on qualities such as character, leadership, citizenship and loyalty in creating a positive school environment.

In addition, the Riverside Middle School House System was designed to create a middle school community where students work together and support each other throughout their middle school career. The purpose of each house is to guide and support the academic, social and personal development of each student during their time at Riverside Middle School. The house system encourages teamwork, friendship, cooperation and leadership. One of the main goals of the house system is for all middle school students to meaningfully contribute to the local community. Every person involved in the school is an integral part of the house system. Students can earn points and rewards for their prospective houses through community service, participation in

extracurricular activities, positive behavior, perfect attendance, mentoring/tutoring, and participation in school-related functions.

Riverside Middle school embraces and strives to celebrate and understand cultural diversity among its student population. Teachers include instruction that promotes cultural awareness and tie customs to various lessons. Both teachers and guidance counselors encourage students to share information about their backgrounds and personal experiences with others. Teachers aim to establish an inclusive environment where everyone feels connected and respected.

### **Organizational Supports**

Riverside Middle School has high performing organizational structures and processes which focus on continual improvement. There is a strong, effective leadership that expects continuous professional learning and accountability. RMS teachers hold state issued certificates to teach middle school and are deemed highly qualified in the content they teach. There is a shared vision that supports the day to day functions of the school. The master schedule, grouping of teachers among teams, and resources needed to implement the standards are all areas that are carefully thought out and planned according to the best interest of the students. Among teams, students are grouped heterogeneously to allow access to rigorous learning opportunities for all students. Teachers collaborate among grade level content areas with vertical collaboration across grade levels within their department. Teacher websites are required to have a weekly lesson plan. Parents and students use the websites to communicate and stay informed. New teachers are assigned veteran teachers as mentors to support them through their first year of teaching in the county. There are remediation and acceleration programs in place to provide opportunities for the range of student needs. There are biweekly club meetings for students to participate in chosen clubs that promote social interaction. STEM opportunities are developed throughout each grade level.

Two days a week are designated as protective planning so teachers are able to come together to collaborate. Common planning time for each grade level allows teachers to meet with same content area teachers to discuss observed strengths and weaknesses of student performance, develop higher-level thinking activities, and create

common assessments in order to help students be successful. There are monthly grade level meetings for administrators to share information from district meetings. There are bimonthly faculty meetings where administrators facilitate professional development. There are monthly meetings among grade levels where district personnel come to participate in training and discussion of critical areas (such as writing across the curriculum). Teachers have redesigned the physical layout of their rooms and/or their instruction in order to respond to the needs of the students.

There is a leadership team consisting of administrators, teachers from each grade level and special services department as well as a counselor and media specialist. This team meets to analyze student data and make decisions. This team develops and helps implement the school improvement plan that focuses on increasing student achievement.

Students at-risk academically or who display behavioral issues are closely monitored. The school follows the state mandated response to intervention guidelines where teams meet regularly, discuss documentation, develop and implement an intervention plan and continue to meet to follow up and take further steps if necessary to achieve the goals set forth in order to help the students be successful. Student-teacher mentor partnerships exist to foster personalized relationships in order to promote the development of social and academic needs of students.

The school has a parent-teacher-student organization (PTSO) that engages families, teachers, students and businesses in the community as partners in supporting student achievement to maintain and raise success.

Teachers are highly encouraged to take part in professional development opportunities that are of high quality with intense and ongoing learning. School administrators and staff provide time, talent, training and resources for a rigorous and relevant curriculum, instruction and assessment to support student learning.

The administration, counselors and sixth grade teachers communicate with the elementary feeder schools in preparing the rising sixth graders for the middle school expectations through a variety of opportunities (orientation for upcoming students). The administration, counselors and eighth grade teachers communicate

with the high schools in preparing the eighth graders transition to high school and be successful through a variety of activities.