When the Rise School of Stillwater opened in the Fall of 2007, its goal was to provide a focused program for developmentally delayed and typically developing children ranging in age from 18 months to 6 years. One unique aspect of the Rise program is the integration of children with disabilities among their non-disabled peers. Physical, occupational, speech and music therapies are part of the daily schedule. Children currently enrolled in the Rise School represent six school districts in Central Oklahoma. A waiting list of 21 includes children from as far away as Edmond.

Research is another unique component that strengthens and distinguishes the Rise School of Stillwater from its six peer institutions across the country. The purpose of the research at the Rise School is to examine how children’s participation in the Rise School program is related to developmental outcomes and family functioning.

Findings from initial research are promising. Developmental gains were identified for children with disabilities including Speech and Hearing Disabilities, Autism, Down Syndrome, Cerebral Palsy, Pervasive Developmental Disorder, and other genetic disabilities. Examples of skills that children did not demonstrate at the time school began in October 2007 but had gained by the end of the school year in June 2008 are described below.

Acquisition of these skills and behaviors is part of the developmental process for children. Because the development of these seemingly simple skills is often more challenging for children with disabilities, these achievements are life-changing for children and their families.

Gains in Gross Motor Skills
- Walks up and down stairs alternating feet while holding rail
- Can catch a ball
- Walks independently
- Sits erect and unsupported for 5 minutes

Gains in Self-Help Skills
- Spoon feeds without spilling
- Indicates wet or soiled pants
- Washes and dries hands without assistance
- Wipes nose when requested to do so
- Assists in undressing
- Uses a fork for eating
- Wipes self independently

Gains in Speech and Language Skills
- Imitates sounds or words
- Says at least one word other than “mama” or “dada”
- Uses two word phrases
- Has an expressive vocabulary of at least 10 words
- Uses the words “my” and “mine” to indicate possession
- Asks “where” questions
- Understands and responds to own name

Gains in Fine Motor Skills
- Moves fingers independently
- Grasps and releases objects such as blocks out of a container
- Can turn a doorknob
- Can nest or stack objects in graduated size

Gains in General Knowledge and Comprehension
- Turns pages in a book
- Describes actions
- Knows body parts
- Knows colors
- Knows directional words like “in” and “out”
- Identifies animals
- Points to and names simple pictures

Gains in Social and Emotional Development
- Shows emotions such as joy, fear, anger, and surprise
- Plays peekaboo
- Shows attraction to caretaker and may be afraid of strangers
- Engages in make believe play
- Imitates other children’s actions
- Shows a strong sense of self by saying “no” to an adult’s request
- Begins to take turns
Parental satisfaction with the Rise School of Stillwater was also measured in the initial study.

- 95% of parents rated the quality of the Rise School as excellent.
- 100% of the parents expressed satisfaction with the services at the school and would recommend the Rise School to other parents who were in similar situations with regards to their children.

Parents of children attending the Rise School of Stillwater shared the following thoughts:

“I can see a difference in my child. She has definitely blossomed with speech therapy, physical therapy, and music therapy.”

“He receives more therapy at school than we could ever afford to get him independently. Rise School has given us hope with our child with his speech and behavior issues. He has progressed so much these past six months. That is so amazing.”

“There’s that deep breath that you get to take knowing that he’s growing, he’s thriving, he’s doing well. And that’s what you want to feel as a mom and it’s harder I think sometimes when you have a child with special needs to feel that way.”

“I hope the school can continue to grow and increase its capacity. The school provides a service that is not found in the small outlying communities.”

“I can honestly say the therapists here are amazing. We could not get my child to sound out anything—he would put his head down like he was embarrassed. And now you better watch out what you say because he will repeat it!”

Gay Washington, Ed.D, Director of Special Education, Stillwater Public Schools, says:

“Research shows the key to progress for children with disabilities is early intervention. The Rise School is key to providing early intervening services for children in our community.”

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