

Rivers Bend Academy

Rivers Bend Academy was founded by Wendy Fitch in 2007, and is a division of Step By Step Consulting. It is a coeducational private day school specializing in the teaching of students who have been diagnosed with autism, PPD-NOS, and/or Asperger's Disorder. Rivers Bend Academy believes in a child-centered approach which fosters positive emotional growth, addresses specific academic, language and behavioral needs, and builds on each child's unique strengths. Rivers Bend Academy operates at 156 Burnetts Way in the City of Suffolk, Virginia. Rivers Bend Academy operates from 8:30 am until 2:45 pm Monday thru Friday year round (September & August).

The facility utilizes six class rooms, a sensory room, resource room, conference room, therapy rooms and a commons area. Rivers Bend Academy maintains maintain a staff to student ratio of one (1) staff per two (2) students and offers services for children ages 2 thru 21. This includes a minimum of four (4) certified teachers per 18 students.

Classroom instructors are certified teachers and paraprofessionals with experience working with children with autism from various backgrounds, needs and abilities.

Rivers Bend Academy utilizes the principles of applied behavior analysis with an emphasis on verbal behavior. This teaching methodology focuses on systematic instruction of skill and emphasizes functions of behavior and functions of language. It encompasses use of reinforcement, motivation, and extinction, and task analyzing skills. Data is collected and analyzed to make programmatic/ instructional decisions.

The goal at Rivers Bend Academy is for the students to become independent people with the ability to interact in a variety of settings and situations. This will be accomplished by creating a structured teaching environment. The structured environment will incorporate the following:

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Organized physical environment

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Well defined schedules and work stations

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Clear goals, objectives and expectations

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Use of multimodal instruction and materials

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Systematic instruction

Educating children with autism is a challenge for both parents and teachers. Children who have been diagnosed with some form of autism have a common thread which is the presence of a developmental disability, more specifically, a disorder of communication which manifests itself differently in each person. The level of impairment for an individual with autism should be based on the unique needs of the student as each has unique strengths and weaknesses. Some may be of average to above average intelligence, while others may be below average. Some children may need help understanding social situations and developing appropriate responses. Others may exhibit aggressive or self-injurious behavior and need instruction or alternative means to get needs met. Systematic instruction with clear outcome goals is necessary for progress to be made. Academic goals need to be tailored to that individual's intellectual ability and functioning level. Progress will be reported at a minimum of every five (5) weeks and will be based on the goals of the IPP/IEP. Rivers Bend Academy believes that a child's growth and development is a combined effort between home, school, applicable professionals and the community. The staff at Rivers Bend Academy will work closely with the child's parents to have an understanding of the child's behavior and communication skills at home and what techniques work at home. Open communication between school staff and parents can lead to a better evaluation of a student's progress. The staff will also determine and address the parent's expectations for their child.