



## **RIDES Program Evaluation 2014**

### **BACKGROUND**

In 2014 The Red Barn became one of the first centers in the United States to use the Rider Instruction Development Evaluation System (RIDES) to track student progress. RIDES was developed by Saddle Up, a PATH Premiere Accredited Center in Nashville, Tennessee to assess rider ability, develop rider skills, and track rider progress. Their systematic and progressive format allows an organization to effectively form groups of students with similar abilities, improve horse to student matching, promote common goal setting among various instructors, and provide a way for parents to understand the skills their children are learning.

The RIDES system has five levels that begin with the fundamentals of riding and progress through cantering. Each level includes both mounted and unmounted skills.

- Level 1: This level of rider is primarily walk only, on lead. Trotting is minimal, if at all.
- Level 2: This level of rider is learning basic riding skills at the walk and trot on lead.
- Level 3: This level of rider is learning to ride off lead at the walk and on lead at the trot.
- Level 4: This level of rider is proficient at riding off lead at the walk and is learning to ride off lead at the trot.
- Level 5: This level of rider is working on more advanced skills off lead at the walk and trot and is learning to canter.

The unmounted skills are appropriate to each level and include grooming skills and general knowledge about working with horses and barn operations.

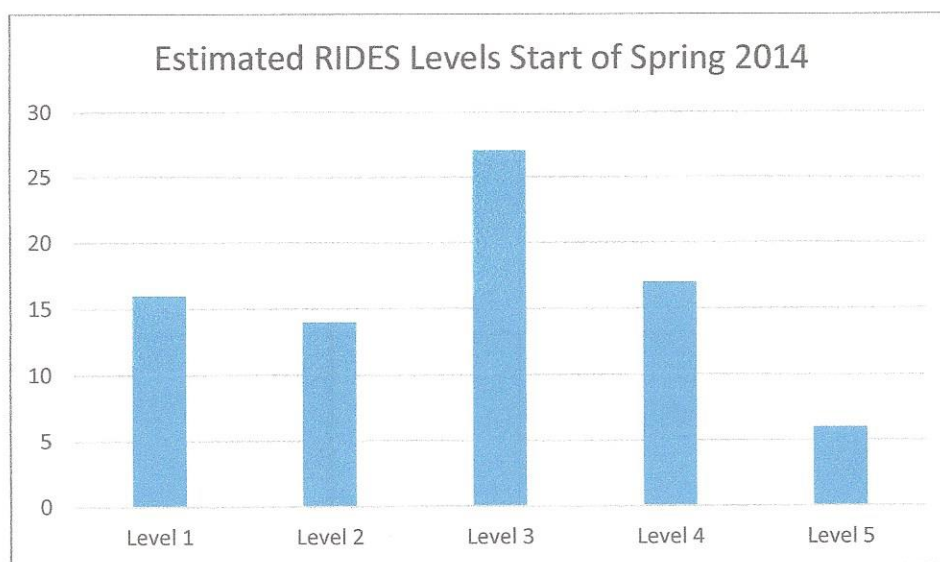
## IMPLEMENTATION

The RIDES level was appealing to us as a measurement tool as its creator's intended, but we saw an additional advantage to implementing it: the ability to identify when students should graduate from our programs. As The Red Barn entered our second year of programs, we were faced with a growing waiting list, a need for more horses to suit our advancing students, and the need to reduce expenses. We realized that if we didn't determine a graduation point, we would rarely be able to add students from our waiting list and this would impact the types of horses kept in our programs.

As part of your yearly agency review at the end of 2013, we decided that if a student was cantering they could usually go to any lesson barn in the Birmingham area and take lessons. We did consider the financial implication for our students since so many of them received scholarships to attend. But, realized what author Jim Collins calls a "brutal fact" that we could not operate over the long term solely for the benefit of those students.

We completed RIDES worksheets on each of our 2013 students and first identified those who would have completed Level 5. We made the decision to graduate those students and asked them to become barn helpers to assist in lessons, help with barn chores, and be considered as our next generation of instructors. We also provided them with a list of other local barns where they could take lessons and contacted those barn owners asking for special consideration with pricing for our graduated students referred to them. We had been braced for an out lash among parents, but found that almost everyone was understanding and supportive.

The RIDES levels of the non-graduated students are shown below. Students who had only started cantering were not graduated, so we did have a few Level 5 students remaining.





As the Spring 2014 term began, we sent an email to parents explaining about the RIDES system, pointing out that it included both mounted and unmounted skills. Having parents recognize the benefit of unmounted skills was an important part of our plan to reduce our horse expenses. In the past parents had seemed to only think the benefit of our programs existed when students were actually riding the horse. Our accreditation limits the number of times that each horse may be ridden each day and over the course of a week. Having unmounted and even at times horse-less lessons helped us to stretch the number of lessons that each horse could teach.

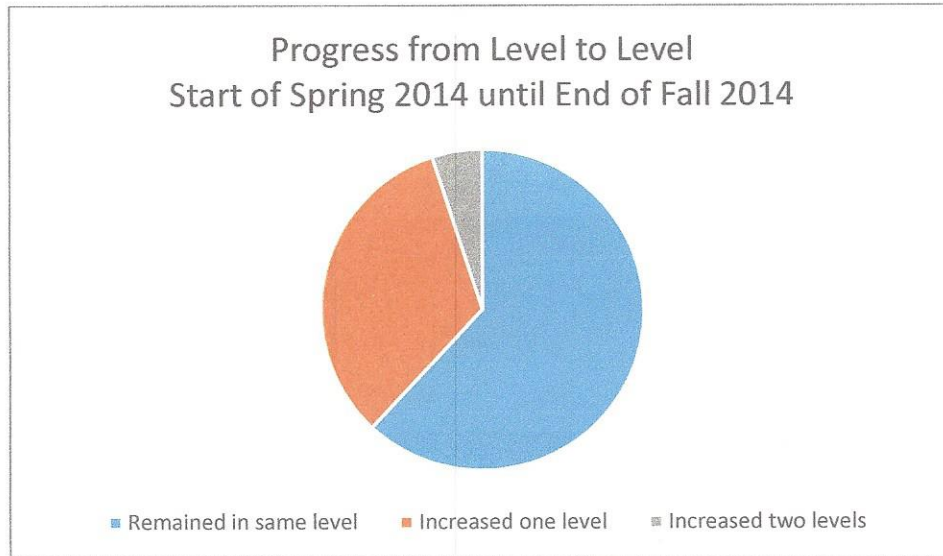
We experienced some typical bumps with implementation, but the RIDES creators helped us to navigate them. The largest of these was finding a consistent way to document a subjective observation – such, as what does proficient at posting trot mean? Down one straightaway? Around the whole arena? Ten strides with hands still or ten times in perfect form? RIDES had been intentionally created with a “flexible structure” so we were encouraged to set those standards internally and note the level of skill mastery on the RIDES worksheet. Even in professional equine competitions judges often have different scores, so a certain amount of variation is to be expected.

At the end of the spring term parents were sent a letter explaining their child’s progress. Parents indicated to us that seeing the specific number of skills mastered during the term helped them to understand their student was making progress even though it might not be evident to them at times. For example, a non-horsey parent may not realize the difference between a posting trot and a trot on the correct diagonal because they look the same to a casual observer. One parent said she framed the letter because it was the first time she had received a note from the teacher showing progress rather than simply a list of all his shortcomings. She asked us to send a copy to the school so that it could be placed in the student’s folder to show that there was a place where his behavior was controlled and not disruptive.

Those who were near completing Level 5 had plenty of notice to begin looking for another facility for lessons. Parents of those students reported that it was bittersweet to them to realize that their child was so close to graduation. But, they could remember a time when their child had not had the skills to even make eye contact with another person, but were now able to trot by themselves and no longer needed a therapeutic facility. We always reiterate that graduating students may remain as barn helpers to with lessons and barn chores, and be considered among the next generation of future instructors.

We realized at the end of the Summer 2014 term that we had a few students who would not likely be able to show progress even on the most basic skills listed of Level 1. So, we created our own Intro Level that included an even more basic skill progression, like being able to move from using adaptive equipment to sit on the horse to being able to sit upright by themselves; from needing a more involved hippotherapy type support to a more traditional therapeutic riding support.

We sent progress reports to parents at the end of the Fall 2014 term. We noted that many students had remained in the same level since the spring. We analyzed this concern and discovered that the majority of students did indeed remain in the same level from term to term, even when making progress within the level. For example, the chart below shows all of the students who have ridden consistently from the start of spring 2014 to the end of fall 2014 and their levels:



Since it is not uncommon for a student to remain in the same level from term to term, we continued including the number of skills mastered so that parents could measure progress within that level. Remaining in the same level should not be seen as lack of progress and it is expected that as a student's progress in higher levels will take longer since the skills are more difficult. The chart below indicates the average number of skills mastered in each level over the fall term. A sample of the report sent to parents is also attached.

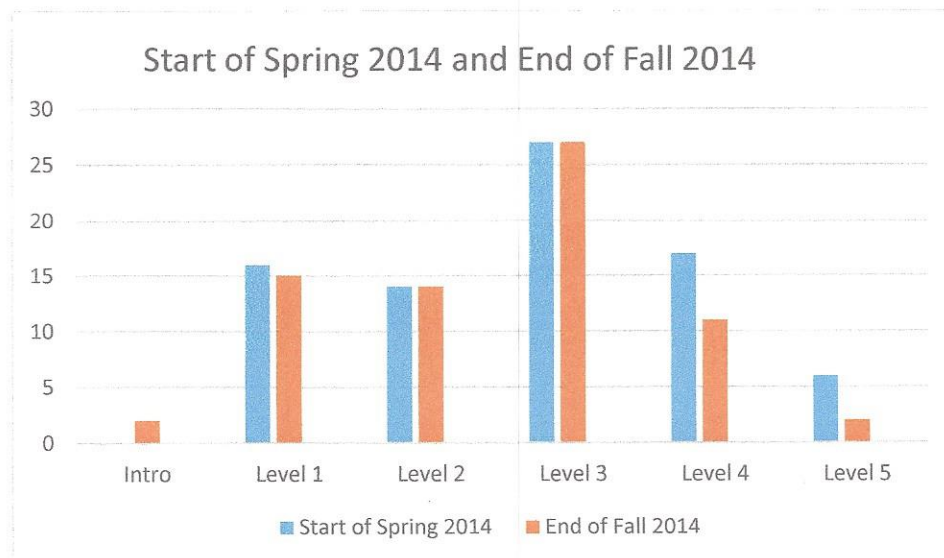
Over the Fall 2014 Term Students On Average Mastered Even if They Remained in the Same Level		
Began Term on:	Mounted	Unmounted
Intro	1/16	n/a
Level One	9/12	3/8
Level Two	11/16	5/11
Level Three	8/18	3/12
Level Four	5/19	2/15
Level Five	4/19	0/16

## CONCLUSION

Implementing the RIDES system has helped us tremendously in these ways:

- Parents are able to see progress in their child's ability to ride and work with horses.
- Parents understand the value of an unmounted lesson so we are able to more easily stretch our most expensive resource – the horse usage.
- We are able to stay focused on our core purpose – to serve those who could not ride at a traditional riding lesson program. Once a child can canter independently, they can ride at any lesson program.
- When making the schedule we are able to better match the appropriate horses to the rider's level.
- It's much easier for a substitute instructor understand the student's abilities when teaching a lesson.
- We are able to predict the types of horses needed in the future by doing a pre-assessment of a new student's skills to know how quickly they may move through a level.

The chart below indicates the comparison of our student population from the start of the Spring 2014 term to the end of the Fall 2014 term. We expect that our number of Level 5 students will continue to drop and the number of Levels Intro – 3 students will continue to increase, with 3 usually containing the most students.





We will continue using the RIDES system to measure our students' progress through 2015. As with implementing any new system, it has taken us almost a year to fully develop the best process for reporting results. We believe this especially to be true since we were among the first agencies in the United States to use the system and did not have a more experienced center to call upon for assistance. The creators at Saddle Up were wonderful to work with, but since they had created the system, their implementation developed along with the system. We hope this program evaluation will help other organizations understand our implementation process and rationale, as well as provide an example of the numerous benefits.



June 3, 2014

Dear Parents,

We recently purchased the Rider Instruction, Development, and Evaluation System (RIDES) to help us track your child's progress in critical mounted and unmounted horsemanship skills. You can learn more about RIDES by visiting [www.RidesInstruction.com](http://www.RidesInstruction.com). Your child's progress is summarized below:

Child's Name: [REDACTED]

Progress: completed 13/16 mounted and 11/11 unmounted skills in Level 2 and 3/18 mounted and 0/12 unmounted skills in Level 3.

For many students, you will notice that the unmounted score is lower than the mounted score. This is why we have placed more emphasis on unmounted lessons this spring. Many people mistakenly believe that only mounted lessons are valuable to their child's overall horsemanship ability, but it is often the unmounted skills that are more difficult to master and most useful long term.

I can tell you from my experience as a "barn mom" that it is the children who take the time to really understand horses on the ground that gain the most benefit long term in their personal relationships. If all you learn to do is ride.....well, all you learned to do is ride and how much will that really help you in life? But, learning to build a relationship with your horse on the ground so that you understand why and how he is thinking is a great bridge for learning how to do those same things with people. And even though horses are wonderful, it's the people of the world we have to live and get along with!

You may feel at times that progress in mastering these skills is very slow, but don't be discouraged! As Ecclesiastes 7:8 reminds us, *The end of a matter is better than its beginning, and patience is better than pride.*

If you have any questions about the RIDES system or what your child's score means, just let me know and we'll be glad to go over it with you.

Sincerely,



Joy O'Neal



## RIDES STUDENT REPORT AS OF NOVEMBER 2014

We have implemented the RIDES system of skill evaluation to help us measure progress in our students. Each level of RIDES includes mounted and unmounted skills that advance methodically in difficulty. The levels include:

### Intro

This level of rider is working towards riding without adaptive support.

### Level 1

This level of rider is primarily walk only. Trotting is minimal, if at all.

### Level 2

This level of rider is learning basic riding skills at the walk and trot on lead.

### Level 3

This level of rider is learning to ride off lead at the walk and on lead at the trot.

### Level 4

This level of rider is proficient at riding off lead at the walk and is learning to ride off lead at the trot.

### Level 5

This level of rider is working on more advanced skills off lead at the walk and trot and is learning to canter. When our students complete this level, we consider them to have graduated from our programs.

Students progress at their own pace, but in a methodical way. Some skills are mastered quickly, and sometimes it may take longer to master others. The point of the RIDES system is not to compare students to each other, but only to identify that skill mastery is indeed taking place over time.

Your student's RIDES progress is noted below. Please let us know if you have any questions.

**Student Name:** ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~

**RIDES Level at start of Summer Term:** Level 3

**RIDES Level at end of Fall Term:** Level 3

**Number of mounted skills mastered from June – November:** 7

**Number of unmounted skills mastered from June – November:** 4