

Could Your Child Qualify for Extended School Year (ESY) Services?

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Every parent of a child who has an Individualized Education Program (IEP) should be familiar with the term Extended School Year (ESY) services. If your son or daughter qualifies for ESY services, it's an extremely important component of his or her educational program.

ESY services are an individualized extension of special education and/or related services beyond the normal school year, provided as part of a FAPE (free appropriate public education) and outlined in an eligible student's IEP (or sometimes in an addendum to the IEP). ESY services must be considered for any student receiving special education and/or related services.

ESY services are provided for students who meet one or a combination of the established criteria for eligibility. The school system has a legal obligation to consider and fairly evaluate the appropriateness of ESY services at least annually for every student in the special education system, and this is usually accomplished during the meeting to develop the IEP. If a student qualifies for ESY services, there is no cost to the parent or guardian.

Regression of Skills

There are a number of specific criteria that students may meet to qualify for ESY services; however, ESY services are provided most frequently for students who demonstrate significant regression during extended breaks from school that is so severe the student would be unable to recoup the losses in a reasonable period of time. ESY services are also appropriate when areas of learning involve life skills that are critical to the self-sufficiency and independence of the student. ESY services are not meant to teach new skills or increase progress on goals and objectives already

achieved, but rather to assure that students will not lose progress made toward achieving skills that they will have difficulty regaining.

How can you know if your child will significantly regress in previously acquired skills over the summer and have difficulty regaining those skills? Do you see your child on an academic treadmill — increasing reading, writing and math skills from September through June one year, only to begin again at a significantly lower level when school starts the next fall? Does it take months to get back to the skill level from the previous June?

Documenting the Need

It takes time to support the need for ESY services. Throughout the school year teachers and therapists *and* parents should document why ESY services are needed. Some of the information that can be used to document that the child will have difficulty recouping skills lost includes the current and previous year's IEPs, reports prepared by teachers and therapists, student work samples, pre- and post-summer testing, and medical and other outside agency reports. If the IEP team agrees that your child will significantly regress without ESY services, then they must determine the acquired critical life skills and/or other areas in which they anticipate the regression/recoupment difficulties will occur and plan and document the type and frequency of special education instruction and/or related services which will be used to address those difficulties.

Other Criteria

Although the IEP team should be familiar with issues of regression and recoupment and attainment of skills for self-sufficiency and independence, there are a number of

other criteria that can be used to determine if a student may qualify for ESY services. You may want to review the complete list of criteria for determining eligibility for ESY services in advance of the IEP meeting where ESY eligibility will be discussed. If you think it might be helpful, you can bring a copy of the policy explaining eligibility for ESY services to the meeting.

When you receive the 10-day advance notice of your child's annual IEP meeting, you may want to contact the IEP chairperson, principal or assistant principal (preferably in writing) to ask if the possible need for ESY services will be discussed at the upcoming meeting or if there will be another IEP meeting set up before the end of the school year for that purpose. It is important to schedule this meeting early enough in the spring so that you would still have time before the school year ends to prepare for and take advantage of mediation and due process if necessary. The IEP team does, in fact, make the decision regarding ESY so you will want to be prepared to discuss the criteria for eligibility, and together with the other members of the team, determine whether your son or daughter meets the criteria.

It may take time and determination to access ESY services for your son or daughter who qualifies, but it can be well worth the effort and energy.

For More Information

Do you want more information about the complete criteria for eligibility? If the staff at your child's school cannot provide that information, contact the Parent Resource Center (PRC) in your local district or the Office of Special Education in your local school system. ■