

Extended School Year Services

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Have you been wondering how you can extend your child's services beyond the traditional school year? The *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) regulations entitle all children to receive special education and related services regardless of your school district's calendar. Extended school year or (ESY) services are based upon the IDEA statutory requirement of providing a "free appropriate public education." Provided below are definitions of extended school year services and standards used to determine your child's eligibility for service delivery.

How Does the Government Define ESY?

The federal code of regulations defines ESY services as special education and related services provided to a child with a disability beyond the normal school year. These services should be provided in accordance with the child's Individualized Education Plan (IEP), at no cost to parents and meeting the standards of the State Educational Agency. Although ESY services are required by law, there are some limitations. These include limitations imposed upon public agencies that may not be considered when ESY requirements were established. For example, a school district cannot state that ESY eligibility and services are only provided to children who are autistic and not for children who are deaf or hard of hearing or provide only physical therapy services, but not speech and language services. ESY services are not traditional summer school services and school districts are required to make services available even if summer school or summer activities are not provided. In addition, the amount of services or duration of services cannot arbitrarily be limited. Lack of funding or school district personnel does not alleviate the school district from the responsibility of providing extended school year services.

How Can I Determine My Child's ESY Needs?

The annual IEP meeting or review allows you, the parents, and the IEP team to consider your child's need for ESY services. Each child receiving special education and related services must be considered, individually, through the IEP decision making process to determine eligibility and services necessary to provide a free appropriate public education or (FAPE). Parental input and involvement in this decision-making process is vital.

Who Sets the ESY Standards?

State educational agencies determine eligibility standards for ESY services. However, judicial decisions have recognized the need for ESY services as part of FAPE during the late 1970s.

How Can I Determine If My Child's ESY Services are Working?

The key factor in determining your child's success is whether skills learned during the school year will be lost when a break in instruction occurs. If your child is not retaining skills in a reasonable amount of time after instruction resumes, your school district is not providing an adequate FAPE. In order to evaluate the ESY services, it is important for your child's IEP team to identify and earmark skills relating to the goals and objectives of the IEP. Throughout the school year, parents and IEP members should gather data on your child's progress and the impact that vacation breaks have on those skills. Parents can contact the state educational agency and the local school district's special education department for the ESY standards.

IEP teams can identify and earmark critical skills on the IEP and collect data on the rate of progress of those goals and objectives during the school year. Evaluations at the end of the year and beginning of the new school year can be important documentation to evaluate your child's progress as well as review objectives over breaks in service and program delivery.