
What Do You Need to Know About an Extended School Year?

Contributed by Hanni Raley, Assistant Executive Director of The Arc of Aurora

As summer rapidly approaches, you will likely begin considering options for your child while school is out of session, some educational opportunities and some that are “just for fun.” While having the flexibility (and perhaps the burden) of patchwork-ing together a child’s schedule can be an opportunity to round your child’s education, consider that some children with disabilities do best academically when they are exposed to special education and related services longer than the usual school year. This service, offered through your child’s School District, is considered Extended School Year, commonly referred to as ESY.

ESY services are different from what we might know as “summer school” because they should be individualized based on the child’s needs, documented in each child’s Individualized Education Plan (IEP), and goal driven. The services should be a necessary component of a child’s free and appropriate public education (FAPE), and must be determined annually by the student’s IEP team. Don’t forget, you are a member of the IEP team and your opinion and observations are important to the discussion.

The ESY determination and discussion is a meeting that could be held outside or in addition to your annual goal setting IEP, but it should be conducted like any other IEP meeting - with appropriate prior notice. If the student’s annual review happens in the spring, often times an ESY discussion and decision is included in this meeting. If the student does NOT have a spring annual IEP meeting, you have a right to request (in writing) an IEP meeting to discuss ESY services. Be sure to do so no later than one month prior to the end of the school year, but the earlier the better! Keep in mind that receiving services under an IEP does not alone qualify your child for ESY services.

While many children require structure over the summer months and may benefit from ESY, it is important to consider the following factors that will be discussed and used to determine whether ESY is appropriate:

- The degree of impairment of the child;
- The degree of regression suffered by the student (data is collected over past breaks: summer, holiday, etc.);
- The time it takes for a child to recoup skills lost over a break;
- The ability of the student’s parents to provide the educational structure at home;

- The student's behavioral and physical challenges;
- The availability of alternative resources;
- The ability of the student to interact with children without disabilities;
- The areas of the student's curriculum which need continuous attention;
- The student's vocational needs; and
- Whether the requested service is extraordinary for the student's condition, as opposed to an integral part of a program for those with the student's condition.

The Arc of Aurora wants you to understand that ESY also has its limits and it isn't for every child. Though your child's documented needs will drive his/her time at ESY, the services, supports, programming, and environment will likely look very different from a typical school day. Often ESY is offered at a different school than a student regularly attends with different instructors and paras providing services, and ESY may take place over 3-5 incongruous weeks, with varied days and hours. ESY services are not designed to teach new skills or behaviors, and ESY is not a substitute for childcare. ESY does help to improve structure over the summer months, but some families opt out of ESY to explore other summer options such as camp. Take a look at [Petri's article](#) to see if there may be some other summer programs that suit your child better than ESY.

Summer should be exciting, but for parents, the build-up to the summer months can be anything but fun. You don't have to struggle alone! Check out [Wrightslaw](#) for more on ESY, including advocacy strategies and case law, but never forget that if you have questions about ESY services or other options to support your child's growth, contact your Arc of Aurora advocate for more information or support.