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facts

Summer Services The Extended School Year

Over the summer vacation, does your child forget skills learned during the previous year and have to learn them all over again? If so, you and members of your child's education planning team should discuss an extended school year (ESY) or "summer services."

Put summer services on your child's IEP or 504 plan.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the federal law governing special education, guarantees children with disabilities ages 3 through 21 years a free appropriate public education. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act also mandates that children with disabilities who qualify must receive an education that is appropriate and at no cost to their parents. Federal and state special education laws do not specify the length of the school day, the number of days in the school year, or the frequency of services. For students with disabilities, these decisions are part of the IEP or 504 process, which outlines the services that a child will receive based on his or her individual needs.

If your school district offers summer services to children without disabilities, it must offer the same resources to children with disabilities. Although schools are not required to offer a full range of special education services during the summer, they must provide services tailored to the area(s) of a child's significant loss of skills. For example, summer services might include (but would not be limited to) academic tutorials, physical therapy, speech-language therapy, social skills, development, and behavior management.

The goals written into your child's IEP or 504 plan can look different from those developed during the regular school year. For instance, to help develop your child's gross motor skills during the summer, the plan might include riding a bike or



To order copies of this fact sheet, or to learn more about VFN's materials and services, contact the Vermont Family Network
600 Blair Park,
Suite 240,
Williston, VT 05495

1-800-800-4005

You can also contact us via e-mail at info@vtfn.org.

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learning to swim. When written into the IEP or 504 plan, summer services may be provided in a variety of settings including day camps, community swimming pools, or beaches.

To decide whether a child is eligible for summer services, the team will consider the type and severity of the child's disability and the evidence that he or she experiences significant loss of skills (regression) that are not relearned in a reasonable length of time. The most important criteria in determining eligibility for summer services is how long it takes a child to relearn skills lost over the summer. If it takes more than a month or two, he or she may be entitled to summer services.

If you think your child will need summer services, ask for a meeting with his or her IEP or 504 team early enough in the school year to allow the school district to plan for the necessary services. Even January is not too early to get started.

Questions to ask

When planning for summer services, here are some things to consider.

- Is a summer program necessary to help your child reach his or her educational goals?
- How does the severity of your child's disability affect his or her progress reaching these goals?
- Does your child lose skills during school breaks or vacations and does he or she catch up in a reasonable amount of time?
- How do school breaks or breaks in services affect your child's progress?
- Are there areas of your child's program which needs ongoing attention?
- Is a summer program necessary for your child to keep from regressing in the skill areas he or she has already achieved?

Things you can do

- Keep written notes about your child's progress.
- Talk to last year's IEP or 504 team and to your child's current teachers to see whether they noticed significant loss of skills during school breaks.
- Get written opinions from other professionals who know your child.
- Understand your rights.

Finally, remember that the school district is not required to provide summer services unless they are written into your child's IEP or 504 plan.