

Creative Approaches for an Extended School Year

When drafting and planning an Individualized Education Program (IEP), the question of an Extended School Year (educational programming beyond the regular 180 school days also referred to as ESY) may pop up. Once it has been established that an ESY is necessary for the student to preserve or continue progress, a flurry of new questions follows. How will we satisfy this IEP requirement? Where will we satisfy this IEP requirement?

Many educators feel limited by what's in place or available already. The good news is, if you discard the idea that the ESY needs to happen in a classroom or a traditional academic setting you increase your possibilities dramatically.

If a child needs to work on his socialization skills, he belongs with his peers. Instead of providing an aide for classroom support, how about using an aide to support the child at camp?

The first step is getting familiar with the different types of summer recreation and camp opportunities in your area. Many townships provide free or low cost recreation programs for residents. Local YMCAs, Boys and Girls Clubs, the Boy and Girl Scouts and athletic associations provide summer programs and camps too.

CP of New Jersey's Bridges Project, which supports inclusive recreation opportunities for children with disabilities, assisted with several ESY programs last year. In one instance, we provided an aide to support a child at her swimming lessons and in one case, found an aide to accompany a child to art classes.

For many students, the academic requirements of the regular school year are so numerous there doesn't seem to be enough time to get everything required in the Individualized Education Program (IEP) done between September and June. An Extended School Year provides an excellent opportunity to address transition and employment issues for older students.

Last summer, CP of New Jersey helped find employment for a 16-year-old boy at a summer camp in Burlington

County. The camp modified its Counselor in Training program and created a spot on the maintenance crew for him. The experience gave the student the opportunity to work and interact with individuals his own age in a fun summer camp setting. The job was also used as a Functional Vocational Assessment.

Once you've found a program that will suit the student's needs, consider how the ESY will be administered. Will an aide be necessary? Will counselors or employees of the camp need training? Who will be responsible for monitoring the student's progress and collecting feedback?

Cerebral Palsy of New Jersey has aides available to provide support in ESY settings. CP of New Jersey can also train aides to implement the supports necessary in an ESY setting or train recreation and camp staff on adaptations, behavior techniques and how to modify activities to make them accessible.

There are countless ways to create and implement an ESY if you're willing to "think outside the school." For more information on how Cerebral Palsy of New Jersey can help you develop or implement an ESY program, contact Associate Executive Director of Programs, Jackie Edwards at (888) 322-1918 ext. 526 or online at jedwards@cpofnj.org.

Visit CP of New Jersey at the Abilities Expo

The 2004 Abilities Expo, a show dedicated to improving the lives of people with disabilities, will be held April 16 through 18 at the New Jersey Convention Center in Edison, NJ.

Admission is \$5 for adults and free for children under 12. For information on how to receive free tickets to Abilities Expo, contact Hollis Painting at (609) 392-4004 ext. 520 or email hpainting@cpofnj.org.

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Paraprofessionals

Supporting a Critical Element in Education

Many students with disabilities rely on paraprofessionals to get through a day at school. Whether it's someone providing one-on-one personal care supports, helping with classroom activities, or tending to both sets of needs, a paraprofessional provides a critical element in the education process.

The paraprofessional has the most contact with a student, yet frequently we see that the paraprofessional is the least informed when it comes to the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP), the specific devices or software utilized by the student or the goals the student is working toward.

When developing an IEP, it's important to consider the role of the paraprofessional. If the para will be helping a student who uses an augmentative communication device, the para should receive training on the device and that training should be written into the IEP. Similarly, if a student will be trying new devices, computer equipment or software, training should be required for the paraprofessional as well.

Generally, the paraprofessional is not privy to a student's IEP. However, if a paraprofessional is working with a child on a regular basis, he or she should be aware of the student's goals and, when appropriate, be encouraged to help chart a student's progress. And when the child study team meets to review an IEP, the paraprofessional should be invited to participate or at least be given the opportunity to offer input.

Paraprofessionals play a key role in educating children with disabilities. They deserve to be informed about the students in their charge and should be equipped with the skills and tools needed to assist the children they serve. For more information about including paraprofessionals in a student's IEP or providing training for paraprofessionals, contact Jackie Edwards at (609) 392-4004 ext. 526 or email jedwards@cpofnj.org.

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