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Summer is winding down, and it's time to start thinking about back-to-school, especially your child's Individualized Education Program (IEP). Hopefully, the "summer slide" wasn't too extreme for your child. If your child received Extended School Year (ESY) services, ideally, the services were productive and not just school-based babysitting.

If your child did experience regression during the summer, it's important that the start of the new school year is focused on recouping the lost skills. Regardless of when your child's Individualized Education Program expires, you want to make sure that the goals and objectives are consistent with your child's current abilities. Below are tips and to ensure that your child will be set up to maximize the benefits of their special education supports and services.

1. **Evaluations** - First and foremost, if your child does not have an IEP, but you feel as though they should, request an evaluation immediately. Under federal law, schools are given 60 days from the time of parental consent to complete their evaluation. Make sure you make your evaluation request as soon as you suspect a problem. If you have requested an evaluation and the school refused or said to “wait in line,” you should consult with an attorney or advocate.
2. **Ask for a meeting** - Don't be afraid to ask for a meeting during the first month of school to assess your child's progress and ensure the goals in their IEP are commensurate with their current abilities.
3. **Communication** - Don't wait for the school to contact you. Frequent check-ins with your child's teacher will ensure that you don't miss any important developments. It's always a good idea to communicate via email so you can look back later. Teachers have many children on their caseload and memories fade.
4. **Check dates** - Make sure your child's most recent educational evaluation and IEP are up to date. The last evaluation shouldn't be more than 3 years old (or 2 years old if your child has an intellectual disability) and their current IEP should be no more than 1 year old.
5. **Speak with your child** - Ask your child what their school day looks like. For example, if your child's IEP calls for speech “pull out” 3 times a week, ask your child if this is happening. Your child is often the best source of information for determining whether an IEP is being appropriately implemented.
6. **Be mindful of transitions** - It isn't easy to go from summer break to a more structured school day. This is especially true if your child is making one of the larger educational transitions (e.g., from middle school to high school). Students with certain disabilities, like autism, may have a particularly hard time with transitions. Behaviors that interfere with your child's ability to learn are often tied to inappropriate transition planning and goals. Don't be afraid to request that your school district [or charter school] incorporate transition goals into your child's IEP. Transition planning is a critical part of a successful school year. It is often the first couple months of the school year that set the tone and determine overall success for the year.

7. **Bullying** - Too often children with disabilities are bullied. No one can be expected to focus in school when they are the target of bullying. Your child's school should address bullying issues and there should be accommodations within your child's IEP to ensure they have the appropriate skills and resources to combat bullying.

If you feel as though your child's IEP is not currently appropriate to meet their needs, or if you feel as though your child may need an IEP, it may be wise to consult with an Education Lawyer.

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