



Series I - Step-By-Step Guide

Part XI - End of the School Year Responsibilities

Even though we are coming down to the end of the school year, there will be several important issues that need to be the focus of your attention. This is a very crucial part of the year since it will define what you have accomplished with parents and students. Many legal requirements occur during this time of year depending on the school district in which you are employed. So let's take these topics one at a time so that you are prepared for each one. The topics covered in this stage will include:

- ✚ Teacher reports for triennial evaluations
- ✚ Preparing for annual review meetings
- ✚ Declassification or decertification of students with learning disabilities
- ✚ Extended school year recommendations
- ✚ Writing end of year reports to parents

I-Teacher reports for triennial evaluations

Every three years, beginning from when the child was initially classified by the Eligibility Committee, a reevaluation takes place in order to assess the child's current strengths and weaknesses, determine if the variables that determined the classification are still present to the level of significant impairment, and to make recommendations based on the outcomes of the assessment. This assessment is very thorough as defined in the law and the results must be shared with the parents and the Eligibility Committee. This is sometimes done at the annual review for that year.

While this can occur at any time of the year, many school districts share triennial results at the annual review meeting held at the end of the school year. As the child's classroom teacher you will be asked by the Assessment Team, usually referred to as the Multidisciplinary Team, to provide information on the child that will assist in these recommendations. This information, in the form of a report, should include the following:

- ✚ The child's present academic levels in reading, math, spelling and writing. These may be available as a result of recent individual or group achievement tests, informal evaluations that you may have administered, observation (although try to be more objective), class tests etc.

- ✚ The child's present pattern of classroom behavior. Write this up in behavioral terms (factual, observable and descriptive notes of behavior that do not include analysis or judgment).
- ✚ The child's present levels of social interaction and social skills.
- ✚ The child's interest areas and areas of strength.
- ✚ Samples of the child's work
- ✚ Determine grade levels if possible, and where the child falls in comparison to others in the class.
- ✚ Outline of parent conferences, phone conversations or meetings and the purpose and outcome of each. These notes should be kept on an ongoing basis.
- ✚ Your opinion as to whether the child is benefiting from his present placement
- ✚ Any physical limitations noted and their implication on the learning process
- ✚ Any pertinent comments made by the child that may have an impact on his present situation.
- ✚ copy of the child's present schedule

II-Preparing for Annual Review Meetings

Beginning in March or April, depending on the school district, you will be asked to participate in annual review meetings. These meetings which are required by law are held by the Eligibility Committee to review the child's progress over the past school year and make recommendations for the following school year. The parent or parents of the child usually attend this meeting so being prepared is crucial. There are many things you will need to consider.

As with a regular Eligibility Committee meeting, there are several people who may attend this meeting (this may vary from district to district including the director of special education services or assignee, school psychologist, parent member, parent of the child, guidance counselor (secondary level), assigned teacher (at the secondary level this may be the classroom teacher in a self-contained class, resource room teacher if this is the only service provided, or one of the child's special education teachers in a special education departmentalized program) classroom teacher (elementary level), speech and language therapist (if the child classification requires attendance), the child if over a certain age (if the professionals feel that the child could benefit from the discussion or may be able to shed light on a concern or recommendation being considered) and any other individual deemed necessary.

This meeting should be taken very seriously since it will determine the child's educational direction and objectives for the coming year. As a result you should be prepared and familiar with the following materials:

- ✚ Any pre-and post-standardized test scores indicating the child's academic progress for the year.
- ✚ A copy of the child's report card clearly outlining grades and attendance for the year.
- ✚ Suggested goals and objectives for the coming year.
- ✚ An evaluation indicating whether or not the child benefited from the modifications allowed on his/her IEP, and the reasons why they may or may not have been beneficial.
- ✚ If applicable, recommendations for additional test modifications
- ✚ If applicable, recommendations for additional related services and the reasons why.

- ✚ If applicable, recommendations for reduction of related services and the reasons why.
- ✚ Samples of the child's work over the course of the year.
- ✚ A review of the child overall social progress for the year.

The above information should be sufficient to present a professional judgment of the child's progress and needs for the coming year (Pierangelo, 2004).

III-Declassification of a student with a Learning Disability-Considerations and Procedures

A major component of special education reform effort is the decertification of students no longer in need of special education services and, where necessary, providing support services and / or transitional services in general education. If declassification or decertification is determined to be necessary, you will be an active participant in this process.

During periodic review of the student's IEP (i.e., Annual Review, requested review and triennial review), the Eligibility Committee (IEP Committee, Committee on Special Education) should determine if the student no longer requires special education services as the students' needs can be met in the general education program. This committee should also determine for students who no longer require special education services, if the student requires temporary services to facilitate his/her transition to general education (i.e. declassification support services). Students who continue to require ongoing special education services for more than a year are not appropriate for decertification at this time.

Decisions regarding decertification must be made on an individual case-by-case basis by the Eligibility Committee, based on the needs of the student. The decertification process must comply with federal IDEA regulations and the Board of Education procedures for your district. This includes the active participation of the student's parents and the student, as appropriate, in the decision making process. Under the reauthorized IDEA, parents also have the right to request that assessments be conducted.

Declassification Support Services are temporary services (not to exceed twelve months) designed to assist students who have been declassified from a special education service and who are recommended for a general education program with no other special education services. Declassification Support Services provide temporary direct support to students and/or the receiving teacher to facilitate transition to the general education classroom and maintain appropriate student functioning. Declassification support services may include individual or group counseling, individual or group speech and language service, small group instruction, modified curricula or other strategies that have demonstrated success with students.

IV-Extended school year recommendations

One of the issues that you may need to consider is whether any of your students with learning disabilities will need services over the summer to ensure that they do not lose what they have gained. These services are provided to maintain continuity of learning and make sure that the student does not fall behind for the coming school year. These services are called Extended School Year services and are determined appropriate by the Eligibility Committee. However, again you will play a very crucial role in this determination and should be aware of the requirements.

As part of the IEP process, a multidisciplinary team must determine if a child needs a program of special education and related services extending beyond the normal school year. For such a child, restricting services to a standard number of school days per year does not allow development of an education program that is truly individualized. A child may require extended school year (ESY) services in order to receive FAPE (free and Appropriate Public Education).

Reasons why ESY services may be needed vary from child to child, but the end result is that some children may suffer severe losses of social, behavioral, communication, academic or self-sufficiency skills during interruptions in instruction. This is particularly true during long breaks such as summer vacations.

Losses suffered by a child may be so extensive that when school resumes, unreasonable amounts of time are needed to recover (recoup) lost skills. Other children may experience losses because they reach critical learning stages at the end of a school year and need ESY services to avoid irreparable loss of learning opportunity. For some children, skills that support continued placement in the least restrictive environment (LRE) can be maintained only by ESY services.

The determination of whether a child with a disability needs ESY services must be made on an individual basis following the IEP process. The critical question that each IEP team must ask regarding ESY services is whether the learning that occurred during the regular school year will be significantly jeopardized if ESY services are not provided.

Your role will include providing documentation to the committee. The primary criteria in determining a child's need for ESY services are the likelihood of significant regression of previously learned skills during a break in service, and limited or delayed recoupment of these skills after services resume. The courts have found that the regression/recoupment measures are an integral part of the determination of need for ESY services, although they are not the only measures.

In determining significant regression and limited recoupment, it is important to consider the distinction between generalization and maintenance. A loss of skills over time could be due to failure to maintain performance or failure to generalize acquired skills to new settings. Many children do not easily generalize acquired skills to environmental conditions beyond those under which initial learning took place. In terms of interventions, the distinction between maintenance and generalization is essential. Regression may be an indication of either or both.

Regression can be defined as a decline to a lower level of functioning demonstrated by a decrease of previously learned skills which occurs as a result of an interruption in educational

programming. Recoupment can be defined as the ability to recover or regain skills at the level demonstrated prior to the interruption of educational programming.

School districts should use regression/recoupment criteria in determining the need for ESY services, but a broad range of relevant factors must also be considered. The factors to be considered in making ESY placement decisions shall include, but are not limited to the following.

- ✚ **Category of disability.** Children with disabilities requiring consistent, highly structured programs may be predisposed to regression when their services are interrupted. These children may also have limited recoupment capacity.
- ✚ **Severity of disability.** Although limited recoupment capacity can occur among children with moderate disabilities, it is more likely to be a learning characteristic of children with severe disabilities. Children with the most severe emotional disturbance, for example, are more likely to revert to lower functioning levels or to exhibit inappropriate behaviors, such as extreme withdrawal or anxiety reactions, when their programs are interrupted. For many of these children, each successive interruption in programming and consequential regression also reduces the level of motivation and trust and may lead to an irreversible withdrawal from the learning process. Finally, children with severe disabilities are more likely to have difficulty attaining the goals of self-sufficiency and independence from caretakers, and may need additional help and support to reach those goals.
- ✚ **Parents' ability to provide an educational structure at home.** A parent or guardian may be unable to maintain a child's level of performance during a break in programming because of the complexity of the program, time constraints, lack of expertise, or other factors. This consideration is relevant to whether a child can be expected to regress. Also relevant is the child's stage of mastery of crucial skills or behavioral controls at the point of interruption in programming.

When appropriate, school districts should consider offering training to parents to help them maintain their child's level of performance during interruptions in programming. School districts may also consider offering support services in the home, either directly or in cooperation with other agencies, if such services will prevent the child's regression during breaks in programming. School districts are free to utilize the resources of other public or private agencies in order to meet the child's needs, so long as there is no cost or financial liability to the child's parents or guardians.

Child's rate of progress. Just as every child's rates of learning, regression, and recoupment are different from that of other children, an individual's rate of learning specific skills or behaviors may differ from his or her rate of attaining other skills. Certain skills or behaviors are particularly essential to meeting the goals of self-sufficiency. For example, basic self-help skills, such as toileting or eating, are essential for minimal independence; stable relationships, impulse control and appropriate peer interaction are necessary for community living. Therefore, if a child would suffer significant regression in a skill or behavior which is particularly crucial to reaching the goal of self-sufficiency and independence from caretakers, the child requires continuous education programming in that skill or behavior area.

Keep in mind that not all your students will require these services. However, closely evaluate each child's needs and do not be afraid to make this suggestion if you feel it might benefit him/her. If you make this recommendation, you are offering the committee your professional judgment and if you provide support for the above criteria you should make a very professional presentation.

V-Writing end of the year reports to parents

If your school district requires you to write end of year reports to parents you will need to take several things into consideration. In general you will want to use plain language since special education jargon may not be readily understood by most parents. You may want to hold your own end of the year meeting with all parents even though you may have just seen them at an annual review meeting. At this meeting you will want to discuss summer plans, extended school year services if applicable, the parent's role in maintaining learning over the summer, suggested materials and readings and discussion about what to expect next year. At this meeting you can go over your report but make sure they have a professional typed copy to take with them. When writing this report keep the following in mind:

- ✚ The written report will provide information on what students have learned as a result of the school's teaching programs in each of the key learning areas.
- ✚ Information provided in the report should be consistent with syllabuses in each key learning area. Written reports may also provide additional information about student achievement in relation to school programs that extend beyond syllabus requirements or where students have special needs.
- ✚ The written report will identify student strengths and areas that need further development or assistance.
- ✚ The written report will provide parents with information about the student's attendance at school.
- ✚ The written report will provide information about the student's social skills and development and commitment to learning.
- ✚ The written report may include information about student participation in other school programs e.g. sporting, leadership, clubs.
- ✚ Their child's progress toward the annual goals
- ✚ Whether this progress is sufficient in order for their child to achieve the goals by the end of the school year.

Try to keep the report to one page if possible. This can still be a lot of information for parents to grasp.

This brings us to the end of this classroom management series that we hope will prepare you for what lies ahead in the teaching of students with disabilities. We are sure that there may be other aspects you encounter that we did not cover. We have tried to provide you with a framework of issues that are normally experienced by teachers in your field. We hope this makes a difference for you in your job as a special education teacher.