

BACK TO SCHOOL TRANSITION: SUPPLYING PARENTS WITH THE TOOLS THEY NEED TO SURVIVE THE COMING SCHOOL YEAR AND BEYOND

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School has just started, and for the parents of children with special needs, this is the time to plan your own *Back To School* transition. Most parents view this time of year with anxiety-packed anticipation of the 2012-13 school year. Have you read your child's IEP? Do you understand the terms and acronyms in the IEP? For a useful guide to special education and related acronyms: nichcy.org/families-community/acronyms.

COMMUNICATIONS WITH THE SCHOOL ABOUT YOUR CHILD.

It is *never* too early to start to build a collaborative relationship with the school administrators, teachers and related service providers for new school year.

Checklist:

Do you know the staff assigned to your child?

Have you met with the 2012-13 school year staff?

Have you and a school staff member walked a child around the school building, especially if it is a new environment for your child?

Do you have concerns with your child's transition to the 2012-13 school year? If so, do you have a plan to communicate regularly with school staff during the 2012-13 school year through regularly scheduled informal meetings, e-mails, or other forms of communication?

Have you considered sending your child's teachers a letter or e-mail that describes your child's strengths, weaknesses, learning style, social issues, and any other concerns that you may have prior to the commencement of the 2012-13 school year?

If the school's staff was required to obtain training in certain areas of delivering the IEP services to your child, have you confirmed that the school staff has acquired that training since your last PPT meeting?

Remember, as much as the new school year involves a transition for your child, it is also an adjustment for the teachers and school staff as they get to know you and the needs of your child, along with the needs of many other children.

IS YOUR CHILD TRANSITIONING TO A NEW SCHOOL?

Is your child going to a new school next year? If so, have you visited the school and/or arranged to meet with the school staff that will be assigned to your child. Do not assume that the new school staff will know your child as well as you do or the staff from the previous school.

HAVE YOU NOTICED ANY CHANGES IN YOUR CHILD'S SKILLS OR BEHAVIORS SINCE THE END OF THE 2011-12 SCHOOL YEAR?

If your child has been out of school since the end of the 2011-12 school year and was not receiving any educational services over the summer, have you noticed any changes in his or her behaviors or skills since June? If so, you should be prepared to share that information with the school staff because gains or regression over the summer vacation could affect your child's transition to the new school year. This is especially important if you have noticed that your child has regressed over the summer since it could take several days or weeks for your child to adjust to the 2012-13 school year while attempting to recoup lost skills.

ANY NEW INFORMATION FROM AN ANNUAL CHECK-UP OR EVALUATION?

Have you taken your child to the pediatrician for an annual check up over the summer? If so, has the pediatrician noticed any changes since the last exam that is likely to affect your child's education? If so, you should obtain a letter from your child's doctor containing that information and any educational recommendations and provide that information to the school. If your child's IEP needs to be reviewed or revised because of that information, you should request a PPT meeting to review that information and any additional information that you have obtained since the last PPT meeting.

ANY NEW INFORMATION AVAILABLE FROM YOUR CHILD'S SUMMER CAMP, SOCIAL SKILLS GROUP, ARTS THERAPY OR TREATING PROFESSIONAL?

Did your child receive any private services over the summer from a summer camp, social skills program, or a treating professional such as a psychologist, physical therapist, occupational therapist, speech and language pathologist, or a social worker? If so, can you obtain any information or a letter regarding your child's progress in that summer program, along with any educational recommendations, if any? If so, you should share that information with the school especially if it will affect your child's 2012-13 school year program.

EFFECTIVE PARENT COMMUNICATION AND ADVOCACY.

It is never too early to start your own *Back To School* promotion and build a collaborative and positive working relationship with your child's teachers and other school staff. Through the process of sharing new information, on-going communications with school staff, periodic meetings, and parental monitoring of your child's progress during the school year, any issues and concerns that you may have can be addressed immediately, rather than allowing small problems or issues to evolve into insurmountable obstacles.

Attorney Lawrence Berliner practices in the area of special education law and disability law and legal advocacy throughout Connecticut. He is available for individual consultations and meetings with any parent organization to discuss the concerns of the group. He has offices located in both Westport and Guilford. Please review Attorney Berliner's website for additional information: berlinerspecialedlaw.com.