



TREES NETWORK

April 2026 Newsletter

Parent and Family Meeting

Monday, April 6, 2026 7 PM - 8 PM

Summer Camps and Programs for Students with Disabilities Meeting

Join us virtually on **Monday, April 6, 2026, from 7:00–8:00 PM** for our monthly Parent and Family Support Meeting. This month, we have invited several local organizations and camps to share information about their summer programs for students with disabilities, including what participants will learn, how they will benefit, and the lasting impact these experiences can provide. Some of these programs may also qualify as your child's Extended School Year (ESY) programming. Representatives from The Woodlands (Wexford), Always B Smiling (Washington), Camp HERO (Millvale), AAC Camp (South Hills), and Hilltop Horizons (Beaver) will present and be available to answer your questions. Anyone interested in attending can register by contacting Vicki Donne at donne@rmu.edu, Deanna Hiltz at hiltzd@rmu.edu, or by completing the Google Registration form (<https://forms.gle/961qekrNjXsdew9A9>) Upon registration, registrants will be sent a Google Meets calendar invitation.



Save the Date!

Monday, May 4, 2026 7 PM - 8 PM

Student Advocacy 101 Meeting



Join us virtually on **Monday, May 4, from 7:00–8:00 PM** for our monthly Parent and Family Support Meeting. In May, Melissa Skiffen, Coordinator of Individual Advocacy and Supported Decision Making, will be joining us to discuss advocacy. She will talk about what advocates do, when it is time to call in an advocate, what information an advocate may need to know, and general tips when working with advocates. Anyone interested in attending can register by contacting Vicki Donne at donne@rmu.edu, Deanna Hiltz at hiltzd@rmu.edu, or by completing the Google Registration form (<https://forms.gle/nwqQGBubkVACk3TJ8>) Upon registration, registrants will be sent a Google Meets calendar invitation.

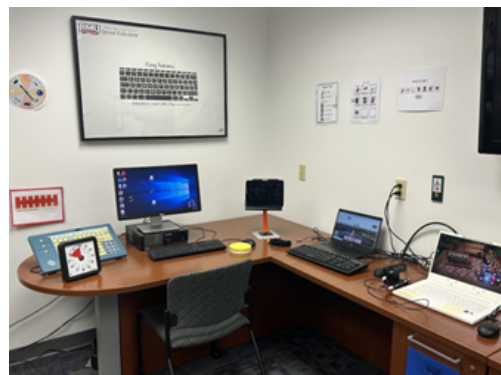
Individual IEP Collaborations and/or Conferences

Feeling overwhelmed by your child's IEP? You're not alone, and you don't have to navigate it by yourself. The RMU Trees Network is offering virtual office hours for parents and guardians who have questions about their child's Individualized Education Program (IEP). Whether you're brand new to special education or have attended multiple IEP meetings, we're here to help you make sense of the language, understand your child's supports and services, learn how to request things like Extended School Year (ESY) services, and feel more confident in the process. These one-on-one conversations are guided by your questions. No question is too big or too small. We provide a safe, supportive space to gain clarity and peace of mind. Email Vicki at donne@rmu.edu or Deanna at hiltzd@rmu.edu to set up a time.

Trees Assistive Technology Device Center Open Lab Days

The Trees Network maintains an Assistive Technology (AT) Device Center for use by students and families. AT is any item, piece of equipment, software or product system that is used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities (IDEA, 2004). AT can range from low technology (such as a pencil grip) to high technology (speech recognition software). The AT Device Center hosts Open Lab Days

on **Mondays from 9:00 am - 3:00 pm**. The Device Center will be open to the public without an appointment. Visitors can explore a variety of AT, including adapted computer equipment, communication devices, and switch-friendly apps and toys. Staff will be available to answer questions; however, individualized support is dependent on the number of participants. Appointments are also available. Come to RMU, **Patrick Henry 333** and check out the various devices.



Featured IEP Resources Extended School Year (ESY)

Each month, we will highlight one key component of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) and share resources to support understanding and implementation. These monthly spotlights are designed to break the IEP into manageable parts, clarify roles and responsibilities, and provide tools that can be immediately applied in classrooms and meetings. By focusing on one detail at a time, we aim to strengthen collaboration, improve consistency, and ensure IEPs are meaningful support for students. This month's spotlight is on **Extended School Year (ESY) services**.

In Pennsylvania, **Extended School Year (ESY)** services are special education services provided to some students with disabilities beyond the regular school year when the IEP team determines the student needs continued support to receive a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). ESY is individualized special education designed to maintain progress and prevent skill loss. The IEP team decides if a student qualifies for ESY. The decision must

be based on data and the student's individual needs, not on disability category or available programs.

In Pennsylvania commonly considered factors are:

- Regression and recoupment
- Severity of the disability
- Critical life skills or emerging skills that could be lost without continued instruction
- Progress toward IEP goals
- Behavioral or communication needs

According to guidance from the Pennsylvania Department of Education, every student with an IEP must be considered for ESY each year, and the decision must be documented in the IEP. If a student qualifies, the IEP will specify the services, location, frequency, and dates of the ESY program.

Upcoming Events Around the Area

The RMU Trees Network is a member of the Special Needs Consortium, a group of amazing service providers in the Pittsburgh area. The consortium exists to provide a forum where all service providers can network and opportunities can be shared, promoted, and advocated for to increase awareness of resources available to the community. For a full listing of member events, visit their [website](https://www.specialneedsconsortium.org/upcoming-events) (<https://www.specialneedsconsortium.org/upcoming-events>). We hope you will find some of these highlighted events of interest to you.

April 11th and April 25th 10AM-2PM - Camp Woodlands Jr. Day Camps

Camp Woodlands Jr. (CWJ) is designed for campers, ages 6-12. Each Saturday session features a wide range of activities including arts and crafts, nature exploration, music, sports, "snack-tivities," and more. The Saturday session costs \$75 (lunch included). They accept out of pocket or private pay, ESY, and waiver funding. They also have a scholarship program called the "Wonderfund" to assist with cost, available upon request. To apply or for more information, contact Leia Patsilevas, 724-935-5470 or lpatsilevas@woodlandsfoundation.org www.mywoodlands.org

April 15th and 29th 5:00PM - 7:00PM Big Feelings, Real Solutions: Helping Your Child Through Challenging Behaviors - Beaver Valley Intermediate Unit

This is a 2-part presentation on behavior management and childhood trauma conducted at the Beaver Valley Intermediate Unit in Center Township (Beaver County). This event is completely free, and the target audience is parents/guardians/caretakers, group home workers, agency employees, and adoption/foster parents. Contact Chris McCabe at christopher.mccabe@bviu.org or Melissa Niedbala at melissa.niedbala@bviu.org to register.

April 24th - 26th (starting at 5:30pm) - Teen/Young Adult Weekend Retreat at The Woodlands: Spring Around the World

Travel the globe without leaving camp as participants explore spring traditions from different cultures through games, crafts, and hands-on activities. Explore the powerful forces of nature through hands-on science experiments, movement-based games, and creative discovery. From 5:30 PM on Friday to 11:00 AM on Sundays, these inclusive getaways for youth with disability and chronic illness are created for individuals ages 13-24! Whether you're a sports lover, singer, cook, or in touch with nature, the Woodlands covers it all! Each retreat offers a variety of activities that encourage social connections, health, and leadership skills. Activities encourage new experiences that spark creativity and self-discovery. Each retreat costs \$585.

They accept out of pocket or private pay, ESY, and waiver funding. They also have a scholarship program called the “Wonderfund” to assist with cost, available upon request. To apply or for more information, contact Leia Patsilevas, 724-935-5470 or lpatsilevas@woodlandsfoundation.org www.mywoodlands.org

April 25th, May 9th, and June 6th from 10AM-11AM - Bridge’s Adaptive Field Hockey at Brookline Rec Center

Bridges Adaptive Field Hockey, a new adaptive, disability-inclusive field hockey team serving the greater Pittsburgh area. Bridges is the first adaptive field hockey team in Western PA and the Great Lakes Region. Lydia Smeltz is the founder and head coach of the team.

The mission is to:

1. Increase access to field hockey for athletes with disabilities;
2. Build relationships between disabled and non-disabled athletes in the greater Pittsburgh region; and
3. Raise community and healthcare awareness of the importance of physical activity for people with disabilities.

Individuals can participate for one date or all three. More details are included in the sign-up: https://glrfieldhockey.playbookapi.com/programs/more_info/class_package/62507/

The Woodlands Teen/Young Adult Summer Camps

Occurring from 3:30PM on Sunday through 11:00AM on Friday, these inclusive camp experiences are designed for individuals ages 13–24. Participants are served dinner on Sunday, all three meals Monday through Thursday, and breakfast on Friday. All programs may also be attended as day-camp experiences, with daily check-in beginning at 9:45 AM and pick-up as late as 8:30 PM.

- **June 7-12:** Teen/YA Camp Woodlands: (General camp experience)
- **June 21-26:** Notes from the Heart (music camp)
- **July 12-17:** Maker Camp: (where science, creativity, and teamwork come together)
- **August 2-7:** Camp Bloom: (Transition/life skills based camp)

The Woodlands accepts out of pocket or private pay, ESY, and waiver funding. They also have a scholarship program called the “Wonderfund” to assist with cost, available upon request. PPS Students may utilize CCS Hours. Registration : mywoodlands.org

June 23rd - June 25th from 9AM - 12PM - Inclusive Summer Camp at Hilltop Horizons

Our Summer Camp offers participants the opportunity to connect with horses through a blend of mounted and unmounted activities, designed to build confidence, coordination, teamwork, and joy all in a supportive barn environment. Each camp day may feature:

- Mounted riding activities focused on balance, coordination, following directions, and confidence-building
- Un-mounted horse activities such as grooming, tacking, leading, and horse observation
- Barn-based games and group challenges that encourage teamwork and communication
- Hands-on learning experiences including basic horse care, barn routines, and safety awareness
- Creative activities and movement breaks to support sensory regulation and engagement

All activities are adapted to meet participants where they are and are led by our experienced, PATH Intl. staff and trained volunteers.

July 28th - July 31st - AAC Summer Camp

ICAN Talk AAC Summer Camp is a 3.5 day program of interactive, fun-filled activities designed specifically for children and adults who use alternative and augmentative communication (AAC) systems to communicate. Our program gives these individuals opportunities to communicate with other AAC users, develop their language skills, and use their AAC devices in new and exciting ways. The camp includes an AAC training seminar for parents, excursions to local attractions, and optional one-on-one consultations with clinical experts in AAC. For additional information, contact Christine at clepore@aacinstitute.org

Band Together upcoming events:

- **April 9th 7:00PM**
1775 Three Degree Rd, Mars, PA
Register: [https://urldefense.com/v3/_https://bandtogetherpgh.org/event/live-autism-friendly-open-mic-mars-area-middle-school-3/_:!!HE3Wh9YiWbHP!1jevUCsRALYDLnL4wa0kbYhPkJB4_j9CMHU7QuDOF_1leHOWSLPf7ZSLjIIWTYYzN6crFg7oJOHGPmRQ4WHdA\\$](https://urldefense.com/v3/_https://bandtogetherpgh.org/event/live-autism-friendly-open-mic-mars-area-middle-school-3/_:!!HE3Wh9YiWbHP!1jevUCsRALYDLnL4wa0kbYhPkJB4_j9CMHU7QuDOF_1leHOWSLPf7ZSLjIIWTYYzN6crFg7oJOHGPmRQ4WHdA$)
- **April 12th 2:00PM - 5:00PM**
Moondog's, 378 Freeport Rd, Blawnox, PA
Register: [https://urldefense.com/v3/_https://bandtogetherpgh.org/event/live-autism-friendly-open-mic-band-together-clubhouse-40/_:!!HE3Wh9YiWbHP!1jevUCsRALYDLnL4wa0kbYhPkJB4_j9CMHU7QuDOF_1leHOWSLPf7ZSLjIIWTYYzN6crFg7oJOHGPmR2-n8XQ\\$](https://urldefense.com/v3/_https://bandtogetherpgh.org/event/live-autism-friendly-open-mic-band-together-clubhouse-40/_:!!HE3Wh9YiWbHP!1jevUCsRALYDLnL4wa0kbYhPkJB4_j9CMHU7QuDOF_1leHOWSLPf7ZSLjIIWTYYzN6crFg7oJOHGPmR2-n8XQ$)

DON'T FORGET TO THINK OF YOUR LOCAL LIBRARY FOR EVENTS

- **Allegheny Library Association Programs & Events**
(<https://aclalibraries.org/explore/library-programs-and-events/>)
- **Beaver County Library Systems**
(<https://www.beaverlibraries.org/system-wide-events>)
- **Butler County Federated Library Systems** (<https://www.bcfls.org/libraries>)
- **Washington County Library Systems** (<https://www.washlibs.org/>)
- **Westmoreland County Libraries** (<https://www.wclibraries.org/>)

Council Events

- The Pittsburgh/Allegheny County Local Interagency Coordinating Council (LICC) is a group of families, professionals, and community members who work to improve the delivery of Early Intervention services for young children with developmental delays and disabilities. Their next meeting will be held on Tuesday, May 26, 2026 at 9AM. To register, email strocheck@afit.org.
- The Allegheny County Local Task Force will meet on Wednesday, May 6, 2026. To join, visit <https://www.ltf3.org/meetings>

Resources for Parents and Educators

The Network provides resources for parents and teachers and these resources can be found at the [RMU Trees Network Website](https://donne94.wixsite.com/rmu-trees-network) (<https://donne94.wixsite.com/rmu-trees-network>). Information on the Network and the previous newsletters are posted on the RMU website <https://www.rmu.edu/academics/provost/trees>. In each newsletter we



provide links to resources related to the topics discussed in our parent meetings and workshops as well as other information that may be helpful to families, schools, and the community. **Below are some links to resources to Behavior, which was our topic covered by Brittany Maurizi at our March 2nd meeting.**

- **Balanced Behaviors, LLC** - Balanced Behaviors, LLC mission is to provide warm, nonjudgmental, and evidence-based ABA therapy for children, adolescents, adults, and families. They listen first, tailor support to each individual's unique needs, and partner with families every step of the way, helping people build meaningful skills, confidence, and independence in a supportive, real-life environment.
<https://www.balancedbehaviorsllc.com/>
- **Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA)** - Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) is a therapy based on the science of learning and behavior. ABA therapy applies our understanding of how behavior works to real situations. The goal is to increase behaviors that are helpful and decrease behaviors that are harmful or affect learning.
<https://www.autismspeaks.org/applied-behavior-analysis>
- **Functional Behavior Assessments (FBA) and Positive Behavior Plans (PBSP) Resources** - An FBA is used to identify the underlying causes or functions of a student's challenging behavior. The purpose is to understand why a behavior occurs by examining the antecedents, the behavior itself, and the consequences. Once an FBA is conducted, the information gathered is used to develop a Positive Behavior Support Plan outlining strategies and supports to help the student learn new, more appropriate behaviors that serve the same function as the challenging behavior.
<https://www.pattan.net/Testing/Learning-Environment-Engagement-1/LEEI-Topics-Navigation/LEEI-Topics-1-1/Functional-Behavior-Assessments-FBAs-and-Positive>
- **Four Functions of Behavior** - The 4 functions of behavior are avoidance, access, attention, and sensory. Understanding each function may help you replace unwanted behaviors with desired behaviors.
<https://psychcentral.com/autism/functionsofbehavioraba>

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RMU Trees Website (<https://donne94.wixsite.com/rmu-trees-network>)
RMU Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/RMUtrees/>)

