

School Advocacy Program Overview



Mental health issues create challenges at school that increase stress, anxiety, and obstacles to learning. Navigating the school system can be difficult and overwhelming for parents – developing IEPs and 504 plans, knowing what accommodations their child is entitled to, and ensuring those accommodations are implemented.

Even with a cooperative and collaborative school district as a partner, parents must still know intricacies of federal and state laws governing special education. These laws can be difficult to understand, making it harder to ensure they are adhered to. In less ideal circumstances, schools may refuse to offer an IEP, grant needed accommodations, or provide services that are essential to your child's success.

Parents are bombarded with educational and legal jargon that makes the process unnecessarily complex. This can cause your child to be denied needed services and to fall behind academically, socially, and emotionally. These unfortunate outcomes reinforce and perpetuate your child's resistance to going to school and can irreparably damage their self-esteem.

After periods of simmering conflict, many parents turn to attorneys to help make schools provide needed services. This option typically costs thousands of dollars, involving an unpredictable number of consultations with each billed by the hour. While attorneys are experts in the law, they are not experts on mental illnesses and the unique impacts they have on children. Worse, this route takes an already stressful situation and escalates the tension and mistrust between family and school.

JBRF Is Here To Help

Every child, regardless of diagnosis, deserves to have access to learning and accommodations that will promote their success in school. JBRF believes that most times this goal can be achieved without the threat of lawyers and litigation.

JBRF's school advocacy program helps families navigate the long and

complex process of requesting assessments for, developing, and implementing an IEP. JBRF provides guidance and support from an experienced educational advocate *as well as* a mental health professional with specific expertise in diagnoses such as bipolar disorder and Fear of Harm.

What We Offer

JBRF provides comprehensive and supportive school related advocacy services to families at highly competitive rates. Unlike most advocacy programs and services JBRF's services fall into two areas:

Mental Health Expertise

Families meet with the mental health advocate (MHA) to:

- Learn about effective intervention strategies;
- Have your questions answered;
- Plan for meetings with the school.

The MHA will virtually attend meetings with the school as a direct support to the family. The MHA will educate school officials on:

- The mental health diagnosis;
- How its symptoms manifest;
- How they impact children;
- The specific mental health needs of your child.

The MHA will also provide context to school officials to help them understand:

- Symptom driven behaviors seen at school;
- How to manage them effectively.

These meetings can be with the full team or with individual teachers or school officials.

Educational Expertise

Families meet with the educational advocate (EA) to:

- Have your questions answered;
- Learn about your rights and the school's obligations;
- Plan for meetings with the school;
- Develop a prioritized plan of accommodations for your child.

The EA will virtually attend meetings with the school as a direct support to the family. The EA will assist in:

- Documenting the discussions and agreements made;
- Reinforcing your family and student rights;
- Outlining the correct child-focused framing of accommodations;
- Ensuring the school is fulfilling its obligations to provide equal access to learning for your child.

About Our Advocates

Mental Health Advocate:

JBRF executive director, Elizabeth Errico, is a mental health professional with more than 20 years of experience in the fields of counseling, psychotherapy, and education. She is a licensed psychotherapist and taught undergraduate psychology for nearly a decade.

Ms. Errico earned two master's degrees, one in psychological counseling and one in counseling and education, from Columbia University, Teachers College. She is a member of the American Counseling Association and the National Board of Certified Counselors.

Ms. Errico works tirelessly on behalf of families to ensure children receive the mental health treatment they deserve.

Educational Advocate:

Anna-Christina Allen has spent more than 20 years advocating for and supporting individuals and families suffering from a variety of diagnoses, including mental illness.

Ms. Allen provides advocacy to ensure that children have access to medical, social, educational, and mental health services and accommodations. She works closely with families to ensure that all children have access to the

resources they need to succeed in school and beyond.

You Don't Have To Go It Alone

Working to get your child the accommodations they need at school can be an exhausting and overwhelming task. But you don't have to do it on your own and you don't have to reinvent the wheel.

Let JBRF help you, your child, and your school get on the path to success. Let's take the school experience from this...



... to this.

