

Family Ambassador Resource (FAR) program

THE ROLE OF FAMILY AMBASSADORS

What is the FAR Program?

It is a family-to-family support network where families of children with disabilities can find community among themselves and connect with each other to share their experiences, supportive strategies and resources as they navigate the special education systems.

Who are the Family Ambassadors?

- They are family members of children with disabilities who are currently enrolled in or have graduated from Maryland Public School System.
- They are graduates of the Family-as-Host (FAH) model training that position families as experts in their own lives, with lived experience, expert knowledge and valuable school partners who contribute towards shared goals and successful outcomes.
- They serve as **family-to-family support volunteers** who encourage parents to advocate for themselves without the need for a third party.
- They are NOT a formal parent advocate in special education.

What Family Ambassadors Do ✓

Instead of acting as a representative or advocate, Family Ambassadors share their lived experience navigating special education. They provide encouragement and reassurance. They suggest possible strategies or resources that helped them. They also help connect families to school family support departments or community resources when needed.

What Family Ambassadors Do Not Do ✗

Family Ambassadors are not professional advocates, and so they do not attend IEP meetings as representatives or provide legal advice. They do not speak on behalf of parents or replace professional services and support. Their role is strictly peer/family-to-family support.

The FAH & FAR project—a collaboration between Howard County Public School System and Maryland Center for Developmental Disabilities at Kennedy Krieger Institute, is supported by the Family Engagement grant from the Maryland State Department of Education, Division of Special Education Services.

Project lead: Mirian Ofonedu, PhD.



KennedyKrieger.org/FamilyEngagement
or scan the QR Code to connect with a
Family Ambassador.

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EXAMPLE OF WHAT THE FAR PROGRAM IS

Imagine yourself as a parent of a child with a disability who is overwhelmed and unsure how to navigate the school system.

In this scenario, you as a parent might reach out to one of the Family Ambassadors on the list provided (let's say Ms. Sarah is the Family Ambassador). Ms. Sarah is not a school employee, advocate, or service provider. Instead, she is another parent who has already gone through the same experiences.

You call Ms. Sarah not for formal advocacy, but for something much more personal: That is, shared lived experience and guidance from someone who truly understands.

The conversation might begin simply as:

- "I just found out my child has a disability."
- "I don't know how the IEP process works."
- "I feel overwhelmed by the school system."
- "I was given the Family Ambassadors list by the school, which is how I found your contact information."

Ms. Sarah's role is to respond from experience, by saying something like:

"I understand how you feel. I went through this too."

She might explain:

- How she navigated the IEP process
- Who she contacted in the school system
- What resources, programs or departments she reached out to
- What helped her advocate for her child
- What mistakes she learned from

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