



# Functional Behavior Assessment Guidance Document



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# Introduction

The Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) Guidance Document is the collaborative work of a multi-disciplinary team from Colorado that includes Colorado Department of Education personnel, special educators, school social workers, behavioral analysts, university faculty, and district level behavioral specialists. The purpose of this document is to guide educators, specialists, and mental health providers through the process of completing an FBA. The FBA process is meant to guide school teams in identifying and prioritizing behaviors of greatest concern, determining functions, making decisions, and designing interventions that support students' behavior and social-emotional needs. Through this process, a more inclusive learning environment can be created and sustained. This document provides guidance around the analysis and summary of FBA data and supports alignment of FBA data and Behavior Intervention Plan content (Cherry Creek Schools FBA Handbook, 2018).

Conducting an FBA is the process of collecting a body of evidence when school personnel (e.g., teachers, administrators, staff) identify students who demonstrate serious or chronic behavior challenges. A basic assumption of FBA is that “behavior serves a purpose: The behavior is performed to obtain a desired outcome or goal (i.e., obtain or escape)” (National Center on Intensive Intervention, 2013, p. 1). Depending on the intensity or complexity of the behavior, different types of data are collected from a variety of sources to form a body of evidence. Direct or indirect data may be collected using tools such as interviews with individuals who know the student or behavioral observations in the school setting. A review of records may also be conducted, including the examination of documents from outside providers (e.g. physicians) as appropriate. The FBA collects information on student needs in multiple areas including Antecedent Analysis, Consequence Analysis, Historical Analysis, Health/Medical analysis, Ecological/environmental Analysis, Social Status analysis, Emotional Status Analysis, Communication Analysis, Mediator Status Analysis, Cultural Analysis, and Routine Analysis to help the team determine the “why,” or the function, of the behavior.

## Legal Requirements

To best support students with diverse needs and strengths, an understanding of the relationship between behavior and learning is essential. To that end, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (“IDEA”) requires IEP teams to address behavior that impedes a child’s learning or the learning of others. IEP teams must consider a child’s need for behavioral interventions and support on an individual basis during IEP development, review, and revision. Parents and guardians are required to be notified throughout the FBA process and should be included in the development of a behavior support plan (CDE, 2017). The Colorado Department of Education 2017 created guidance for the schools regarding FBAs, called [ESSU Technical Assistance Functional Behavioral Assessment \(FBA\) and Behavior Intervention Plans \(BIP\)](#).



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This guidance document supports best practices in promoting expected behavior and preventing and managing undesirable behaviors, which may include conducting an FBA and developing a Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) based on FBA data.

## Parent/Guardian Permission

Before conducting an FBA, **Parent/Guardian Permission** must be obtained for students receiving general education or special education services.

Colorado law requires that the parent/guardian be notified of any test in the area of behavior. The recommended testing must be described along with plans for the use of results. For students with an IEP or 504, the established permissions and assessment notifications are required. When conducting an FBA outside of the normal IEP assessment cycle, this assessment will reset all the IEP due dates (as assessment for an FBA only is the same as conducting a reevaluation). Special Education and/or Section 504 Consent should not be used unless the child has been referred. Students who do not have an IEP or 504 plan in these situations are typically receiving support through the MTSS process. A form letter generated by the local school district/BOCES is used to obtain parent/guardian permission.

“School personnel shall not test or require a test for a child’s behavior without prior written permission from the parents or guardians of the child and prior written disclosure as to the disposition of the results or the testing therefrom.” (C.R.S 22-32-109 [1] [ee]).

## Functional Behavioral Assessment

The IDEA does not define functional behavioral assessment (“FBA”). However, an FBA may be used to evaluate a child’s unique behavioral needs and identify undesirable behaviors and the function (or reason) behind those behaviors. An undesirable behavior is one that interferes with learning and a child’s ability to make progress on IEP goals. Written permission (informed consent) from a parent/guardian is required before the IEP team performs an FBA. This is because an FBA considers a wide range of child-specific information—often as part of an initial evaluation or a reevaluation—to inform the development of positive behavioral interventions and supports, such as a behavior intervention plan.

## Behavior Intervention Plan

The IDEA does not define a behavior intervention plan (“BIP”). However, a BIP is commonly used to describe the behavioral interventions and supports in a child’s IEP that are designed to prevent and manage undesirable behavior. A BIP should be informed by an FBA and, like an IEP, must be tailored to a child’s individual disability-related needs. The failure to develop, review, and revise a BIP as part of the IEP process—or to properly implement a BIP’s interventions and support after development—may result in the denial of a free appropriate public education (“FAPE) for a child with a disability (if need for a BIP has been identified).

## Situations Requiring an FBA and a BIP

When a child's behavior impedes their own learning, or that of other children, the child's IEP team must consider the use of positive behavioral interventions and supports to address the behavior. These behavioral interventions and supports, which may include an FBA and a BIP, must be used proactively. An FBA and a BIP are explicitly required in two situations related to the discipline of a child with a disability:

- When a manifestation determination review reveals that a child's behavior was a manifestation of the child's disability. In that case, the IEP team must either:
  - Complete an FBA (unless the school district completed an FBA before the at-issue behavior occurred) and implement a BIP; or
  - If the child already has a BIP, review and modify the BIP, as necessary, to address the behavior.
- When a manifestation determination review reveals that a child's behavior was not a manifestation of the child's disability. In that case, the IEP team must provide, as appropriate, an FBA and behavior interventions designed to address the behavior and reduce the likelihood that it will occur again.

### Best Practices

FBA is conducted for a student when:

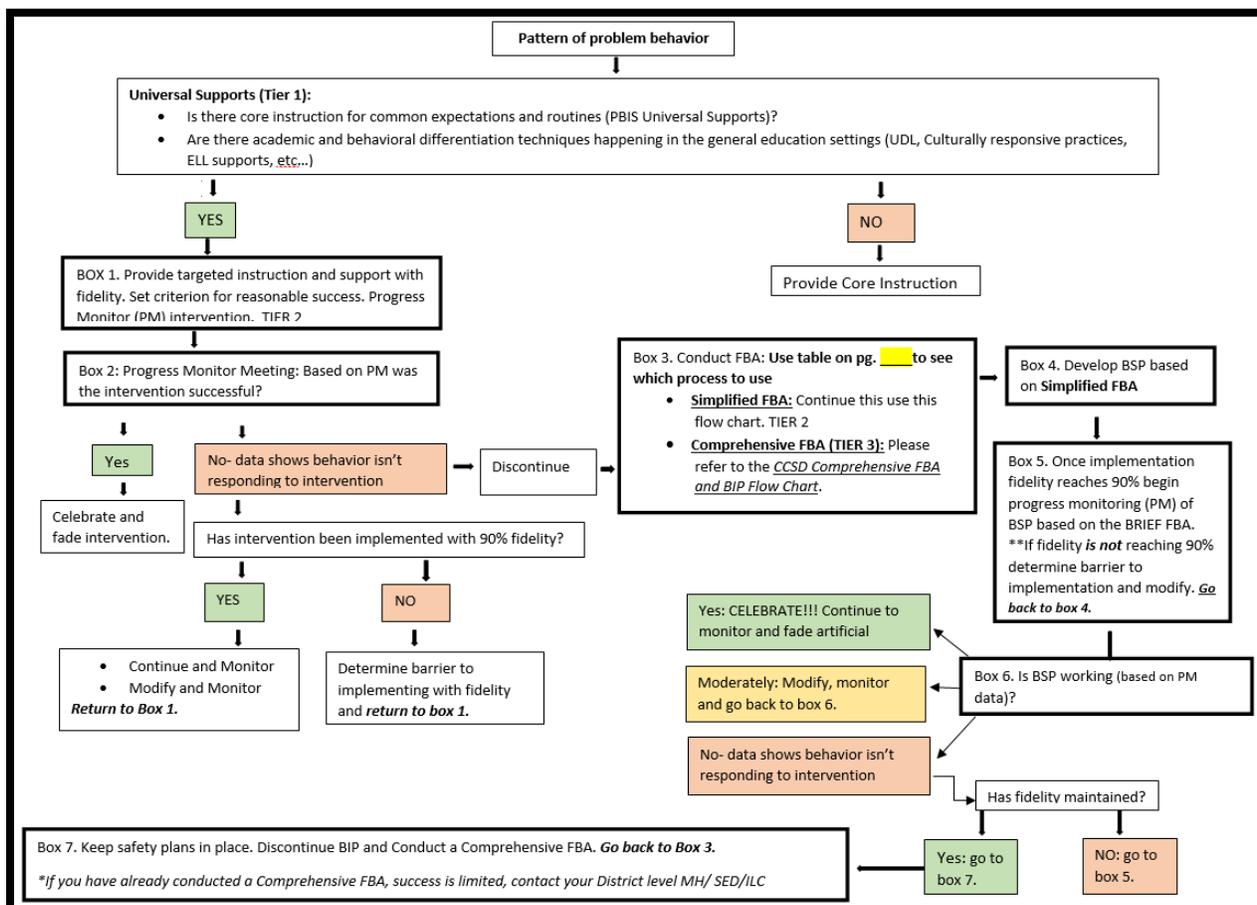
- there is a pattern of maladaptive behavior(s)
- the current behavior program is not effective
- the student or others are at risk for harm.
- a more restrictive placement or a more intensive intervention is contemplated.

### FBA Systems

The purpose of Figure 1 is to help schools and practitioners with a clear process for determining when an FBA should be conducted.



Figure 1  
FBA Systems



(Adapted from Crone et al., 2015)

# Behavior Theory

FBA's are rooted in the theory that behavior is functional, meaning all behavior serves a purpose, communicates, and has a function. Another way to think about function is that people engage in behaviors because they benefit from that behavior (i.e., obtain something, escape something). Behavior is situational in that we adjust our behavior depending on the circumstance or situation. Behavior is also learned, which means that new ways of behavior can be acquired or "re-learned." Understanding the function or purpose underlying a student's behavior can help a school team develop a plan to teach the child more appropriate, prosocial behaviors to replace the behavior of concern.

## Different Types of FBA

Types of FBA's exist on a continuum from a Brief FBA (possibly using a check box system) to a Full FBA (conducting interviews and observations). At an even higher level of support, a Functional Analysis may be conducted. This involves the skill sets of BCBA's or highly trained mental health staff members. The three types of FBA's are briefly described in Table 1.

**Table 1 Types of FBA**

FBA Type	Goal	Description
<b>Brief FBA</b>	To define the challenging behavior	Process typically only involves a short interview with teachers, staff, or parents/guardians who have dealt with or witnessed the challenging behavior previously.
<b>Full FBA</b>	To build an understanding of when, how, and why problem behavior occurs, including a summary statement describing the function of the behavior	Most common FBA used. Process typically involves short and extended interviews, a record review, and direct observations of challenging behavior.
<b>Functional Analysis</b>	To test the hypothesis generated by a full FBA so that an effective intervention can be developed and implemented	Combines direct observations and systematic experimental manipulations of the environment (antecedents and consequences) to confirm an understanding of the function of a specific behavior.

Although there may be a tendency for staff members to think of the FBA process as "form oriented," the process is not. While the steps remain the same, the content will differ for each



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individual student. The FBA summary form is a tool that was designed by the FBA Workgroup, a subgroup of the SED Taskforce, to help summarize the body of evidence that was collected through the FBA Process. The FBA Summary form does not drive the FBA process, but instead allows the team to capture its end results.

## What influences behavior?

Behavior is defined as any act which is both observable (i.e., an individual can see and describe it) and measurable (i.e., an individual can count or measure the intensity). Problem behaviors do not occur randomly. All behavior is related to and influenced by other events. Every behavior has a function, and behaviors of concern can serve several functions. To change behavior, the intent and purpose of the behavior must be understood. Note that, while all behavior services a purpose, is not *personal*.

Teaching behaviors is part of an educator's role and responsibility, as adults model the behaviors which are expected from students in the school setting. The educator also sets the behavioral expectations within the classroom and school environment. Once these expectations have been established, they need to be directly taught to the student. Direct instruction regarding these expectations (pro-social behavior) increases the likelihood that the students will demonstrate the expected behaviors, thereby decreasing behaviors of concern.

Data-driven decision-making is necessary for the success of any behavior intervention plan. Addressing behaviors of concern early can decrease challenges which may be encountered later, as proactive intervention supports long-term student growth. Table 2 depicts variables that commonly influence expected behavior and behaviors of concern.

**Table 2 Variables that Commonly Influence the Occurrence of Expected and Problem Behavior**

Variable Type	Influence Expected Behavior: Meets learner Needs	Influence Behaviors of Concern: Does not meet learner needs
<b>Curricular and Instructional</b>	Predictable schedule and change in routine	Unpredictable schedule and change in routing
	Supported difficult task	Unsupported difficult task
	Reinforcement in setting	Little or no reinforcement in setting
	Meaningful curriculum	Curriculum is not meaningful
	Instruction pacing is differentiated to meet learner needs	Instruction pacing does not accommodate learner needs
	Student choice	Lack of student choice
	Task variation	Lack of task variation
	Errors are corrected quickly to result in low rates of errors	High rates of errors are not addressed.
<b>Environmental</b>	Temperature	Temperature
	Noise level	Noise level
	Lighting	Lighting
	Number of people in the room	Number of people in the room
	Adequate personal space	Inadequate personal space
	Seating positioning	Seating positioning
<b>Health, Medical, and Personal</b>	Addressed:	Not addressed:
	Allergies	Allergies
	Pain	Pain
	Illness	Illness
	Fatigue	Fatigue
	Hunger and thirst	Hunger and thirst
	Medication side effects	Medication side effects
	Mood	Mood



Variable Type	Influence Expected Behavior: Meets learner Needs	Influence Behaviors of Concern: Does not meet learner needs
Social	Staff presence	Staff missing
	Peer presence and attention	Lack of peer presence and attention
	Staff consistency	Changes in staff
	Social connection	Social isolation

## Team Collaboration

The completion of an FBA is a team process. One individual may oversee collection and organization of FBA components. However, this individual is not the only staff member engaged in the collection of the body of evidence that makes up the FBA.

The development of the FBA team should be based upon the knowledge and skills of selected staff members. Those who have the most comprehensive knowledge of the student are the individuals who should be part of the student's team. The size of the teams will vary, but the following stakeholders are necessary:

- Those who will implement the interventions
- At least one individual who is knowledgeable about school/district/BOCES resources, laws, policies, and procedures and has decision-making ability re: allocation of school's resources
- At least one staff member with knowledge and experience in behavioral programming, intervention, FBA processes, and the development/implementation of Behavior Intervention Plans
- Parent/guardian or other relevant family member

Other team members may include School based Mental Health (Counselor, Social Worker, School Psychologist) and/or a Speech Language Pathologist. One of the team members must be identified as the lead or the facilitator of the team.

The following five tasks are essential to the FBA process and are the responsibility of the designated team leader:

1. Assemble the team, arrange roles, agree on a unified long-term vision for the student, develop short-term goals, and define the target behavior(s).
2. Organize a data collection system, determining who will collect and summarize the data (and how this will be done).
3. Discuss the Collected FBA Information and summarize that information into a hypothesis statement.

4. Develop the BIP (identifying who will be implementing the plan, how it will be implemented, and when the strategies will be used).
5. Review progress monitoring information after two weeks of data have been collected. The purpose of reviewing implementation data is to determine the need for any modification to the plan.

## Determining and Defining Target Behavior (Goal Setting)

First, the team must determine what behavior needs to be addressed. The team may pick one, two or three behaviors. The team should not focus on more than three behaviors, as this model will not support targeted planning for student success. The team may pick the behaviors which seem most simple to address first, or the most significant behaviors may be selected as a starting point for intervention. If there are safety concerns, these behaviors should be the primary focus. When safety-related behavior is selected, other behaviors of concern should not be targeted for intervention.

### Identification of Target Behavior

- Increase in Prosocial Behavior (What behavior does the team want to see more of?)
- Decrease in disruptive or problematic behaviors (What behavior does the team want to see less of?)

The first step is to determine which behaviors will be targeted for intervention. Next, an operational definition of the behavior(s) must be developed in observable (can be viewed by others), measurable (it either occurred or did not), and clear terms.

The operational definition needs to be clear enough that an individual entering the school from the outside can review the operational definition, enter the classroom, and determine clearly whether the behavior occurred without assistance or explanation from stakeholders.

### Well-written target behavior definitions:

- Use objective language referring only to observable characteristics of the behavior.
- Allow for the behavior to be readily measured.
- Delineate the boundaries of what the behavior includes and does not include.



Table 3 Examples of Effective and Ineffective Operational Definitions of Target Behaviors

Insufficient	Acceptable	Ideal
<b>Sarah loses control.</b>	Sarah cries and tantrums.	Sarah cries, flops to the floor, kicks feet, pounds fists on floor, and/or grabs at objects.
<b>Tara is disruptive.</b>	Tara makes inappropriate comments during class.	Tara curses at teacher or peers, talks excessively about unrelated tasks/work, or insults peers during class.
<b>Robin has been acting withdrawn.</b>	Robin is not engaging with peers.	Robin sits quietly by herself at her desk and does not speak with other students, even when they approach her to engage.

Staff will first need to decide upon the following:

1. Behaviors to Decrease: Identifying and defining an initially challenging behavior to be resolved (behaviors impacting the student and others)
2. Behaviors to Increase: Selecting and defining a desirable behavior (which is usually a social-communicative behavior) that will be increased or taught and that will help serve as a replacement for the child’s challenging behavior (Replacement/Desired Behaviors)
3. Prioritize One Set of Behavior (challenging and desired): If multiple behaviors of concern are present, it can be unrealistic to try and address all the behaviors at one time. This is not only overwhelming for the student and staff but can also result in failure of programming. Typically, one or two behaviors need to be prioritized and addressed at a time. This means that other behaviors will receive decreased attention, which can be difficult for staff. Once the prioritized behaviors have been successfully resolved, other behaviors can be addressed through intervention.

Other criteria which may be used in the process of selecting a target behavior include:

- Is there a challenging behavior that exists across a variety of contexts or across multiple activities such as transitions, large group times, arrivals, and dismissal?
- Is there a challenging behavior that is used frequently to communicate wants and needs?

- Is there aggressive behavior that needs to be immediately addressed for safety reasons?
- Are there any behaviors that begin mildly then escalate to more extreme or intensive behaviors (one behavior occurs, then escalates to another and possibly another)?

## Data Collection (Baseline):

Start the data collection process:

- Conduct student observations/ABC observations
- Create an ABC data collection log
- Observe for antecedents - What event leads to the behavior? Was it a teacher request, a non-preferred activity, a peer interaction?
- Consider consequences - What is the student getting from this behavior? How does the student benefit from these behaviors? Is the student getting attention from adults or peers? Is the student getting out of completing a task or a non-preferred activity?

Why is collecting ABC Data Important?

ABC data helps the team to predict future behaviors. It may also help the team to understand the reasons for student engagement in the behavior as the hypothesis is formulated. ABC data will help the team to determine the function of the behavior. There should be at least two different staff members conducting observations, as this supports inter-rater reliability. Data should be examined to ensure that both parties observed the same behavior. Team members must conduct the observation in at least two different areas/structures. Observations need to take place in academic settings such as Math/Science/Social Studies/Language Arts classes and in social (or less “structured”) environments such as PE, Art, Music, Lunch, or Recess. Observations also need to be conducted at a few different times of the day (e.g. morning and afternoon) and on different days of the week. This will help the team to identify and establish patterns of behavior. When conducting observations, it is not best practice to record data for an undetermined amount of time (Wallace & Iwata, 1999). Each observation needs to be conducted for the same length of time; this improves the reliability of the data. Common observation times include 5, 10, or 15 minutes.

[ABC Datasheet example](#)

[Structured ABC data collection sheet](#)

Other data collection Methods (Definition from the [American Psychological Association Dictionary of Psychology](#))

Indirect observation

- **Surveys:** A data collection method in which a specific group of participants is selected from a population and data/perspectives regarding those participants are collected, measured, and analyzed.



- **Interviews:** A directed conversation in which the interviewer intends to elicit specific information from the interviewee for purposes of assessment and service provisions. Conducted face to face, by telephone, or online, interviews may be either standardized, including set questions, or open-ended, varying with material introduced in responses by the interviewee.
- **Checklists:** A list of actions, responses, or other behaviors that are to be recorded each time they are observed.

#### Direct observations

- **Frequency recording:** A count of the number of times that behavior occurs in each established time interval. For example: Over the course of 5 minutes, 10 minutes, 15 minutes, 30 minutes, an hour, morning and afternoon, all day or weekly. The selected time interval will be in part determined by how often the behavior occurs. If the behavior only happens a few times a week versus multiple times an hour, this knowledge will help the team with structuring data collection.
- **Latency recording:** The length of time it takes from the time a directive is given to time that the student engages in the action required to complete the directive. An example would be that the teacher requested the student to access a book and turn to page 107. From the time the teacher gave the instruction to the time the student had the book out and opened to page 107 would be the latency measure.
- **Duration recording:** The length of time that a behavior or a behavior cycle lasts. Duration data can be helpful if the student engages in a series of multiple behaviors in a sequence where the frequency of each individual behavior is difficult to determine. This type of data collection may also be helpful in the case of behavior that lasts for extended time periods (e.g. work refusal, shutdown). Another example might be when a student cries for a lengthy period of time (such as 60 minutes, 90 minutes, or two hours).
- **Intensity:** The level of severity at which a behavior is occurring. Examples of intensity levels are as follows: The student is verbally aggressive, the student is verbally aggressive and throws items or engages in property destruction, or the student engages in physical aggression with peers or adults. There are times when a student's frequency of behavior does not decrease, but the intensity decreases. If this is the case and the team is only tracking frequency data, the data might not reflect any progress that the student is making. For example, it might be that the student engages in physical aggression with others at least five times per day. An intervention may be implemented and the events may occur at an average of at least five times per day with property destruction only. The frequency data does not show change, but the intensity data indicates progress.

The team must develop a meaningful, evidence-based structure for data collection. It is considered best practice to gather data on both positive behaviors and behaviors of concern. As a general rule, the team should collect at least four days of baseline data. The purpose of collecting the baseline data is to be able to gauge the effectiveness of the selected intervention. For example, if the data

collected indicates that the student is engaging in physical aggression ten times a day, an intervention will be implemented and the same type of data will continue to be collected. The hope is that, with intervention, the behavior may decrease to five or even three times per day (and eventually to zero). Without the baseline data, it is difficult to be able to make any determination about the effectiveness of the intervention; there is no information to measure against once the intervention has been implemented. At minimum, three data points will be required to generate a trend line. Best practice would call for at least six data points. However, depending on the nature of the behavior being measured and the urgency of the situation, six data points may take too much time to collect. Thus, the general rule of at least four data points allows for some flexibility in this regard.

When making decisions about collecting baseline data, describe how, when and where student behavior will be measured.

Examples:

- Using the event record, Tom will be taught to count the number of times he becomes frustrated and has outbursts versus how often he asks for help. He will be given a checklist to use for self-monitoring.

Summarize data by specifying which problem behaviors and replacement behaviors will be targets for interventions.

- Problem Behavior: Extensive loss of emotional regulation: Throws items, hits or kicks, uses inappropriate language, threatening remarks and actions
- Replacement behavior: Appropriately deal with anger; 1) student will ask for help from an adult when he feels angry and thinks he needs to leave a situation; 2) student will use positive self-talk and anger management skills to independently cope with anger

Once the target behavior has been decided upon, an operational definition has been generated for the target behavior, and data collection has been established to collect the baseline data, the next step in the process is to begin the collection of the body of evidence. This is more commonly referred to as the Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA).

In data collection, the team may consider what information is already being gathered on the student and whether that content could be used in place of a new collection process. It may be possible to make adjustments to an existing data collection system.

### Existing Data Sources

- Attendance records
- Office discipline referrals
- Class Dojo
- Grades

There might be times, however, when existing data collection sources will not meet the needs of the team and a custom data collection system must be developed.

# Interviews: Student Interviews, Parent/Guardian Interviews, Staff Interviews

It is considered best practice to conduct multiple interviews with people who work closely with/know the student best. Interviews can be conducted with the student, parents/guardians, general education teachers, licensed special services providers, paraprofessionals, etc. For depth and functionality, focus on interviewing two to three people across home and school settings.

There are many types of interview forms. Some are open-ended, and some are structured as questionnaires. Examples of questionnaires are linked here: [FAST](#), [MAS](#), [QABF](#), [Open-Ended Functional Assessment Interview](#). These are usually relatively easy to fill out and can be completed by a variety of individuals who know and work directly with the student. Checkbox forms are typically used with the brief FBA process, as they are quick and efficient; however, the checkbox forms do not collect the same level or depth of information as an open-ended format. There are both short open question interview forms (typically one page in length) and longer open question interview forms (multiple pages). These forms help respondents think through potential antecedents, consequences, frequency/duration input, and the level of intensity of the behavior. The forms also allow for the interviewer to be able to expand or individualize responses about students based on the information that is collected. The shorter open-question interview form is typically used within the MTSS process, while the longer version of an interview form is more commonly used for the Full FBA associated with the IEP process. In reference to case law over the years, the open-ended forms are held in favor and seen as being more individualized than the checkbox forms (which are viewed as more generic or universal in their approach). With all of the interview forms, the intent is that the information is collected in an interview format and not a survey format. If the team selects a survey format, an interview will be pursued as the next step. The information gathered through the survey is analyzed, and from this information specific questions are developed to expand upon what has been collected. Interviews are considered best practice because they allow for the collection of data that may exist outside the structure of the questions (for instance, follow-up conversations). These are situations in which the professional involved must have knowledge and expertise in behavior, because questions must be expanded upon appropriately based on the responses received. Another approach might be to have each of the different FBA team members fill in the FBA interview form and then bring this information to a scheduled meeting where all the information can be shared. The content can then be combined into one document.

Student input, whenever it is possible to gather it, is essential. What insight does the student have regarding their own behavior? Parents and guardians are important team members in the FBA process, as they are often the experts on the child's behavior. This engagement also allows the family to actively participate in the FBA process. These interviews support the team's understanding of whether the behaviors are occurring in multiple environments, which is one of the

criteria for SED (Serious Emotional Disability). Finally, parent/guardian input can help the team to better understand relevant setting events.

The team should also interview at least 1-2 staff members in this process. When interviewing staff, information emerges about whether the behaviors of concern are occurring with more than one individual. This will help the team to determine whether the student struggles to work collaboratively with most staff members, or if there may be a personality conflict and the student is struggling solely with a specific staff member. If the team identifies a staff member that is not struggling with the student, the staff member's behavior must be examined to determine what is working well. Can other staff members adopt a similar approach? Patterns of behavior among staff should be carefully observed as part of this process.

Ross Greene's Plan B approach (2024), which is a collaborative problem-solving approach for conversation with students, can be used in conducting all the above interviews for the FBA process. The use of Plan B will help in investigating the root causes of behaviors of concern, and this may allow the team to obtain higher-quality information.

Plan B has three distinct parts. The first part of this process is the empathy stage, in which staff members are encouraged to be genuinely curious about the perspectives of others. Active listening or reflective listening is often used in this empathy stage. Once all the needed information has been gathered and no added information is being presented, the interaction moves to the next stage. The Empathy stage is about seeking first to understand before being understood. The next step in the Plan B process is the expression of adult concern. The adult concerns that are expressed must address how the student's behavior is negatively impacting others or negatively impacting the student.

For example, an adult concern may be shared using the following language: "I have noticed that you have difficulty with (verb) coming in from recess after lunch." Expressed adult concerns do not contain any behavioral descriptions or adult theories. The adult concern should also be as specifically stated as possible and should not include a "clumped" set of problems.

The next stage in Plan B process is the invitation stage. The invitation stage is about brainstorming solutions; in this process, the solution generated must be collaborative. If an adult enters the conversation with pre-determined solutions, Plan B is not authentically occurring. The student needs to be given the first opportunity to generate the solutions. The selected solution can then be incorporated into the Behavior Intervention Plan. This will occur through use of the Competing Pathways Model, which will be covered in depth later in this document. Specifically, a replacement behavior and desired behavior will be generated. For the solutions to be functional, they must be both mutually satisfactory (meeting the needs of the students and staff) and realistic.

When conducting an FBA, the team must gather information in the following areas:



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## Antecedent Analysis (What happens to “cause” the behavior?)

- In which settings, situations, and places do the behavior(s) occur? Consider home, school, community, workplace (if relevant), etc.
- Does the behavior occur more frequently when routines are altered or changed, or if activities are interrupted?
- In what settings, situations, and places do the behavior(s) not occur at all (or less frequently, as an exception to the rule)? What is the difference in these situations and settings?
- With what people does the behavior occur or become more intense?
- With what people does the behavior not occur (or occurs with decreased frequency/intensity)?
- During what time of the day, week, or month does the behavior typically occur (or occur more often)?

## Consequence Analysis (What happens after the behavior occurs?)

- What is the staff's response to the behavior (actions taken)?
- How does staff react to the behavior (emotional response)?
- What happens to the individual after the behavior occurs?
- What does the individual do after the behavior?
- What do others/peers usually do when the behavior occurs?
- What have staff done in the past to manage the behavior and how has it worked?
- What response has been found to be most effective in response to the behavior?
- What effect does the behavior have on others?
- What actions improve the behavior?
- What makes the behavior stop?
- Does the behavior seem to occur while the student is alone? Self-stimulation?

## Historical Analysis

- When did the problem first appear?
- Has there been an increase or decrease in the behavior recently?
- Have there been any significant family events or changes in the person's life or routine?
- Review and evaluate effectiveness of previous or current behavior strategies and plans.

## Health/Medical Analysis

- Are there medical conditions or recent changes in physical health that would cause pain or contribute to mood changes or behavior changes?
- Are there side-effects of medications which may be contributing to mood/behavior changes?
- Is there a need for medical evaluation?
- Hearing/Vision
- Sleep Patterns (sleeping too much or not enough)
- Eating habits (increase or decrease in weight or appetite)

## Ecological/Environmental Analysis

- What events or experiences does the individual perceive as positive (or negative) in the environment or daily routine?
- What is the rate of positive to negative statements/comments from staff towards the student?

## Social Status Analysis

- What is the nature of the individual relationships between the student and staff, peers, and family members?
- Does the individual develop and maintain friendships?
- Do they initiate social interactions?
- What is their response when others initiate social interactions?
- Do they respond or have an awareness of others' body language or social cues?

## Emotional Status Analysis

- Describe the student's general mood.
- Observe for signs of the following:
  - Depression
  - Fear
  - Anxiety
  - Psychosis
  - Anger
  - Hypersensitivity (intense reactions to minor events)

## Communication Analysis

- Is the behavior related to an inability to communicate feelings, wants, needs, or desires?
- Does the individual need to learn a way to communicate feelings, wants, needs, or desires?
- Does the individual need assistance with understanding what is being asked? \*\*Recall that negative behaviors may often occur as an attempt to communicate.



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## Mediator Status Analysis

- How do staff feel about the individual?
- Are there limitations in resources that contribute to behavior concerns?
- Analyze and identify motivation amongst staff members
- Consider organization (structure or lack of structure)
- Is the data consistent across staff reports?

## Cultural Considerations and Summary

- What is the school's relationship with the family?
- Describe successful strategies of school staff to build positive school, parent/guardian, and family relationships.
- Identify student language and cultural strengths/assets that can be incorporated into the plan to mitigate problem behaviors.
- Explore whether personal assumptions, biases, or perceptions of staff members adversely impact this student.
- Examine beliefs of the school regarding the school's responsibility to honor individual beliefs, values, and priorities of language, race, culture, family, and socioeconomic circumstance to build a positive, socially-responsive community.

## Routine Analysis

- What does the student's typical day look like?
- What are the routines of the student throughout the day?

## Determine Function

Examples may include:

- Sensory
- Seeking sense of belonging
- Initiate social contact (attention)
- Escape/avoidance
- Obtain objects or experiences
- Expression of emotions (emotional regulation)

Most of the FBA interview forms or data collection forms are designed to collect all of the above information. The amount of information, or even which specific types of information must be collected, will all be driven by the needs of the student. This is another reason that the interview form is considered best practice for data collection. Most interview forms will address the basic information listed above. However, it is the knowledge and experience of the individual with

behavioral training that will support decision-making about the level or depth of information that must be gathered. This will vary for each student.

### Framework for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

Members of the Exceptional Student Services Unit at the Colorado Department of Education created a framework (see Figure 5.1) by which individuals, and school / district personnel may explore dimensions and practices of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI). This framework uses four core pillars.

**Pillar 1: *Contextual Fit***- Understanding the student and family assets such as language, culture, family, community, and individual strengths

**Pillar 2: *Data Use***- Through a collaborative-inquiry approach, gathering, reviewing, and using available information to map existing gaps in services, resources, and student outcomes

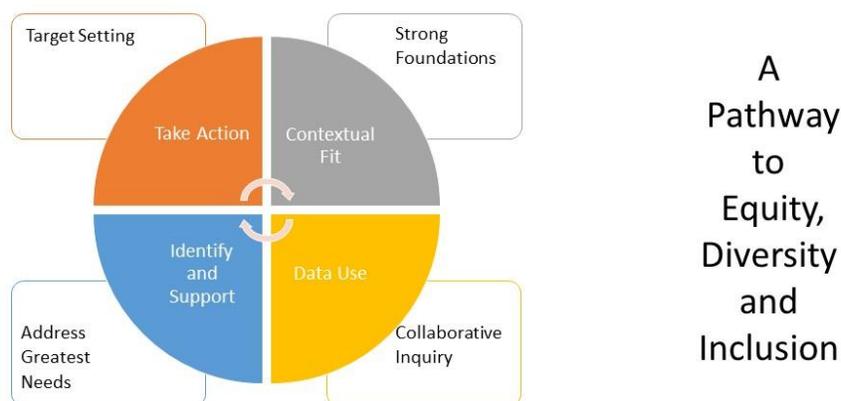
**Pillar 3: *Identify and Support***- Managing and allocating resources such as time, funding, personnel, materials, and staff skills (while matching assets to areas of greatest needs, thereby eliminating historic and persistent barriers)

**Pillar 4: *Take Action***- Using information gathered via Pillars 1-3 to set targeted and measurable EDI goals

Since all behavior has meaning within the context it occurs, this framework can be used to support the development of a functional behavioral assessment. Consideration of the student's assets, culture, family background and other contextual information is foundational to identifying culturally responsive and actionable positive behavioral supports.

**Figure 2 ESSU Framework for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion**

**ESSU Framework for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion**



Description: This figure shows a pathway/framework for equity, diversity, and inclusion in educational settings. Initiatives for change must have strong foundations grounded in contextual fit. Through collaborative inquiry, educational organizations must gather and use data to determine specific needs. Needs are addressed through an identification process to develop support options. When clear targets are set, stakeholders can then act on goals and objectives.

## Cultural Considerations when Gathering Information

The first goal of a culturally responsive interview is to determine the environments in which the student experiences belonging. A student who feels a sense of belonging feels cared about, accepted, respected, and valued by others. Building positive relationships with students allows educators an opportunity to understand the individual’s worldview, values, priorities, forms of communication and propensity toward individualistic or collectivistic problem-solving strategies. Understanding the student’s feeling of belonging allows educators to build a bridge to the foundations of equitable, diverse, and inclusive learning environments. Educators, families, and students benefit from learning the context, culture and core beliefs held by the student and using those strengths to create a well-designed behavior intervention plan. Awareness of these variables is particularly important if a student has a limited sense of belonging in the school setting.

Rather than just obtaining information about the behavior of concern, a goal of the parent/guardian interview is to explore potential barriers that the student must overcome to access instruction. Educational Equity means that every student has access to the educational

resources and rigor they need at the right moment in their education across race, gender, ethnicity, language, disability, sexual orientation, family background, and income spectrums. Barriers can be broadly identified within the following domains: communicative, environmental, social-emotional, and access-related (transportation, technology). More specifically, communication barriers and lack of information experienced by Multilingual Learners and their families contribute to feelings of isolation, fear, and mistrust. Similarly, environmental barriers such as lack of housing, food, heat, and healthy, safe living conditions significantly impact the student's ability to attend and focus on instruction. Additionally, social-emotional challenges that create barriers for well-being and readiness for learning must be discovered and addressed. Highly volatile and hyper-reactive student responses may stem from unseen threats, trauma, and other stressful events. Understanding these root causes will guide educators in developing emotionally safe and predictable learning environments. The last barrier for students is the lack of access to transportation or technology. Equitable access to appropriate transportation and technology must be considered when developing educational strategies, interventions, and accommodations.

Effective school leaders understand children come with [funds of knowledge](#) developed and fostered in the context of their families and communities. “The theory of funds of knowledge (FoK) focuses on students' competences, and the skills and knowledge they acquire outside of school” (Volman & Gilde, 2021, p. 2). Volman and Gilde (2021) further argue “that teachers can decrease the gap between school and home by drawing on the knowledge and skills that students acquire in their families and communities and can thus support academic learning.” Often, the cultural and social experiences of teachers are very different from those of their students. Conducting home visits is one way to uncover student and family strengths that are not typically observed in the school environment. If a team does pursue this option, norms and policies must first be addressed via discussions with leadership (for instance, two adults making a visit at one time). Another strategy includes asking students to write or share personal stories regarding the things that are most important to them and their families.

Benefits of culturally responsive practices include:

- Improved student-teacher relationships
- Improved non-academic outcomes (e.g., personal empowerment of students)
- Enhanced student agency
- Enhanced academic engagement
- Increased exploration of new information/academic knowledge for students

Accessing funds of knowledge has proven to be an invaluable tool to provide teachers with a new perspective from which to build bridges to learning.

When completing a functional behavior assessment, team-members should use an equity lens by revisiting the interactions, beliefs and values held by the adults within the context in which the behaviors are occurring. This allows the opportunity for consideration of any bias on the part of staff collecting and interpreting assessment data. For example, behavior that might be considered inappropriate within the classroom environment might be widely accepted, rewarded, and



supported within the culture of the student. Using a lens of cultural awareness allows school-based teams to better understand generalizability of behaviors and expectations within the school environment. The team must address whether it is appropriate to eliminate a behavior that is culturally relevant for the student, or whether it is appropriate to teach the student to adjust style of speech, appearance, expression, or behavior for the comfort of others. For example, in some cultures students are expected to assert themselves and are rewarded for doing so; in other communities, members are encouraged and rewarded for their passivity. Either dynamic can be easily perceived incorrectly, resulting in negative attributions (and in some cases, disciplinary action). It may be that we do not need to eliminate a certain behavior because of its importance and relevance to the culture and community from which the student must navigate daily.

## A Culturally Responsive Example

According to Zaretta Hammond (2015), “Deep culture is like the root system of a tree. It is what grounds the individual and nourishes his mental health. It is the bedrock of self-concept, group identity, approaches to problem solving and decision-making (p. 24)”. Accessing the roots of culture is the foundation for building trusting and safe relationships. A good place to begin is asking the question, “Could the student’s behavior be culturally driven?” The following example is used to illustrate the impact of culture on student behavior.

### Example

An Elementary student has been referred to the school social worker for multiple student disciplinary infractions related to interpersonal conflicts. These may include starting fights with other students, verbal aggression, defiance of authority figures, and refusal to follow staff directions. These behaviors typically take place at lunch and recess and have resulted in multiple suspensions. The student does well in school academically and is generally well-liked by his teachers. The function of the behavior is seen as the student’s desire to escape or avoid negative peer interactions. The team used the Competing Pathways model to address the behavior.

**Setting Events:** Unstructured time, such as recess and Lunch

**Antecedent:** Negative Peer Interactions

**Behavior of concern:** Physical and Verbal Aggression towards other students

**Maintaining Consequence / Function:** Escape negative peer interactions

**Desired Behavior:** Student will use coping strategies to support emotional regulation during difficult interactions

**Replacement Behavior:** Walk away from Peer

The Competing Pathways model was completed correctly, and it captures all the behavioral information and data collected. Nevertheless, the BIP was not working for the student until the team gathered additional information using a cultural lens.

In speaking with the student's father, it was learned that all the children were taught to 'stand-up' for all family members. Since this student was the oldest of four children in the family, it was his family obligation and responsibility to protect and keep his siblings safe in school. This deeply rooted family belief was an inflexible part of the child's value system and home culture. As a result of this added information, the Competing Pathways model was revised and used to update the student's plan as follows:

**Setting Event:** During unstructured times, such as recess, the student would check with his younger sibling to see if they were okay. When the younger sibling(s) reported being 'picked on' (bullied), then the student had the family obligation to defend and protect his younger sibling(s).

**Antecedent:** Escalated peer interactions during unstructured time may be interpreted as the student's response to sibling reports in which they were bullied.

**Behavior of concern:** Physical and verbal aggression towards other students.

**Maintaining Consequence / Function:** The function of the behavior is no longer considered escape or avoidance but driven by the student's desire to obtain protections for his siblings. By ensuring sibling protection, he is meeting his family obligations and escaping home punishment. If the student goes home and a sibling reports they were bullied, but the older student did nothing, then the older student faces serious at-home consequences.

**Replacement Behavior-** The original competing pathways replaced aggressive behavior with walking away from those who were bullying their siblings. In this scenario, when the student walked away from the bully, he would face punishment at home. By using the previous replacement behavior, school staff unknowingly asked the student to abandon a deeply rooted family value; this expectation then required the student to make a choice between following family rules or school rules. Either option presented the student with a losing outcome. The revised replacement behavior taught the student to ask the supervising adult for assistance.

**Desired Behavior:** This greater clarity helped the team recognize that the student was not struggling with emotional regulation (i.e., getting angry and lashing out as originally indicated), but was behaving in a manner consistent with the family culture. It became evident the student was in control of his emotions and the behavior was not a result of being socially maladjusted (as was previously hypothesized). The final analysis required staff to teach the student conflict management and bully-proofing skills. Recognizing the family beliefs and values that supported the student's behavior resulted in the development of a culturally responsive plan that better met the student's needs.

Observing the behavior from the family's perspective provides a deeper understanding of core values. In this example, the student was taught to stand up for his siblings in all contexts. This survival skill was taught and reinforced within multiple settings and must not be eliminated based on the biases of staff. Instead, the student must be taught strategies to 'stand-up' for his siblings which are appropriate for the school setting. The student can be taught that different behaviors are required for different environments. Using his newfound learning, the student is prepared to differentiate behaviors appropriate in the home and community that may not be appropriate in the



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school. Educators support the student’s commitment to uphold his family obligation while at school without facing punishment at home. Progress is made in changing the student’s behavior when the student is taught socially appropriate and culturally responsive strategies to protect and defend his siblings at school. No longer is the student asked to choose between home rules and school rules. He is not asked to ignore his family values, nor is he placed in an untenable situation where he is asked to defend and justify his family values to school staff. The revised competing pathways model creates a winning outcome for the student at home *and* school.

## Addressing Bias

Acknowledging the multiple filters present when gathering information is helpful in managing the implicit, explicit, and confirmation biases of all parties. For instance, parent/guardian trust in the interviewer is always a consideration when conducting interviews. Educators must always consider the extent to which the cultural lens used by the family impacts the interview. A withholding parent/guardian may not trust that all educators at the child’s school are trusted allies. Equally important is the lens used by educators when interpreting the function of behavior or reviewing the body of data. In some situations, committed and well-meaning teachers may genuinely believe in, and despair of, their students’ perceived constraints; but tragically this deficit-theorizing mindset ultimately leads to low expectations and acceptance of low academic achievement. Hoggs (2011) indicates, “a teacher’s deficit mindset may be hidden from the holder, due to lack of consciousness of closely held attitudes and beliefs and understanding of how these may create obstacles to student achievement.” Recognizing that bias is present for all of us, we must understand its impact on our daily interactions with students and their families. Staff is encouraged to fully explore their own diversity using Fig. 5.1 ESSU Framework to EDI. This process can help staff members to better understand how their attitudes, perceptions, and biases fit within the context of student engagement.

### Key Terms

- **Explicit Bias** - being aware of our prejudices and attitudes toward certain groups.
- **Implicit Bias** - unconscious attitudes or stereotypes which affect our understanding, actions, and decisions, making them difficult to control.

## The Behavior Cycle:

In the process of collecting the body of evidence for the FBA, it is important to consider the behavior cycle. The goal of the data collection is to be able to describe in detail all aspects of the behavior cycle for the student.

- **Cycle:** This is the course of the behavior from start to finish. It describes how staff will know when the behavior has started, when it has ended, and what occurred throughout the event.
- **Onset:** This is what “starts off” the behavior (antecedents). In observable and measurable terms, what will staff see to clearly recognize that the behavior has started? The team must identify the first part in the cycle where this is observed, as this early identification increases the likelihood that the behavior can be diverted through the implementation of interventions. In relation to crisis intervention, this cycle typically starts with anxiety. Each student will display anxiety differently. The challenge for staff is to identify how each student displays, through actions, their individual anxiety.
- **Course:** The course of the behavior includes what starts the behavior, how the behavior progresses and what resolves or ends the behavior. An example would be that the student displays anxiety through fidgeting and hand-wringing. If this is not addressed, the student will begin pacing and wandering around the classroom. Next, verbal aggression will occur. The behavior will then escalate to property destruction or physical aggression. This may result in injury to others, and a restraint may occur to support the safety of the student and others. When the team has determined the course of the behavior, multiple intervention points are identified. Each intervention point throughout the course of the behavior may require a different strategy.
- **Off Set:** This is how staff will know that the student is becoming calmer and agitation is decreasing. This stage is identified by a decrease in the intensity of the behavior and a return of the ability to clearly process. Off Set may be accompanied by a change in emotional response. This may include anger, sadness, worry, embarrassment, guilt, remorse, or a range of other emotions. Physically, the student may start to relax muscles and may present as tired or fatigued. Voice tone and volume will return to normal levels.
- **Precursors (Setting Events):** Different from antecedents (an occurrence which leads to the beginning of the behavior of concern), setting events make the behavior more likely to occur. Examples include lack of sleep, conflict in the home environment prior to arrival at school, the anniversary date of a loss or incarceration of a parent, traumatic experiences, hunger, illness, missed medication, etc.



- **Frequency:** How often does the behavior occur? For example, this may be hourly, daily, or weekly.
- **Duration:** How long does the behavior cycle last or take to complete from start to end?
- **Intensity:** What is the level of disruption that occurs because of the behavior? Is the behavior irritating to others, distracting, destructive to property, or does it create a safety concern which may result in injury to the student or others?

If the behavior cycle for the individual student can be analyzed and understood, this will support the team in identifying the beginning of a crisis. A crisis intervention plan may also be necessary as a part of the Behavior Intervention Plan.

## Observation Guidelines

The team should have at least two different staff conducting observations. The reason for having multiple staff conducting the observations is for confirmation bias. If two different observers note the same behavior, this increases team confidence in the data, reduces the chance of bias interference, and creates a better operational definition.

The team must conduct the observation in at least two different areas/environments/settings, such as in an academic environment/classes and social environments (e.g. lunch, recess). One of the observations needs to be conducted on the days or at the times that have been identified through the interview process as the most likely for the behavior of concern to occur. Another observation should take place in a setting where the student engages most effectively and is least likely to struggle. A comparison between the least and most challenging time periods can provide valuable information about what environmental factors, levels of relational connectedness, or adult approaches might influence student responses. Finally, routine analysis is essential. Through this process, we can obtain information on how to best proceed with the FBA.

Observations also need to be conducted at different times of the day and different days of the week. This helps with the identification of different types of patterns of behaviors that might occur either across the course of the day or week.

## FBA Components

### A Records Review:

Reviewing records is an important part of the FBA process. This component would include a review of the student's general file information including health screenings, past school enrollments,

language preferences, attendance records, behavior referrals, past IEPs or MTSS intervention data as relevant, social history, medical history, outside assessment reports, grades, and state/district assessment data.

## **Complete Motivational Assessments/ Reinforcement Inventories/ Strength-Based Assessments:**

There are a variety of different motivational scales which can be administered to students. Some of these tools require the student to select different items which may be reinforcing, and some are structured in a “forced choice” format where students will select reinforcement options more or less frequently. Motivational assessments allow the team to make informed decisions regarding relevant rewards. This information is important for the creation of a reinforcement system, as targeted rewards will best support skill development. The team should identify areas of student interest and strength. Resources and incentives within the school setting should also be examined. If the school already has a positive reinforcement system, consider how this could be accessed or altered (modified, intensified) for the student.

### **Complete a Strength-Based Assessment:**

[Article from PositivePsychology.com, What Is a Strength-Based Approach? \(Incl. Examples & Tools\)](#)

The strength-based approach focuses on a student’s positive attributes (rather than challenges). Self-determination and strengths are key focuses of this work (Strengths-Based Models in Social Work; McCashen, 2005). This type of approach helps teams to view students as resourceful and resilient in adverse conditions (Strengths-Based Models in Social Work; McCashen, 2005). Another unique characteristic of this approach is that it is student-centered, focusing on future outcomes and the use of individual strengths.

The Strength-Based approach emphasizes the following ideas:

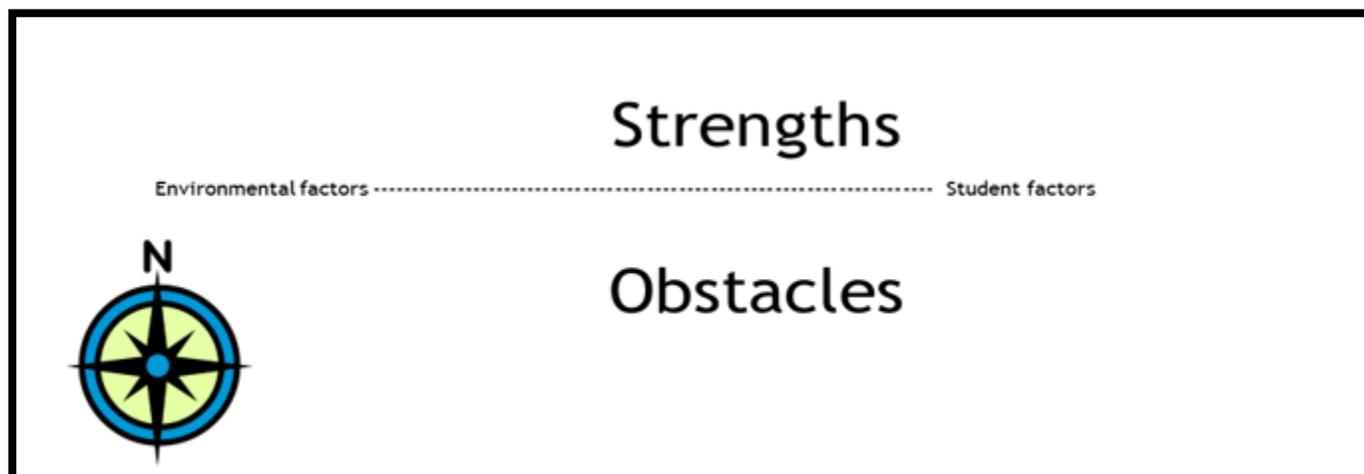
- Putting problems in their place.
- Problems exist in context (they are not global).
- Pay less attention to the problem.
- Find simpler ways to talk about the problem.

Guidelines for a strengths assessment:

- Validate student understanding of the facts.
- Believe the student.
- Discover what the student wants.
- Identify supports or strengths.
- Use the student’s words.
- Include the student.
- Avoid blame and blaming.

- Avoid cause-and-effect thinking.

Figure 3 Strength Mapping Model



## Analysis of FBA Data/Competing Pathways and Hypothesis Statements:

Understanding the influence of the environment on behavior is a crucial part of FBA.

Once all the above data has been collected and the team members understand the student's various needs, the next step is to analyze the body of evidence.

Step One - Look for any patterns that exist. Focus on patterns in these four different areas (the team may break data down using the following categories):

1. **Setting events:** What concerns/issues are being brought into the school system from the home or community environment that are impacting the identified behaviors at school?
2. **Antecedents:** What is occurring in the environment that creates the "onset" of the identified behavior?
3. **Behaviors:** Create an operational definition for each of the identified behaviors the team is addressing. The operational definition describes the behavior in a clear and measurable manner. The full behavior cycle should be described.

Reminder: The operational definition describes the behavior cycle from beginning to end.

4. **Consequences:** What is maintaining the behavior? What is the student gaining or avoiding, and is there a benefit? If so, what?

Part of the analysis may include identifying what data is missing and how the team will gather this information to support decision-making.

## Data Analysis

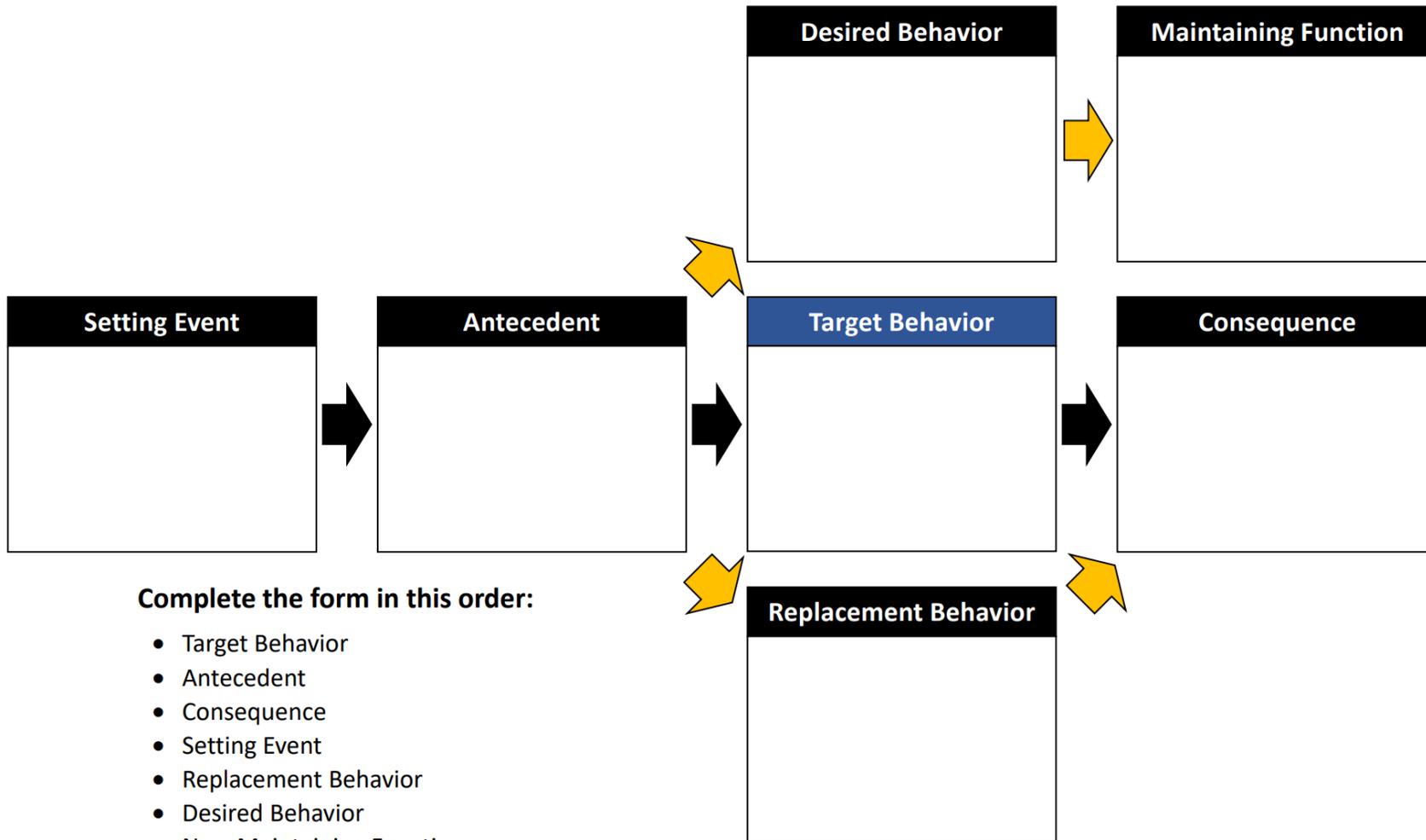
The data analysis is best done as a team. The goal is to use the varied perspectives of the team members and their data to arrive at a consensus regarding:

- Which antecedent events are associated with the identified behavior (look for high probability and low probability).
- The purpose/function of challenging behavior.
- Typical events that follow challenging behavior.
- Potential rewards (motivators) that might be used as positive reinforcement during intervention.

Step Two - Enter all information into the Competing Pathways chart to complete the analysis process.



Figure 4 Competing Pathways Chart



### Filling out the Competing Pathways Chart:

1. Begin with the **behavior** by entering the operational definition.
2. Next, enter the **antecedent** information. These are any events that happen just before the behavior.
3. After this, the team will determine the **consequences** of the behavior. Why is this behavior occurring? Consider how the student may benefit from the behavior.
4. Finally, determine the **setting events**, or the conditions that make the behavior more likely to occur.
5. When the center of the Competing Pathways Model is completed, the team must identify a **replacement behavior**. What will staff members accept in the short-term as a strategy that can be implemented to reduce crisis? This should be a behavior that is simple and requires little effort from the student (in comparison with the behavior of concern). The replacement behavior should serve the same function as the behavior of concern, and it must be socially acceptable.
6. Finally, the team will identify a **desired behavior**. This is a long-term goal for the student's behavior which will require new learning. The team must consider the long-term benefits of this behavior for the student.

**Decide on the function of the behavior:** From this summary, the team will determine the function of the behavior (or “why” the behavior continues to occur).

Different behaviors can have similar/related purposes or functions.

- Hit, spit, cry, yell...
  - Escape non-preferred task or request
- Cry, hit, raise hand, spit....
  - Obtain adult attention

The same behaviors may also have different functions.

Regarding Replacement Behaviors:

“You should not propose to reduce a problem behavior without also **identifying alternative, desired behaviors** person should perform instead of problem behavior” (O’Neill et al., 1997, p. 71).

Replacement Behaviors are an immediate attempt to reduce disruption & potentially dangerous behavior in the classroom. These behaviors reduce pressure for staff members, actively beginning the process of breaking the student’s habit of using the behavior of concern to meet needs. The replacement behavior provides a socially acceptable alternate behavior.

Replacement Behaviors require less physical effort & provide speedier, more reliable access to desired outcome/response than problem behavior.

Appropriate Replacement Behavior:



- Serves the same function as the problem behavior.
- Is more efficient than the problem behavior.
- Requires less effort than the problem behavior.
- Is socially acceptable.

Desired behaviors: Desired behaviors are the target level for functioning, and the team will support development of these behaviors at an independent level. At this stage, Social-Emotional Learning enters the FBA process. It is through SEL that the desired behaviors will be explicitly taught to students. To teach the desired behavior, a task analysis is necessary. This will involve breaking the desired behavior down into the smallest “steps,” or skill sets, possible. When the desired behavior has been broken into smaller parts, a skill assessment will be completed with the student. This assessment will allow the team to determine which skills the student has mastered and which skills require direct instruction. When examining the student’s skills and areas of need, level of mastery must also be evaluated.

Three types of skill gaps are considered:

1. **Cognitive skill gap:** The student does not have the information needed to close the skill gap. The majority of existing SEL Curriculum considers task analysis of large skill sets. Knowledge will then be provided to students about the “smaller” skills needed to complete different tasks. Students may be instructed in 1:1 or small group settings to address this gap.
2. **Performance skill gap:** In these situations, the student has the knowledge needed to perform the desired behavior; however, the student is not able to put the knowledge to use. It could be that the student has the knowledge and can demonstrate the skill in a 1:1 setting. However, the student may not be able to generalize the skill or knowledge to other settings (e.g. small groups, independent work, whole-group instruction, low-structured or high-structured environments, hallways, or other school settings). When addressing this type of gap, intervention includes identification of a safe setting in which students can practice the skill with varying levels of adult guidance. An approach where a professional joins and supports a student in natural settings is useful to address this gap.
3. **Emotional skill gap:** In these cases, the student has the knowledge needed and can display the skill in a variety of different environments/situations with a degree of mastery. However, when mild to moderate emotional challenges present themselves, the student is not able to perform the desired behavior. In these situations, self-regulation is the targeted growth area. The student may need support in the expansion of emotional vocabulary. The student may also require instruction in the use of coping skills and recognition of the body’s early “warning signs” (e.g. emotional response, hypoarousal, and hyperarousal).

In the process of using SEL to teach the desired behaviors, consider the SAFE Format.

S = Sequenced Step by Step Skill Approach

A = Active Forms of Learning for Practicing Skills

F = Focused Time and Attention on Skill Development

E = Explicit Teaching of Social and Emotional Skills

Many assessments may be useful to assess missing social, emotional, and behavioral skill sets. Some SEL curriculum options include assessments, and these may be specific to the curriculum or more generalized. There are also more universal assessments. These may include options such as Ross Greene’s Lagging Skills (ALSUP) assessment (2024), the SEARS assessment, the ABLLS/AFLS assessment, and many others.

Once the Competing Pathways Model has been completed, including determining the replacement behaviors and the desired behavior, the next step is to use the Completing Pathways model to generate a hypothesis statement.

## Generate a Hypothesis or Summary Statement:

The Hypothesis (or Summary) Statement is generated from the center sections of the Competing Pathways Model. These sections will include:

- Setting events
- Antecedents
- Behavior
- Consequences

At times, the hypothesis statement may be referred to as the “FBA Summary Statement.” The FBA Summary statement is the conclusion/outcome of the FBA process.

The FBA summary statement or hypothesis is developed from the FBA. It should include the following:

- A brief operational definition of the target behavior (measurable, observable)
- Conditions under which the behavior is displayed (any observed patterns of behavior)
- Hypothesized function of the behavior
- How setting events (factors outside of the school environment) may make the target behavior more likely to occur

## Examples

There are simple or more complex formulas which may be used for the hypothesis statement depending on the target behavior addressed:



### Example 1: Simplified hypothesis statement:

Hypothesis Format = When.... student will..... As a result, ...

When (event in the environment occurs), then (behavior occurs). As a result, (consequence).

### Example 2: Traditional behavioral hypothesis statement:

“When (student name)\_\_\_\_\_ is expected to (describe environmental task or demand)\_\_\_\_\_ during (specify the classroom/school environment)\_\_\_\_\_, the student (describe behavior of concern)\_\_\_\_\_, for the reason(s) of (indicate reason/motivation for the behavior) \_\_\_\_\_. This is likely to occur with more intensity/frequency if \_\_\_\_\_.”

### Example 3: Traditional behavioral hypothesis statement with the addition of a missing skills statement:

“When (student name)\_\_\_\_\_ is expected to (describe environmental task or demand)\_\_\_\_\_ during (specify the classroom/school environment)\_\_\_\_\_, the student (describe behavior of concern)\_\_\_\_\_, for the reason(s) of (indicate reason/motivation for the behavior) \_\_\_\_\_ associated with lagging skills of \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_. This is likely to occur with more frequency or intensity if \_\_\_\_\_.”

### Example 4: Traditional behavioral hypothesis summary statement with addition of identified missing skills, replacement behavior, and desired behavior:

“When (student name)\_\_\_\_\_ is expected to (describe environmental task or demand)\_\_\_\_\_ during (specify the classroom/school environment)\_\_\_\_\_, the student (describe behavior of concern)\_\_\_\_\_, for the reason(s) of (indicate reason/motivation for the behavior) \_\_\_\_\_ associated with lagging skills of \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_. This is likely to occur with more frequency or intensity if \_\_\_\_\_.” The goal is for the student to \_\_\_\_\_ (Desired Behavior) \_\_\_\_\_. In the meantime, the team will teach \_\_\_\_\_ (Replacement Behavior) \_\_\_\_\_ as a way to \_\_\_\_\_.”

## Hypothesis Testing

Once the Hypothesis statement has been generated, the next step is to test that statement.

One way to assess accuracy of the statement is to conduct observations to see if the Hypothesis statement can be validated. With this type of observation, unlike the ABC observation, the team is only looking for the specific behaviors that were part of the summary statement or hypothesis statement. Dr. Laura Riffel (*Behavior Doctor Seminars*, 2023) has some tools that can be used for this hypothesis testing process through observations.

Once the working hypothesis is validated, the next step is to generate a behavioral goal from the Hypothesis statement.

The generation and the validation of the hypothesis statement or the FBA Summary statement concludes the FBA process. When a working hypothesis has been established, the team makes the transition to the development of the Behavior Intervention Plan.

Prior to addressing the development of the Behavior Intervention Plan, it is important to consider the FBA Summary Report Document. The purpose of the FBA Summary Report is not to capture the entire body of evidence collected through the FBA process, but to capture a summary of information relevant to the target behavior. The summary report provides background and context for the BIP. Consider a situation in which a school does not know the student. What information might the school need to best support the student and implement behavioral programming? The FBA Summary Report is a part of the body of evidence, but does not represent the entirety of the body of evidence.



## Figure 5 FBA Summary Report

### Section 1: Student Data :

Student Name:	DOB:		
Grade Level:	IEP:	504:	MTSS/PBIS:
Parent Permission Date:	Date Report Completed:		

The first section of the FBA Summary Report captures basic demographic information. This may include data regarding other plans and services for the student such as IEP, 504, ALP, or Healthcare Plans. This section also provides documentation that parent/guardian permission was obtained to conduct the FBA as required by Colorado Law.

### Section 2: Problem Identification:

Type of FBA:
Brief <input type="checkbox"/> Full <input type="checkbox"/>

In this section, a full versus brief FBA is specified. A brief FBA will reduce the volume of information collected. It is also possible that the team may begin with a brief FBA and ultimately decide to complete a full FBA as information is collected and analyzed.

### Sources of Information:

This section of the FBA is organized in a “check box” format. The team will indicate which sources of information were used to generate the FBA Body of Evidence. Each of the below checked boxes will have a corresponding section where a summary of the information collected can be entered. For each box that is checked, the corresponding section is completed. Boxes that are not checked will not require completion of the additional section.

Input is collected from multiple sources to complete the functional behavior assessment.  
*Check all that apply.*

<input type="checkbox"/>	Student Interview
<input type="checkbox"/>	Parent Interview
<input type="checkbox"/>	Teacher Interview
<input type="checkbox"/>	Rating Scales
<input type="checkbox"/>	ABC Data and Student Observations
<input type="checkbox"/>	Record Review
<input type="checkbox"/>	Environmental Review:
<input type="checkbox"/>	Missing Skills Inventory/Summary; (cognitive, SEL, and/or academic skills gaps that might be driving or contributing to behavior)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Social History/Medical History
<input type="checkbox"/>	Reinforcement Inventory

**Strength Profile (strengths, interests, possible reinforcers):**

The Strength profile is an essential part of this document, as building upon existing skills supports a student’s success in the learning process. This strategy also increases the likelihood of independent use of new skills in the future. Understanding a student’s strengths allows the team to create an individualized and effective reinforcement system for the student. When completing an FBA, some of the information will reference areas for growth (e.g. behaviors of concern, safety challenges). Capturing student strengths provides context about goals and interests. This reminds staff of a “whole student” approach. Additionally, through accurate implementation of the FBA process, a student may be supported in developing the skills necessary to achieve these goals in the future.

**Cultural Considerations and Summary (interview with the family and team conversation):**

Things to consider:

- What is the school’s relationship with the family?
- Describe successful strategies of school staff to build positive school-family relationships.



- Identify student language and cultural strengths/assets that can be incorporated into the plan to mitigate problem behaviors.
- Explore whether personal assumptions, biases and perceptions of staff adversely impact this student.
- Examine beliefs of the school regarding the school's responsibility to honor individual beliefs, values, and priorities of language, race, culture, family, and socioeconomic circumstance to build a positive, socially-responsive community.

The cultural considerations section is intended to encourage adults to consider their own biased approaches in the FBA process. It also serves the purpose of examining target behaviors through a cultural lens. A behavior that might have been identified as inappropriate within the school environment might be appropriate within the culture of the student. If it is determined that the behavior is culturally appropriate, the team must consider whether a behavior that is culturally relevant for the student should be eliminated.

Some situational examples are as follows:

What is the expected behavior at a sporting event? Would it be using a loud voice to cheer for the team? Jumping up and down? Waving hands and arms?

What if all but one of the participants were engaging in this behavior, and this one participant was sitting quietly in the seat (fully attentive, but without vocalizations or other body movements)?

We might think that this person is strange or that the behavior is out of character for the event and setting. The behavior might, however, be very appropriate for a classroom setting. Do we want to eliminate the behavior of sitting quietly with no verbalizations and body movements?

Let us consider another situation. What if, at a classical band or symphony performance, attendees were quiet and focused with calm bodies? If one person was displaying the behavior described previously for the sporting event, the person would stand out and draw attention to themselves.

Behavior is situational and cultural. An individual may need to learn what behavior is expected for sporting events versus the symphony, and when to display each type of behavior. The same is true for behaviors that are cultural; we do not need to eliminate them, as they are still important and relevant to the culture in which they occur.

## **Academic Considerations and Summary:**

Questions to consider:

- How does the student's academic performance compare to that of their peers?
- Have academic interventions been implemented with fidelity?
- Does the student need academic interventions alongside a behavior plan?

It is important to consider academics when conducting an FBA. The team must determine whether the target behavior is causing the student to fall behind academically, or whether the target behavior is being used to cover and “hide” (as a coping mechanism) academic gaps. Some students would prefer a reputation as the “bad” student rather than the “dumb” student. If this is the case, the team can implement a number of behavioral interventions and the behavior will continue. The student may simply switch out one type of behavior for another. For instance, the student may stop hitting but start kicking, then stop kicking and begin spitting. If the student’s behavior is an attempt to cope with academic gaps, then the only type of intervention that will be impactful will be academic intervention to address and close the academic gap. If a student’s behavior has resulted in a lack of exposure to academics because of time spent in the office or meeting with mental health staff members, then both behavioral and academic interventions may be necessary.

In the academic summary sections, the impact of the behavior on academics or the function of the behavior to hide academic gaps can be addressed. Additionally, the student’s academic status and progress should be discussed clearly.

### **Target Behaviors with Operational Definitions:**

Based on the FBA results, information in this section will indicate which of the student’s behaviors will be considered in the programming. One or two behaviors can be listed, but no more than three behaviors should be addressed at one time. When the list behaviors have been resolved and mastery levels are met, the team can then move on to other behaviors that need to be addressed.

Once the behaviors have been selected, the operational definition is generated. The operational definition must be constructed in observable terms. The observer must be able to identify whether the behavior did or did not occur without room for interpretation or “gray areas.” If there is room for interpretation, stakeholders will understand the information differently. Staff may then begin to address other behaviors not included in the Behavior Intervention Plan, decreasing fidelity of implementation. The operational definition can include the course of the cycle of the behavior.

### **Student Interview Summary:**

In this section, provide a summary of the interview with the student, noting any relevant patterns, and share the student’s perspective.

### **Parent/Guardian Interview Summary:**

Consider cultural context and any cultural considerations or needs with the parent/guardian interview process.

Parents/guardians are an important part of the FBA process, as they are often the experts on their child’s behavior. The parent/guardian can provide information on what has and has not worked in the past. The parent/guardian can also provide information on what the student’s behavior looks like in the home and community environment. Involving parents/guardians in interviewing may



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increase their investment in the behavior programming process. Colorado Law requires that parent/guardian permission is obtained before conducting any type of behavioral assessment. These sections can be used to document that permission. Involving the family in the intervention process, pairing home and school interventions, will result in higher and more rapid levels of change than in intervention occurring solely at the school level. Conducting this interview is a way to build a collaborative relationship with the family and can open the doors for additional guidance and support.

### **Teacher Interview Summary:**

In this section, the teacher interview will be summarized. Teacher input is important, as the teacher is one individual who will be expected to implement the behavior intervention plan. During the teacher interview, the team can gather information regarding the replacement behavior and what will be acceptable in the short-term as the student learns new skills. What does the teacher see as the desired behavioral outcome for this student? This information is critical to the Behavior Intervention Plan development.

### **Rating Scales Summary:**

In this section, a summary of information from any rating scales that have been administered (e.g. behavior rating scale, Autism rating scales, BASC/BESS, Conners, adaptive skills) is included.

### **ABC Data and Student Observations Summary:**

Multiple observations by different individuals are conducted as part of the FBA process. In this section, a summary of all the observations (including number of observations, person(s) conducting the observations, and times of day/week that observations were conducted) will be included. Any observed patterns related to setting events, antecedents, behavior, and consequences can also be described. Finally, the frequency, duration, and/or intensity of the behavior will be noted here.

### **Records Review Summary:**

This section will summarize the information collected from student files, health records, and any other outside documents (e.g. medical or psychiatric evaluations and reports). The records review would also include any existing MTSS/RtI/PBIS data, attendance and discipline records, enrollment history, etc. All the information that is relevant to the target behavior should be summarized and included in this section.

### **Environmental Review Summary:**

Example content for this section may include a routine analysis, schedule analysis, consideration of environmental conditions such as lighting/noise level/classroom arrangements/visual stimuli, etc.

- What events are positive or reinforcing for the student during the school day?

- What events are negative or non-preferred for the student during the school day?
- What is the ratio of positive interactions/feedback/praise to negative interactions/corrections/redirections at school?

In this section, the team examines what factors within the environment might be leading to the student's behavior. Is the student sensitive to noise in the environment? The temperature in the room may also make a difference, as being too hot or too cold may result in behaviors of concern. The lighting in the room may also have an influence (e.g. fluorescent lights leading to sensory overload). If the classroom walls are full of visual stimuli, this may cause students to feel overwhelmed. Additionally, the classroom may have too much (or too little) structure. In this section we are looking for a summary of any Environmental conditions that might be impacting the student's behavior.

### **Missing Skills Summary:**

Listed missing skills must be related to the target behavior. These may also be skills required for the desired behavior to be displayed. Missing skills may be connected to brain injury, neurocognitive functioning, social-emotional functioning, executive functioning, language, or communication.

When considering desired behaviors, it is likely that the student will be missing some skills necessary to demonstrate these behaviors. When the desired behavior has been identified, a task analysis of the skills necessary to perform that behavior must be completed. This process will allow the team to break down the desired behavior into the smallest "skill sets" possible. The team will then assess, collecting baseline data, the skills that the student currently has (and which may be missing). Many of the different social skills curriculum options have missing skills assessments that can be used to determine which skills should be taught to the student. Assessment to identify missing skills is an important part of creating an individualized intervention. There may be multiple missing skills to address. This section should include a summary of missing skills that are directly related to the identified target behavior (remaining mindful of function).

### **Social History Summary:**

Social history can provide a wealth of information on developmental milestones, relationships, number of schools attended, previously provided services, the student's living environment, etc. In this section, a summary of relevant background information is included to support the selection of desired behaviors in the FBA Process. Adverse childhood experiences and trauma, if relevant, may be included in this section.

### **Medical History Summary:**

This section may include information on brain injuries, health conditions, medications, or other content as relevant. School-based health screening information can also be useful. Parents/guardians may have provided outside medical documentation or assessment for students with a condition that may impact behavior (e.g. Fragile X Syndrome). It is important to consider



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hearing and vision needs, side effects of medications, any type of chronic pain which may influence behavior, special toileting needs, hydration needs, or medical conditions that would prohibit the use of physical interventions. The team should be aware of any type of traumatic brain injury, if applicable. Information about sleeping and eating patterns, dietary needs, allergies, and/or seizures will help to inform behavioral programming for the student. In this section, a summary of relevant medical information which may impact the student's behavior is documented.

### **Intervention History Summary:**

This is an area where the student's parent/guardian can be instrumental. It is important to have a history of what interventions have been tried in the past, which were helpful, and which were less than effective. Having information about past interventions that have been tried will save valuable time; this way, the team is not starting from square one with the strategies selected. If there are interventions that have been implemented with fidelity in the past that have not been effective, then the team will avoid the use of these interventions. There might be interventions that are being used in the home environment that are producing results, and these could be duplicated or used in a modified manner in the school setting. Has the student participated with an ABA clinic that the school can contact to review what work was done and which strategies may be appropriate for the school setting? This section will include a summary of past interventions which should either be used or avoided.

### **Reinforcement Inventory Summary:**

Just as adults are reinforced on a monthly or bi-weekly basis by receiving a paycheck, students must be reinforced for learning new skills. This reinforcement makes it more likely that we will observe continued use of those skills. It is through reinforcement of the replacement behaviors and desired behaviors that the student identifies the function and benefit of these new skills. Reinforcement can come in many different forms such as tangibles, adult attention, peer attention, options for free time, etc. There are a variety of different reinforcement inventories that can be completed with the student. Sometimes conducting observations can be useful in determining what is reinforcing for a student. For instance, preferred objects and areas in the classroom can be noted. Enough information must be gathered for the team to generate an individualized list or menu of items that might be reinforcing for the student. Parents/guardians are often a good source of information, as it is likely that they will have additional insight regarding student preferences. This is another opportunity for parents/guardians to provide input in the FBA and BIP process. This section will include a summary of items and activities which are reinforcing for the student.

### **Data Collection Summary:**

This section will summarize patterns of behavior which may be related to time, day of week, class, individuals, frequency, duration, intensity, latency, ABC data, and any other intervention data outcomes. Patterns within the setting will be analyzed while considering antecedents, behaviors, and consequences.

The FBA process includes extensive data, and it can be challenging for the team to determine what data is relevant and which data does not help with the decision-making process. In this section we are looking for a summary of the data that the team has determined to be relevant to the target behavior(s). This will also include data that can be used for ongoing progress monitoring to determine the effectiveness of interventions. Data regarding frequency, duration, latency, or intensity, as referenced above, may provide context regarding the significance of the behavior of concern.

### **Baseline Data Collection Summary:**

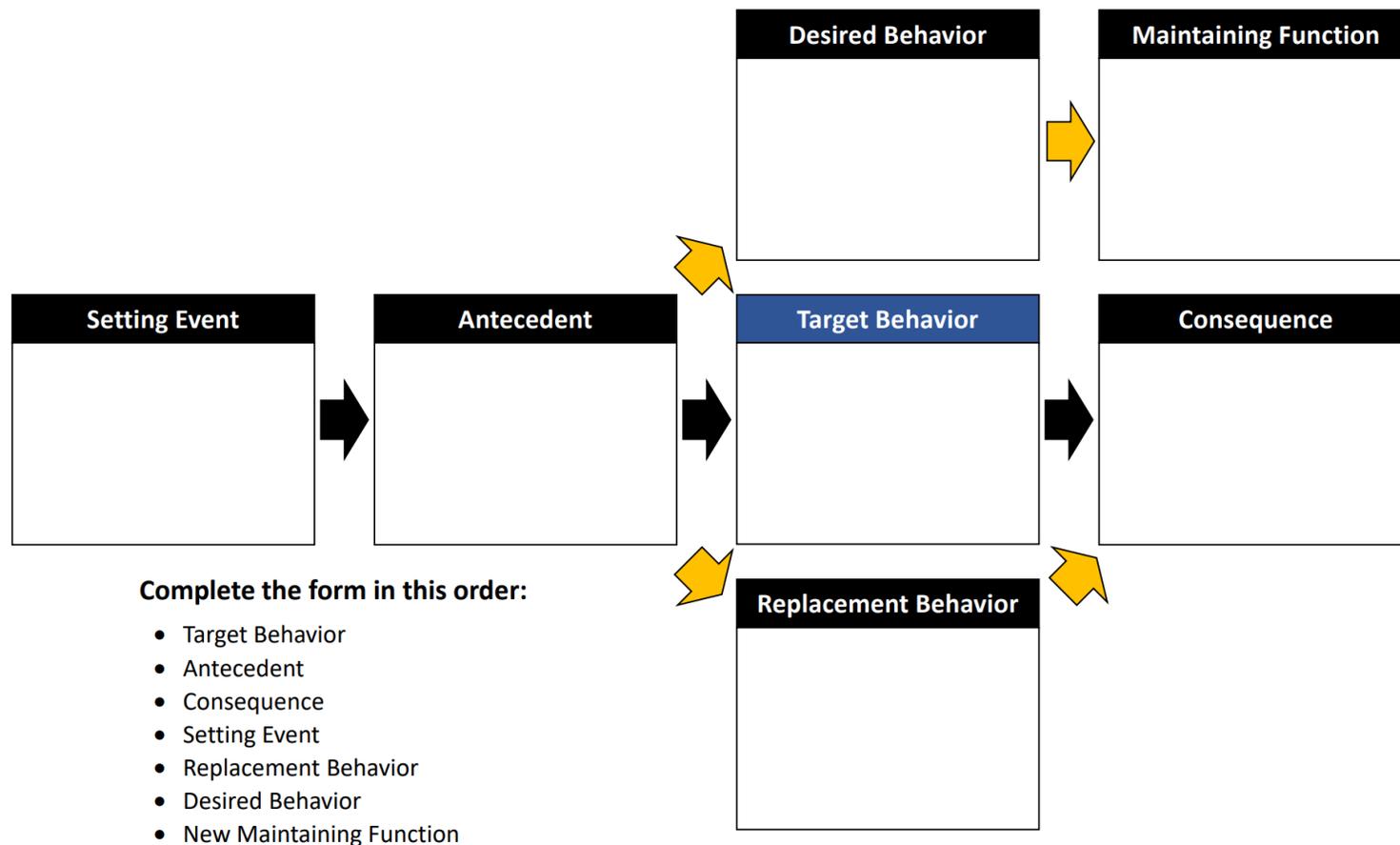
Baseline data is an essential part of the FBA process. As a general rule, the team will collect at least four days of baseline data prior to implementing any intervention. Note that, when safety concerns are a factor, the team must use professional judgment regarding the delay of intervention implementation. The purpose of baseline data is to provide a foundation from which the team can measure the impact (or lack of impact) of interventions on behavior. Baseline data is also valuable for goal-setting. In this section, the baseline data collected as a part of the FBA process will be included.



## Section 3: Behavior Analysis

Once the FBA body of evidence has been collected and analyzed and patterns of behavior have been identified, the pattern of behavior information is then inserted into the competing pathways model.

Figure 6 Competing Pathways Chart



When completing the Competing Pathways Model, the team will begin with the target behavior. Next, the antecedent, consequences, setting events, and replacement behaviors will be addressed. Recall that replacement behaviors serve the same function of the target behavior and the desired behavior with a new maintenance consequence. The Competing Pathways Model is the final summary of the FBA Process from which the Hypothesis/FBA Summary Statement is generated.

Hypothesis or FBA Summary Statement:

A summary/hypothesis statement is developed from the FBA.

It should include the following content:

- A clear, measurable operational definition of the behavior of concern
- Conditions under which the behavior is displayed (any observed patterns of behavior)
- Hypothesized function of the behavior
- Setting events (factors outside of the school environment) and how they may impact the target behavior

Does the Hypothesis Statement include cultural considerations?

### Sample Hypothesis Statement:

“When (student name)\_\_\_\_\_ is expected to (describe environmental task or demand)\_\_\_\_\_ during (specify the classroom/school environment)\_\_\_\_\_, the student (describe behavior of concern)\_\_\_\_\_, for the reason(s) of (indicate reason/motivation for the behavior) \_\_\_\_\_ associated with lagging skills of \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_. This is likely to occur with higher frequency or intensity if \_\_\_\_\_.”  
The goal is for the student to \_\_\_\_\_ (Desired Behavior) \_\_\_\_\_. Prior to this, the team will teach the student \_\_\_\_\_ (Replacement Behavior)\_\_\_\_\_ as a way to \_\_\_\_\_.”

The Hypothesis/Summary Statement concludes the FBA and is also the starting point for the development of the BIP. In this section, the team will include the hypothesis statement. Teams may make use of the above formula as a starting point for the summary statement, but should adjust the structure as needed.



# Appendix

## FBA Summary Report

### **Section 1: Student Data**

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_ DOB: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Grade Level: \_\_\_\_\_ IEP: Y or N 504: Y or N MTSS/PBIS: Y or N  
 Parent Permission Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Date Report Completed: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Section 2: Problem Identification**

#### **Type of FBA:**

Brief  Full

#### **Source of Information:**

Input is collected from multiple sources to complete the functional behavior assessment. *Check all that apply.*

<input type="checkbox"/>	Student Interview
<input type="checkbox"/>	Parent Interview
<input type="checkbox"/>	Teacher and Staff Interview
<input type="checkbox"/>	Rating Scales
<input type="checkbox"/>	ABC Data and Student Observations
<input type="checkbox"/>	Record Review (including attendance, RtI/MTSS data, other pertinent plans, safety, transportation, and disciplinary review)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Environmental Review
<input type="checkbox"/>	Missing Skills Inventory/Summary (communication, cognitive, SEL, and/or academic skills gaps that might be driving or contributing to behavior)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Social History/Medical History
<input type="checkbox"/>	Reinforcement Inventory
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other:

#### **Strength Profile (strengths, interests, possible reinforcers):**

\_\_\_\_\_

#### **Cultural Considerations and Summary (interview with the family and team conversation):**

Things to consider:

- What is the school's relationship with the family?
- Describe successful strategies of school staff to build positive school, parent and family relationships.
- Identify student language and cultural strengths/assets that can be incorporated into the plan to mitigate problem behaviors.
- Explore whether personal assumptions, biases and perceptions of staff adversely impact this student.
- Examine beliefs of the school regarding the school's responsibility to honor individual beliefs, values and priorities of their race, culture, family and socioeconomic circumstance to build a positive socially responsive community.

## **Academic Considerations and Summary:**

Questions to consider:

- How does the student's academic performance compare to their peers?
- Have academic interventions been put in place with fidelity?
- Does the student need academic interventions implemented alongside a behavior plan?

## **Target Behaviors with Operational Definitions:**

## **Student Interview Summary:**

## **Parent Interview Summary:**

Consider cultural context and any cultural considerations or needs with the parent interview process.

## **Teacher Interview Summary:**

## **Rating Scales Summary:**

## **ABC Data and Student Observations Summary:**

## **Records Review Summary (including attendance, RtI/MTSS data, other pertinent plans, safety, transportation, and disciplinary review):**



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### **Environmental Review Summary:**

Examples might include a routine analysis, schedule analysis, environmental conditions such as lighting, noise level, classroom arrangements, visual stimuli, etc.

- What does the individual/family perceive as positive or reinforcing events in their environment or daily routine?
- What does the individual/family perceive as negative events or negative experiences in their environment or daily routine?
- What is the ratio of praise statements to corrective statements? Or, what is the rate of positive interactions/feedback/praise to negative interactions/corrections/redirections?

### **Missing Skills Summary:**

List missing skills that are related to the identified target behavior or skills that need to be taught for the desired behavior to be displayed. The listed skills need to be relevant to the problem behavior. Example of missing skills might include brain injury neurocognitive assessment, social emotional skills, executive functioning skills, language or communication skills etc.

### **Social History Summary:**

Information that could be included might be any adverse childhood experiences/trauma experiences.

### **Medical History Including Medications Summary:**

Which could include brain injury, health conditions, medications, etc.

### **Intervention History Summary:**

### **Reinforcement Inventory Summary:**

**Data Collection Summary:** (Patterns of behavior related to time, day of week, class, individuals, frequency, duration, intensity, latency, ABC data, and any intervention data) Looking for patterns with the setting events, antecedent, behaviors and consequences.

**Baseline Data Collection Summary:**

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# Acknowledgements

## Functional Behavior Assessment Workgroup

The development of this document is due to the efforts of the FBA Workgroup. This task force developed the FBA Summary Report through the collaboration of educators, administrators, special service providers, and university staff. We would like to extend a special thanks to contributors:

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