

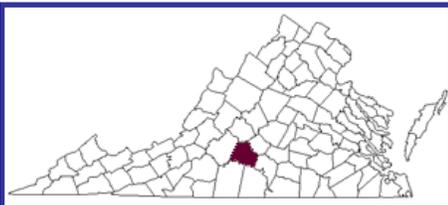


VABA presents . . .

# ABA and Public Schools— Campbell County, VA

Over the past few years, Campbell County Public Schools (CCPS) has made a concerted effort to increase the use of applied behavior analysis (ABA) in the division. In addition to developing Board Certified Behavior Analysts® (BCBA®s)/ Licensed Behavior Analysts (LBAs), division leadership has recognized the benefits of using ABA in schools and is supportive of the practice.

## BACKGROUND



CCPS is a small local educational agency (LEA) east of the Blue Ridge Mountains with about 7,000 to 8,000 students. It primarily serves rural areas, but also borders Lynchburg City. The division boasts two high schools, two middle schools, two combination middle/high schools, seven elementary schools, and one alternative school (Cornerstone Learning).

Currently, the LEA employs four BCBAs, two working towards BACB certification, and one working towards BACB certification as an assistant. The

county also has six behavioral technicians – four are registered (RBT®) and two have completed the classwork. The first BCBA was hired about nine years ago. The second BCBA to be hired was **Ms. Hayley Mullins, BCBA, LBA**, who is the informant for this paper. Currently she works out of the central office.

## PROCESS & STRATEGY

Ms. Mullins and the other LBAs also have a teaching license. The RBTs are, at the least, highly qualified paraprofessionals. Ms. Mullins notes that the LEA prefers to hire professionals that are also licensed as a special education teacher. Campbell County feels licensed teachers are better equipped for the IEP process. In addition, due to the rural setting of the county, it is important to be as efficient as possible.

As of publication, CCPS had not done any outside hiring of LBAs, Licensed Assistant Behavior Analysts (LABAs), or RBTs, but always grew them from within. There were external postings, however no candidates were already licensed as a behavior analyst. Ms. Mullins is not aware of the process that it took

*All of Campbell County Public Schools Behavior Analysts also have a special education teaching license.*

to get initial approval from the school board, but she sees that there is now momentum behind it. The first three were difficult to approve, but now leadership sees value in having LBAs on the team – **“happier parents, fulfilled teachers.”**

According to Ms. Mullins, the initial motivator was a belief in the science of applied behavior analysis and the understanding that ABA is much more than discrete trial training. Especially attractive were the last two dimensions of ABA (Baer et. al., 1968) – effective and generality.

## BARRIERS & CHALLENGES

Ms. Mullins notes that over the past year, new administrators and school officials have been hired who do not yet understand the impact of ABA. Senior leadership has recognized an opportunity for onboarding new employees through a retreat for principals to talk about the role of the LBAs in the schools and how the expectations should be different.

Ms. Mullins admits that there have been some difficulties in translating the BACB code as well as the Board of Medicine Regulations for Behavior Analysis to the school setting. Another struggle was communicating the differences between the licensed person and unlicensed person, but she says they found success with describing unlicensed personnel as “top notch paraprofessionals.”

Retention is also a struggle. CCPS addressed the issue by modifying how it supports employees pursuing certification: the employee must pay back the money spent on schooling if s/he leaves the school system within three to five years.

### **DUTIES & RESPONSIBILITIES**

LBAs in Campbell County are not limited to special education. As Ms. Mullins says, “We believe in behavior analysis for the greater good!”

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However, the funding does come from the special education department. To disseminate behavior analysis beyond special education, they work hard to model behavior analysis practices and the applicability to everyone, especially regarding trauma, classroom management, and staff behavior change.

CCPS was recently accepted in the cohort for VCU Autism Center of Excellence (ACE)

services. One of the processes they are exploring involves functional behavior assessments (FBA). The autism specialist, an LBA, currently facilitates all the county’s FBAs, but this practice is not sustainable. The goal with VCU ACE is to better establish FBA and behavior intervention plan processes and then reserve the autism specialist for those that need true intervention. The expected product is a school guidance document and flow chart.

In addition to paraprofessional training (as mandated by HB325), the LBAs do trainings on the principles of ABA, the behavior chain, reinforcement, preferences, and motivating operations, mostly on an *ad hoc* basis. Ms. Mullins says, “We tried to be cognizant of what we are calling behavior analysis and what we are not.”

As teachers, LBAs in Campbell County are involved in curriculum decisions. The county made an informed choice to not use a specific curriculum and instead focus on training competent behavior analysts. It was important to them that the LBAs do not become prompt dependent on a particular system, but instead become competent at making data-based decisions. All LBAs in CCPS routinely graph and analyze their data. That information is then used to facilitate/support decisions made during IEP meetings”

LBAs in Campbell County Public Schools undertake to have collaborative relationships with

private programs in the area. Outside behavior analysts are invited to observe in the schools and they work together for the betterment of students. This requires a mutual respect and an understanding of how each has a place in the community.

### **OUTCOMES**

With the advent of ABA in CCPS, Ms. Mullins notes that the goal is to be able to offer the unique aspects of traditional private day placements in the public school setting in order to promote least restrictive approaches, natural environment opportunities, and generality. Senior leadership are increasingly becoming aware of the benefits of ABA.

***Campbell County Public Schools Administration has seen a clear link in the decrease of due process and private placements since adopting ABA.***

The CCPS administration has seen a clear link to the decrease of due process and private placements since developing BCBA’s in their schools. With the financial benefits front and center, it is not a difficult sell to continue to develop the practice within CCPS.

CCPS has discovered the value of incorporating ABA into the public schools. Many lessons can be learned from the groundwork laid by this rural school division. The rewards of their hard work and determination validate the continuation of the relationship.