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Considerations for School Leadership in Leveraging School-based Behavior Analysis for Systemic Improvement in Public Education

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CONSIDERATIONS FOR SCHOOL LEADERS IN LEVERAGING SCHOOL-BASED BEHAVIOR ANALYSIS FOR SYSTEMIC IMPROVEMENT IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

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VIRGINIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS
BEHAVIOR ANALYST NETWORK

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Acknowledgements

School-based behavior analysts (SBBAs) have a unique and important perspective and skillset. The science of behavior lends itself well to application within the public schools. However, the presence of SBBAs is relatively new in the public school environment. SBBAs have the potential to provide great value to public schools to improve student outcomes and support teachers and other educators. With the applicability of the scope of practice of SBBAs, the large amount of research supporting applied behavior analysis (ABA) in education, and the strong potential benefit for public schools to use SBBAs, school leaders need to consider increased use and support for SBBA. This white paper provides an overview of SBBAs and their potential roles and responsibilities in which they can serve as well as considerations for support for SBBAs in their roles.

The development of this white paper was a collaborative effort undertaken by professionals who currently hold a credential of Board Certified Behavior Analyst(R) (BACB(R)) or Board Certified Behavior Analyst at the doctoral level (BACB-D(R)). These individuals also either currently or formerly have worked in public schools. This project was supported by the Virginia Department of Education through a grant (#876-DOE86625-H027A250107) to Old Dominion University to develop and support the Virginia Public Schools Behavior Analyst Network (VAPSBAN).

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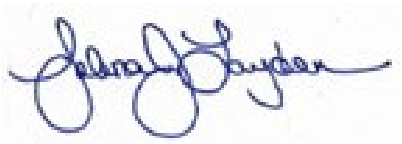

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Public schools face significant challenges, including rising student behavioral needs, chronic absenteeism, and high rates of teacher burnout. These issues are interconnected with and inextricably linked to a need for effective, evidence-based behavioral supports. Educators frequently enter the field lacking the necessary skills and training to manage complex student behavior, often resulting in a reliance on punitive practices that exacerbate problems.

This paper proposes that the expertise of school-based behavior analysts (SBBAs), who are Board Certified Behavior Analysts® (BCBAs®) specializing in education, offers a powerful, underutilized solution. SBBAs are trained in applied behavior analysis (ABA), a data-driven science focused on applying behavioral principles to create socially significant change. SBBAs are uniquely positioned to:

- **Elevate Evidence-Based Practices (EBPs):** Applying deep knowledge of the science of behavior is vital for improving skill acquisition and reducing interfering behaviors for all students.
- **Drive Systems-Level Change:** Transitioning from addressing individual student needs to becoming integral partners in Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) and Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS).
- **Build Staff Capacity:** Utilizing Organizational Behavior Management (OBM) to provide systematic coaching, and performance management, thereby improving staff retention and implementation fidelity.
- **Enrich Data-Based Decision Making:** Analyzing data to identify systemic trends, pinpoint root causes, and evaluate the efficacy of school and district-wide programs.

CALL TO ACTION:

To realize the full potential of this expertise, school district leadership must commit to the strategic integration of SBBAs across all levels of the education system. By doing so, public schools can foster a more sustainable, productive, and positive learning environment. Continued funding, professional guidance, and broader dissemination of ABA principles are essential steps to optimize this critical resource.

GLOSSARY

Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA): A data-driven science focused on applying behavioral principles and learning theories to create socially significant behavior change. It uses methods like experimentation and observation to determine factors influencing behavior.

Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA): A professional at the graduate level who is certified to independently provide behavior-analytic services.

Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP): A formal plan, informed by a functional behavior assessment (FBA), designed to teach replacement skills while addressing and reducing targeted interfering behaviors.

Evidence-Based Practices (EBPs): Instructional or behavioral strategies that are grounded in scientific research and have been proven effective through rigorous study.

Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA): A process used to identify the underlying causes or "functions" of a specific behavior to inform effective interventions.

Implementation Fidelity: The degree to which an intervention or program is delivered as it was designed and intended.
Interdisciplinary Collaboration: The practice of professionals from different backgrounds working together toward a common goal.

Interfering Behavior: Any behavior that prevents a student from learning or interrupts the learning environment for others.

Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS): A MTSS is a systemic, data-driven approach that allows divisions and schools to provide targeted, evidence-based interventions to meet the needs of their students. This is done through a clearly defined process that is implemented to fidelity by all stakeholders within the school and/or division (Gregory & Sturgis, 2023).

Organizational Behavior Management (OBM): A subfield of ABA that applies behavioral principles to improve individual and group performance within an organization, such as a school or district.

Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS): An evidence-based, three-tiered framework, rooted in ABA, for implementing school-wide evidence-based practices to promote a safe school setting by supporting social, academic, behavioral, and emotional needs of all students. It is designed to improve and integrate data, systems, and practices for supporting students.

GLOSSARY

Reinforcement: A consequence that follows a behavior and increases the likelihood that the behavior will happen again.

School-Based Behavior Analyst (SBBA): A BCBA specializing in the education sector who applies the science of behavior to support individual students, classroom systems, and district-wide initiatives. This is not a formal credential.

Single-Subject Design: A research methodology that evaluates the effect of an intervention by comparing a single student's or classroom's performance before, during, and after the intervention. This allows for support that a strategy is working or not.

Skill Acquisition: The systematic process of teaching a student a new skill by breaking it down into smaller steps and providing reinforcement for success.

Socially Significant Behavior Change: Improvements in behavior that are meaningful and practical for the individual's life and their ability to function within their community or school.

Tiers of Support (Tier 1, 2, and 3): From the MTSS framework, these are the levels of intervention and support required for student success.

·**Tier 1**: Universal supports provided to all students.
·**Tier 2**: Targeted, small-group interventions for students at risk or who require intensified intervention.
·**Tier 3**: Intensive, individualized supports for students with significant needs in a particular area.

Visual Analysis: The process of looking at graphed data to determine the effectiveness of an intervention. SBBAs use this to identify trends and levels of behavior.

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM:
BEHAVIORAL NEEDS AREN'T BEING MET

Public schools are responsible for the education of a diverse and ever-changing population of students that can include children ages 2-22 years. Effectively educating this heterogeneous group requires vast knowledge and skills, yet systems are currently strained by chronic absenteeism, mental health crises, increased interfering student behavior, and variability in academic achievement (Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee [JLARC], 2022). Student behavior is directly connected with academic outcomes (Schonfeld et al., 2015), and the overall classroom climate (Ratcliff et al., 2010), emphasizing the importance of effective behavior supports in school settings. Yet, new and provisionally licensed educators may enter the field with limited tools and strategies to effectively address these complexities (Lauderdale-Litten & Brennan, 2017; Holdheide & Reschly, 2008).

INTRODUCTION

THE NEED FOR EFFECTIVE INTERVENTION

Teachers have a lofty task of providing effective educational experiences for a wide range of heterogeneous students. To accomplish this task, teachers need effective supports in behavior. Clunies-Ross et al. (2008) found teachers spend much of their time engaging in classroom management but report they lack the skills and/or confidence to engage in effective behavioral support for their students. As a result, they frequently resort to punitive and ineffective practices (Reinke et al., 2011), which, in turn, exacerbate students' interfering behaviors and jeopardize positive relationships within the classroom (Jensen & Solheim, 2020). Furthermore, educators are charged with utilizing evidence-based practices (EBPs) to address student needs, including addressing behavior so they can deliver effective instruction (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015). Teachers also report a lack of knowledge and resources resulting in a lack of implementation fidelity of EBPs. For example, the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ, 2025) indicates the use of praise for desired behaviors has significant evidence supporting its use but is the least-often taught and practiced of all strategies reviewed. Additionally, Shewark et al. (2018) conducted focus groups with 31 educators working in preschool settings and reported a theme that teachers in those settings felt they did not have the skills needed to create and maintain a positive classroom climate for their students and desired additional support in meeting expectations in these areas. Silveira-Zaldivar and Curtis (2019) surveyed 33 elementary stakeholders regarding barriers to implementation of EBPs and identified six primary barriers; of those six, lack of training was reported as a significant barrier by 65.6% of respondents.

INTRODUCTION

IMPACT OF INTERFERING BEHAVIOR ON TEACHER RETENTION

Teacher burnout is a systemic crisis leading to attrition. While teacher burnout can be attributed to several causes, student interfering behavior is a consistently reported contributing factor (e.g., Bushaw & Calderon, 2014; Reinke et al., 2014). This is coupled with a higher rate of student mental health needs (National Federation of Families, 2021; U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning Evaluation and Policy Development, 2021) and a focus from stakeholders on increasing academic performance in the years following the COVID-19 pandemic (Kuhfeld et al., 2022a; National Assessment of Education Progress, 2023; Office of Civil Rights; 2021). Each of these areas require significant focus on their own, and when taken together can overwhelm existing resources in school settings. According to Prothero (2023), 70% of educators report student misbehavior has increased significantly since 2019. Given the challenges related to student behavior, the lack of training in EBPs to support effective behavior interventions, and the impact on teacher retention, investing in in behavioral expertise is no longer optional; it is a critical requirement for staff retention and school culture.

THE SCIENCE OF BEHAVIOR AS A SOLUTION

Although 49% of teacher preparation programs emphasize the use of EBPs in classroom management as a part of the program structure, implementation remains inconsistent (NCTQ, 2025). Both the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004) call for implementation of EBPs, including behavioral strategies, that are grounded in the science of behavior. ABA is the application of behavioral science to implement socially significant change. Previous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of the principles of ABA for students with and without disabilities (Cammilleri et al., 2008; Tiger & Hanley, 2004) as well as Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), which is rooted in ABA (Bradshaw et al., 2010; McIntosh et al., 2011).

SCIENCE OF BEHAVIOR

Despite its reported effectiveness, ABA has not been fully adopted in public school settings (Putnam & Kincaid, 2015). The school environment is often much more complex than a laboratory or clinical setting and can include far more unpredictable changes to the environment, including the academic, social, and behavioral demands placed on students as well as the behavior of people around them. Utilizing ABA within this setting can lead to a socially significant and long-lasting impact on student outcomes and may lead to positive change in other settings as well (Cooper et al., 2020).

While all educators are responsible for implementing effective behavior supports, SBBAs are well positioned to support behavior change and academic achievement with their expertise in ABA while also supporting other educators to enhance their effectiveness. Specifically, SBBAs have expertise in data-based decision making, experimental analysis, and systems change rooted in the science of behavior. Their knowledge, skills, and field of study inform and support the work of other fields, such as education. Their presence in a school district and contributions to school-based teams at the individual student through systems levels can improve outcomes for both students and staff (Layden et al., 2026). Strategic positioning of SBBAs within a school system can increase a district's capacity to support positive behavioral change in both students and school personnel.

"THAT THERE COULD BE A SCIENCE OF BEHAVIOR, OF WHAT WE DO, OF WHO WE ARE? HOW COULD YOU RESIST THAT?"

DONALD BAER

What is Applied Behavior Analysis?

ABA is the application of the science of behavior and uses methods such as experimentation and observation to determine factors influencing behavior and how to implement socially significant behavior change (Cooper et al., 2020). Additionally, ABA applies learning theories and practices to improve behavior. Rather than providing a prescriptive strategy, tool, or intervention, behavior analysts study instances of behavior and focus on what can be observed and measured across applied settings such as homes, schools, workplaces, and the community (Cooper et al., 2020). Notably, although widely known for supporting individuals with disabilities, the practice of behavior analysis is not so limited in scope (Trump et. al, 2018). Examples of current applications of ABA include education, feeding disorders, gerontology, sports performance, substance abuse, and employee organization and performance management (Heward, et al., 2022).

PROFESSIONAL PREPARATION AND CERTIFICATION IN BEHAVIOR ANALYSIS

A Board Certified Behavior Analyst® (BCBA®) is a professional who can independently provide behavior analytic services and who holds a certification in behavior analysis at the graduate level (BACB, 2025). An individual holding a BCBA credential has:

- Earned (at minimum) a master's degree in a field such as education or psychology.
- Completed graduate coursework requirements, which, at the time of this publication, includes at least 315 hours (in the areas of Ethics; Philosophical Underpinnings; Concepts & Principles; Measurement, Data Display, and Interpretation; Experimental Design; Behavior Assessment; Behavior-Change Procedures; Selecting and Implementing Interventions; and Personnel Supervision and Management).
- Completed 1500-2000 supervised fieldwork hours (BACB, 2025).
- Passed the national BCBA certification exam (BACB, 2025).
- Holds a state license where applicable.

For a more comprehensive description of required coursework and the most current requirements, please refer to the BACB website.

MAINTAINING CERTIFICATION

Fieldwork experiences and training are crucial for developing expertise in a specific area (Bailey & Burch, 2010). BCBAs should engage in activities that fall within both their scope of practice and their demonstrated competencies (Brodhead et al., 2018; Layden et al., 2024). BCBAs maintain their credential through 32 hours of continuing education every two years (BACB, 2025). This aids in maintaining fluency in current research and ethical standards in their scope of competence.

There are other certification levels offered through the BACB including Board Certified Assistant Behavior Analysts® (BCaBA®) and Registered Behavior Technicians® (RBT®), who are responsible for implementing behavior-analytic interventions under the supervision of a higher leveled certificant (BACB, n.d.). Additionally, there are behavior analysts at the doctoral level (BCBA-D). Appendix A provides a summary of the BACB certification levels to include education level and scope of practice.

PREVALENCE OF BEHAVIOR ANALYSTS IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

A BCBA can work in a variety of applied settings but a growing subset of BCBAs report working in school settings (Giangreco et al., 2023), which can be considered as a specific practice area within a BCBA's individual scope of competence (BACB, 2021). Approximately 11.8% of BCBAs and BCBA-Ds (9,386 behavior analysts) identify Education as their primary focus area (BACB, 2025) though it is unknown from this dataset whether these professionals are employed by or contracted to support public or private.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF SCHOOL-BASED BEHAVIOR ANALYSTS

To understand how SBBAs can contribute to public schools, it is important to further understand the knowledge and skillset of these professionals. When practicing in the private sector, BCBAs complete assessments, develop treatment programs for individuals, analyze data, and supervise other personnel, with a focus, typically, on individualized treatment outcomes (BACB, n.d.). While SBBAs have similar responsibilities within educational settings, they may also be tasked with coordinating teams to conduct functional behavior assessments (FBAs), contributing to FBAs and behavior intervention plans (BIPs; Layden et al., 2024), and supporting school- and district-wide teams (e.g., PBIS, Multi-Tiered Systems of Support [MTSS]) with systems change initiatives (Putnam & Kincaid, 2015) and professional development. SBBAs use their understanding of the science of behavior to teach new skills, including academic skills, to students and staff, to reduce interfering behavior, to promote effective and socially appropriate behavior, and to build and support effective systems.

SBBAs who completed some or all their preservice training, particularly fieldwork experiences, in public school settings may have previous training in other areas, such as individualized education program (IEP) development and compliance, academic instruction, or curriculum (Copeland, 2025). SBBAs utilize ongoing data collection and analysis to evaluate intervention efficacy at the individual, classroom, school, and district levels. Even when specific interventions or remediations have large-scale evidence for their use, SBBAs explore barriers to implementation and apply behavioral principles in specific contexts to inform programming and interventions based on individual need.

SCIENCE OF BEHAVIOR

CONTRIBUTIONS OF SCHOOL-BASED Behavior Analysts

Identifying the function(s) of behavior is central to the work of any behavior analyst, including SBBAs (Bakalarz, 2023). Whether working with students or supporting other professionals, SBBAs assert if a behavior continues to occur, then that behavior benefits the person in some way (Daniels & Bailey, 2014). Behavior analysts currently practicing within a school setting apply the principles of the science of behavior in a variety of ways and in support of a variety of initiatives.

BEHAVIOR ANALYSTS CURRENTLY PRACTICING WITHIN A SCHOOL SETTING APPLY THE PRINCIPLES OF THE SCIENCE OF BEHAVIOR IN A VARIETY OF WAYS AND IN SUPPORT OF A VARIETY OF INITIATIVES.

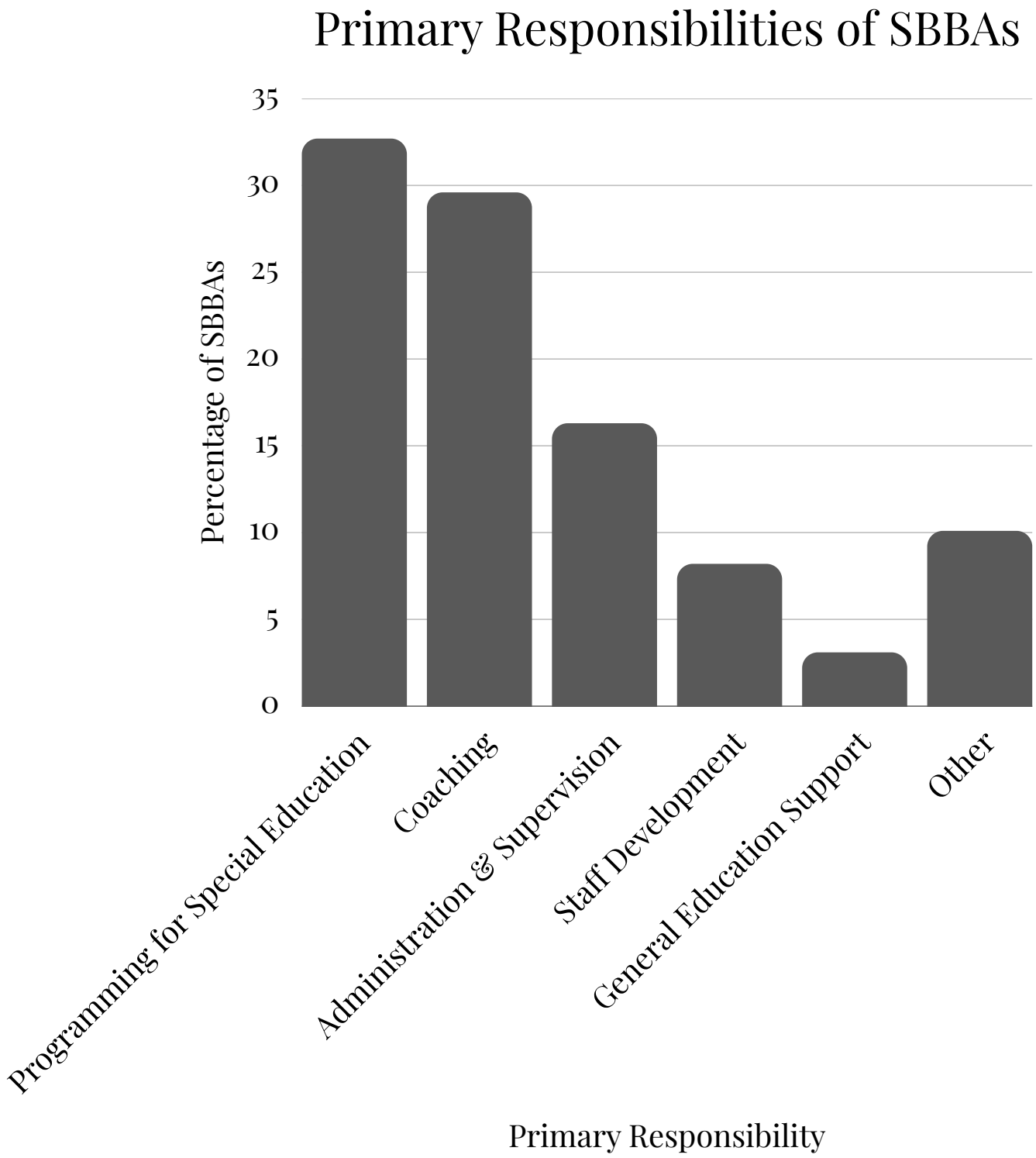
SBBAS USE THEIR UNDERSTANDING OF THE SCIENCE OF BEHAVIOR TO TEACH NEW SKILLS, INCLUDING ACADEMIC SKILLS, TO STUDENTS AND STAFF, TO REDUCE INTERFERING BEHAVIOR, TO PROMOTE EFFECTIVE AND SOCIALLY APPROPRIATE BEHAVIOR, AND TO BUILD AND SUPPORT EFFECTIVE SYSTEMS.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF SCHOOL-BASED BEHAVIOR ANALYSTS

The roles and responsibilities of SBBAs are diverse. Required credentials may also vary as SBBAs working in school districts may have additional licenses or credentials specific to their positions. Formal titles of SBBAs frequently vary, with SBBAs serving in roles such as behavioral coaches, ABA coaches, coordinators of specialized behavior support, behavior interventionists, or technical assistance providers (Layden et al., 2024). SBBAs are frequently hired to provide behavioral and instructional support and often are tasked with training and coaching other school-based professionals about behavior (Layden et al., 2024). Others, however, are hired to support teachers who educate students with autism and may serve in roles of autism consultants, autism specialists, or specialized instructional facilitators for autism (Layden et al., 2024). Additionally, Layden et al. (2024) found SBBAs are often hired for other designated roles, such as assistant principal or special education director, and utilize their behavior analysis training in these roles. SBBAs do not just fulfill one need but rather can serve school districts in a wide variety of roles to improve support for teachers and students alike. Figure 1 is adapted from Layden et al. (2024) and reports responses of SBBAs and their primary responsibility in their school district.

SCIENCE OF BEHAVIOR

FIGURE 1. PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITIES OF SBBAS



SCIENCE OF BEHAVIOR

UNDERUTILIZATION OF SCHOOL-BASED BEHAVIOR ANALYSTS IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The needs around student behavior continue to grow (National Center on Education Statistics, 2022), and more school districts across the United States are choosing to employ BCBAs to support students with and without disabilities due to their specific expertise (e.g., Shepley & Grisham-Brown, 2019). The application of behavioral principles has been shown to reduce staff tardiness (Merritt, et. al., 2019), improve employee safety (Geller, 2005), reduce turnover (Newcomb, et. al., 2019), and improve supervisory practices (Schulz and Wilder, 2022) in schools and other settings. SBBAs can be valuable contributors and leaders in initiatives to align workplace expectations with productive staff behavior and ultimately reduce costs. SBBAs have a unique scope of practice and accompanying knowledge and skills that lend themselves well to public school environments and can result in impactful contributions.

Despite a considerable body of evidence indicating the various roles SBBAs can play in teams across settings (Heward et al., 2022; Layden et al., 2024; Starling et al., 2020), many SBBAs currently practicing in a school-based environment find their work constrained to serving students with disabilities, particularly those with autism spectrum disorder (ASD; Layden et al., 2024). This is due to a variety of factors, including a historic focus on the utility of the technologies of ABA to teach children with ASD, and advocacy from families and providers to support insurance funding for ABA services, specifically for this population (Trump et al., 2018). However, SBBAs have the capacity to expand their practice to many other areas and populations within a school setting. Despite its demonstrated effectiveness (Carr et al., 2002; Gersten, 1985; Wolery et al., 1992), ABA, and SBBAs, continue to be underutilized in schools (Putnam & Kincaid, 2015). To achieve systemic improvement, schools must broaden this scope to leverage SBBA expertise across all student populations and administrative levels.

A PATH FORWARD

MAXIMIZING THE BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE ADVANTAGE

MAXIMIZING THE BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE ADVANTAGE

SBBAs are uniquely skilled to support education by applying behavior analysis in the public school setting. Using these professionals effectively allows them to apply their scope of practice to:

- Improve skill acquisition for both students and educators through EBPs
- Increase student achievement and access to educational opportunities because of reduced interfering behavior and use of EBPs
- Improve systemic functioning with regard to effective and efficient data collection and analysis
- Increase productivity through systematic analysis of interventions and initiatives to determine effectiveness

Given the applicability of the scope of practice of SBBAs, the large amount of research supporting ABA in education, and the strong potential benefit for public schools to use SBBAs, increased use and support for SBBAs are essential considerations for schools and school leaders.

Opportunities for Increased Utilization and Collaboration

Due to the widespread need for effective, evidence-based behavioral support in schools, the expertise held by SBBAs presents an opportunity to optimize the role of the SBBA in creating sustainable systemic improvement. Regardless of student age, disability status, or other demographic characteristics, SBBAs can provide needed support to address and improve student behavior and outcomes in public schools.

MAXIMIZING THE BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE ADVANTAGE

Key opportunities for collaboration include:

- Strategic Planning: Facilitating building- or district-wide goals.
- MTSS & PBIS Leadership: Leading implementation teams to ensure data-driven decisions and evidence-based fidelity.
- Professional Development: Designing coaching models that go beyond one-time workshops to create lasting teacher skill acquisition.
- Data Analysis: Identifying root causes of district-wide trends in discipline, attendance, and academic achievement.
- Instruction: Supporting Tier 1 supports in academic, behavioral, and social-emotional areas and differentiating materials and instruction
- Program Evaluation: Evaluating programs and initiatives for the building or district

MAXIMIZING THE BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE ADVANTAGE

Increasing the number of SBBAs who work in public schools is important. However, even under optimal circumstances, it will take time to develop and integrate SBBAs to effectively support the many public schools across the United States. Incorporating SBBAs at the system level may be the most efficient way to facilitate change. Including SBBAs in and even encouraging them to facilitate strategic planning can positively contribute to schools and districts. In practice, the role of the SBBA may vary depending on the needs and priorities of a school district; however, including SBBAs in district-wide initiatives can help with implementation and sustainability. While many SBBAs have the knowledge and skills to support such initiatives, districts do not always recognize this.

See Appendix B: Examples of Integrating SBBA Expertise into Existing Systems and Support, and Appendix C: Sample Case Analyses of SBBA Supporting Systems-Level Change and Development, for more comprehensive examples of what the integration of SBBAs into public school teams could look like, in terms of their support of various existing initiatives and/or student needs.

SCHOOL-BASED BEHAVIOR ANALYSTS AND TIERED SYSTEMS OF SUPPORT

As many SBBAs are engaged in developing and delivering professional development for staff (Layden et al., 2024), school districts should consider how to include SBBAs in existing district-level teams, like the district's MTSS teams.

MTSS is a framework that is increasingly utilized in public education, specifically with systems change initiatives. MTSS is designed to address the whole child by focusing on social-emotional learning, academics, behavior, attendance, and family engagement (Harlacher & Bailey, 2025). MTSS addresses these areas through a framework that utilizes:

- Universal Screening
- Tiers of interventions
- Ongoing data collection and assessment
- Schoolwide approach to expectations and support
- Family engagement

Often, SBBAs are called upon to support teachers and students who are already in need of individualized and intensive interventions, particularly at the Tier 3 level. Because SBBAs' expertise is valuable and well-suited to address these needs, including SBBAs through all tiers of intervention can increase continuity and alignment within the system and reduce reliance on the additional resources required to provide intensive levels of support. SBBAs' experience with data collection, data-based decision making, and application of the science of behavior enhance the capacity of school MTSS or tiered support teams.

A PATH FORWARD

SCHOOL-BASED BEHAVIOR ANALYSTS AND TIERED SYSTEMS OF SUPPORT

A SBBA's capacity with EBPs can help identify underlying causes of problems and point to effective interventions. Their knowledge of the science of behavior can help teams understand not just what strategies to use, but why they are effective. Effective implementation of tiered systems of support relies on consistent changes in adult behavior over time. School and district staff will have varying levels of adoption and implementation of these strategies. By applying OBM, SBBAs can utilize a systematic approach to ensure the adults in the system have reinforcement and training necessary to sustain the MTSS or PBIS framework. SBBAs can help all staff understand, implement, evaluate, and sustain these initiatives over time.

SBBAS' EXPERIENCE WITH DATA COLLECTION, DATA-BASED DECISION MAKING, AND APPLICATION OF THE SCIENCE OF BEHAVIOR ENHANCE THE CAPACITY OF SCHOOL MTSS OR TIERED SUPPORT TEAMS.

THEIR KNOWLEDGE OF THE SCIENCE OF BEHAVIOR CAN HELP TEAMS UNDERSTAND NOT JUST WHAT STRATEGIES TO USE, BUT WHY THEY ARE EFFECTIVE.

A PATH FORWARD

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

SBBAs do not just monitor student behaviors; they analyze the environment. If an SBBA is working with an individual student, this includes information related to the physical classroom environment, teachers' behaviors, and other variables within the environment, including resources, supports, and behaviors defined in the tiered system. While this process can support the individual student, the data collected can aid in larger building or district initiatives as well. These observations at the individual level can be aggregated and analyzed to identify trends to identify how to better support school teams across the district. For example, if several schools have a higher percentage of students requiring FBAs and BIPs, the SBBA visiting those schools may identify and document implementation gaps in Tier 1 and 2 supports that necessitate increased support for a disproportionate number of students. Through objective data collection and analysis, the SBBA can provide unique insight into the root causes and recommend appropriate interventions.

A PATH FORWARD

POSITIVE BEHAVIOR INTERVENTIONS AND SUPPORTS

Because PBIS is rooted in ABA (Horner and Sugai, 2015), SBBAs are natural, well-suited members and even leads for these teams. At the district level, SBBAs can apply their understanding of research methodology to analyze school data focused on individual classrooms or schools. SBBAs excel at graphic display and visual analysis of data (Putnam & Kincaid, 2015), which allows stakeholders to see clearly which programs are working and make data-based recommendations. SBBAs have further utility in the application of a PBIS framework. SBBAs can define and model effective practices, train and coach adults on EBP implementation, collect and analyze data, and apply OBM principles to support staff.

DEVELOPING AND SUPPORTING CLASSROOM SYSTEMS

SBBAs have the potential to support many of the initiatives and programs already being implemented by schools and school districts. Additionally, they bring a unique lens to these areas with their training and expertise in the science of behavior. SBBAs can aid teachers design classroom systems to reduce time spent managing logistics and increase opportunities to provide quality instruction, implement IEPs, provide needed accommodations, and create opportunities to deliver specially designed instruction. By improving classroom flow and task clarity and improving the knowledge and skills of the adults in the environment, SBBAs contribute to a more manageable workload for educators and a higher rate of skill acquisition for students.

SUPPORT FOR SCHOOL-BASED BEHAVIOR ANALYSTS

SUPPORTS FOR SBBAS

Just as SBBAs can support educators at the classroom, school, and district level, they too need support to be successful in their roles. Foundational activities to greater support for SBBAs and statewide initiatives have begun to form (e.g., Virginia Public Schools Behavior Analyst Network; Kansas Public Schools Behavior Analyst Network). These professional statewide networks supporting SBBAs serve a critical role in supporting and promoting ABA in schools and the behavior analysts working in such settings. The Virginia Public Schools Behavior Analyst Network (VAPSBAN) has compiled resource documents that outline effective, ethical practice within the school environment (VAPSBAN website). Additional states have worked to also provide better guidance for their SBBAs (e.g., Connecticut Guidelines for Behavior Analysts, Best Practices for New Jersey Public School Behavior Analysts). VAPSBAN has particularly worked to not only support state guidance in the form of Guidelines for the Provision of Applied Behavior Analysis in Public Schools (Virginia Department of Education, 2021) as well as developing the Professional Standards for School Based Behavior Analysts (Layden et al., 2026) which highlight five overarching areas that are important to the application of ABA within the school environment. These are:

- Ethics and Professional Practice
- Collaboration
- Systems Capacity Building
- Instruction
- Leadership & Policy

SUPPORTS FOR SBBAS

CALL FOR EXPANDED SUPPORT

Despite these preliminary efforts to better support SBBAs, significant needs remain. Below are four critical needs:

1. Identification by Departments of Education and school districts that SBBAs can be meaningful and valuable contributors to public schools.
2. Continued and expanded funding and support from state Departments of Education, state ABA professional organizations, and national professional organizations in both behavior analysis and education.
3. Greater dissemination of ABA to educators to improve understanding and utilization of the science of behavior.
4. Improved connection by school leaders to available resources to provide these essential supports for SBBAs.

INVESTING IN SCHOOL-BASED BEHAVIOR ANALYSTS

Just as new teachers require induction and mentorship, SBBAs need structured support to thrive in the complex public school environment. Finding other SBBAs to offer guidance, support, and professional development is an early step to set the SBBA up for success. Additionally, a district may consider providing a mentor or coach who has demonstrated effectiveness in leadership positions. By fostering this relationship, the SBBA can learn about the roles and responsibilities of school leaders, district and school policies, the legal requirements of school districts, and the intricacies and idiosyncrasies that come with working in a complex system. Providing a mentorship opportunity will allow the SBBA to gain a greater understanding of their environment and how their expertise can support district initiatives. This formal mentoring structure can also help the SBBA avoid challenges with interdisciplinary collaboration that can arise, particularly in environments where an SBBA has not previously worked on the team (Bowman et al., 2024).

Districts need to consider the SBBA's needs and pair them with mentors who can support their growth specific to their role in the district. Other opportunities for collaboration, mentorship, and participation in school districts are an important consideration that should continue even after the initial induction period for stronger integration and improved performance.

CONCLUSION AND REFERENCES

CONCLUSION

The challenges facing public education, from rising instances of interfering behavior and chronic absenteeism to teacher burnout, are too complex for current systems to resolve without specialized, evidence-based support. This white paper proposes increasing the utilization of the science of behavior, specifically through the expertise of SBBAs, which offers a sustainable path forward.

SBBAs, with their advanced training in behavior analysis, offer a critical resource as they are distinctly qualified to move beyond individual student intervention and drive systemic improvement. By leveraging the skills and competencies in data analysis, coaching and training, and organizational management, school districts can create a more stable, positive, and productive environment for both educators and students.

To ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of support from SBBAs, educational leaders must:

- Understand SBBAs and their unique expertise in the science of behavior and how it applies in public schools
- Integrate SBBAs across organizational levels to maximize potential impact
- Invest in the ongoing professional development and mentorship for these specialists

Providing SBBAs with meaningful, continuous support helps prevent burnout and ensures that they remain effective in their roles, benefiting both students and staff in the long term. Given the versatility and range of evidence on the efficacy of ABA, SBBAs are well suited to support individuals AND the systems in which educators work. School districts must consider their unique needs and match their supports to ensure growth for the SBBA and create opportunities for the SBBA to be effective in their role.

CONCLUSION

The future success of our schools depends on our willingness to invest in solutions grounded in proven science. Fully integrating SBBAs across all organizational levels in education is a decisive action step to ensure effective educational environments, improve student outcomes, and retain dedicated educators. By moving SBBAs from a crisis responder role to a systemic architect role, school leadership can foster environments where students and staff can thrive. School districts must act now to maximize the utilization of these professionals, transforming today's challenges into tomorrow's sustained success.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

SUMMARY OF BACB CERTIFICATION LEVEL

Credential	Description	Education	Practice
BCBA-D	A certified behavior analyst with doctoral training	Doctorate	May practice independently
BCBA	A certified behavior analyst at the graduate level	Master's	May practice independently
BCaBA	A certified behavior analyst at the undergraduate level	Bachelor's	Must practice under the supervision of a BCBA or BCBA-D
RBT	An individual who practices ABA under the supervision of a certified behavior analyst, similar to a paraprofessional	High School Diploma	Must practice under the supervision of a BCaBA, BCBA or BCBA-D

Note. Information adapted from BACB (2025).

APPENDIX B

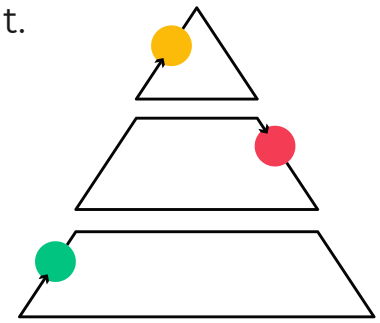
EXAMPLES OF INTEGRATING SBBA EXPERTISE INTO EXISTING SYSTEMS AND SUPPORT STRUCTURES

Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) provide a framework for academic, social, and emotional success. While SBBAs are traditionally viewed as Tier 3 crisis responders, their expertise in the science of behavior, data collection and analysis, and organizational behavior management is vital across all levels of a tiered model.

Tier 1: Universal Foundational Supports

Focus: Structuring the environment and building staff capacity to support the entire student body.

- Core Strategies: Positive reinforcement systems, classroom procedures, behavior-specific praise (BSP), Universal Design for Learning (UDL), environmental modifications.
- The SBBA's Role:
    - Staff Coaching: Utilizing behavioral principles to define, teach, and monitor staff behaviors that align with district expectations (e.g., increasing praise-to-correction ratios).
    - Environmental Design: Advising on classroom organization to reduce antecedents for interfering behavior.
    - Data Infrastructure: Designing user-friendly data collection tools to ensure Tier 1 data can seamlessly inform future Tier 2 or 3 interventions and improve student behavior and achievement.



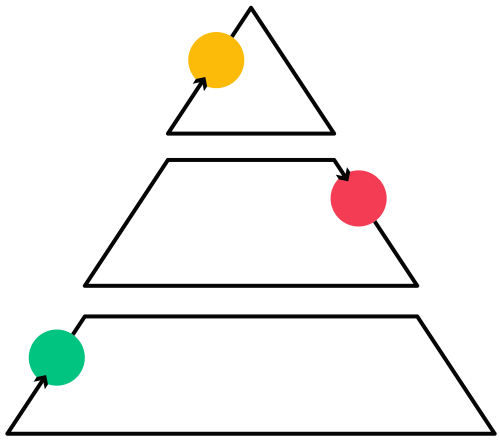
APPENDIX B

EXAMPLES OF INTEGRATING SBBA EXPERTISE INTO EXISTING SYSTEMS AND SUPPORT STRUCTURES

Tier 2: Targeted Interventions

Focus: Supporting students for whom Tier 1 is insufficient through small-group or semi-individualized strategies.

- Core Strategies: social skills groups, behavior contracts, preference assessments.
- The SBBA's Role:
  - Functional Thinking: Assisting teams in analyzing existing Tier 1 data to identify potential functions of behavior before a formal FBA is required.
  - Fidelity Support and Oversight: Developing fidelity checklists to ensure interventions are implemented consistently across different school environments.
  - Can't Do/Won't Do Analysis: When an intervention fails, the SBBA analyzes the environment and staff variables to determine if the issue is a "skill deficit" (staff need more training, additional resources are needed) or a "performance deficit" (the intervention is too cumbersome, staff need support to align with current initiatives).



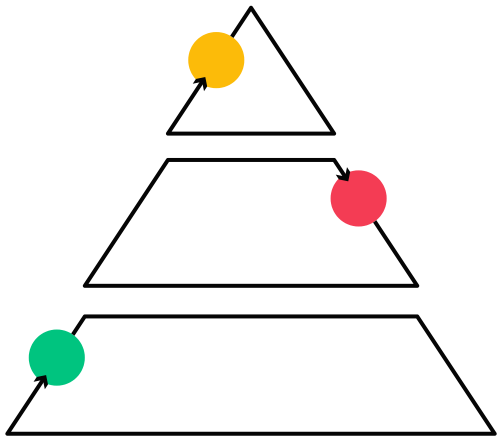
APPENDIX B

EXAMPLES OF INTEGRATING SBBA EXPERTISE INTO EXISTING SYSTEMS AND SUPPORT STRUCTURES

Tier 3: Intensive Individualized Supports

Focus: Highly individualized, high-frequency support for students with significant academic or behavioral needs.

- Core Strategies: Functional Behavior Assessments (FBA), Behavior Intervention Plans (BIP), Functional Communication Training (FCT), and crisis/non-crisis management procedures.
- The SBBA's Role:
  - Specialized Assessment: Leading and collaborating to conduct FBAs and developing BIPs firmly rooted in the science of behavior.
  - Interdisciplinary Collaboration: Working with Speech-Language Pathologists (SLPs) and Occupational Therapists (OTs) to implement FCT, ensuring students have functional ways to communicate wants and needs.
  - Differentiated Instruction: Adapting academic tasks based on behavioral data to increase student engagement and reduce avoidance-based behaviors. Intensifying and individualizing instruction to meet student needs.



APPENDIX B

EXAMPLES OF INTEGRATING SBBA EXPERTISE INTO EXISTING SYSTEMS AND SUPPORT STRUCTURES

Systems Integration & Continuity

A robust tiered system requires continuity. SBBAs ensure that as students succeed, supports are systematically faded rather than abruptly removed.

SBBA Contribution	Impact on School System
Data Alignment	Ensures data collected at Tier 1 are compatible with Tier 3 data collection and intervention.
Fidelity Monitoring	Protects school resources by ensuring interventions are done correctly.
Skill Transfer	Empowers teachers and paraprofessionals through coaching.
Systems Oversight	Facilitates the efficient movement of interventions for students between tiers based on objective data.

APPENDIX B

EXAMPLES OF INTEGRATING SBBA EXPERTISE INTO EXISTING SYSTEMS AND SUPPORT STRUCTURES

Integrating SBBAs into the school's internal structure creates measurable improvements in systemic efficiency. By moving the SBBA role upstream (into Tier 1 and 2), districts can see a reduction in the high costs associated with reactive, Tier 3-only models.

Metric Category	Key Performance Indicator (KPI)	Potential Impact of SBBA Integration
Systemic Efficiency	Time to Intervention	Reduced latency between a student's initial struggle and the implementation of a data-backed Tier 2 intervention.
Staff Capacity	Implementation Fidelity	Increased percentage of staff accurately implementing BIPs and classroom management strategies, as measured by fidelity checklists.
Student Outcomes	Disciplinary Referrals	A measurable decrease in Office Discipline Referrals and out-of-school suspensions due to improved Tier 1 environmental supports.
Fiscal Impact	Out-of-District Placements	Lowered tuition and transportation costs by maintaining students in their Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) through robust Tier 1, 2, and 3 school-based supports.
Staff Well-Being	Teacher Retention	Improved teacher self-efficacy and reduced burnout by providing behavioral coaching and increased classroom support.

APPENDIX B

EXAMPLES OF INTEGRATING SBBA EXPERTISE INTO EXISTING SYSTEMS AND SUPPORT STRUCTURES

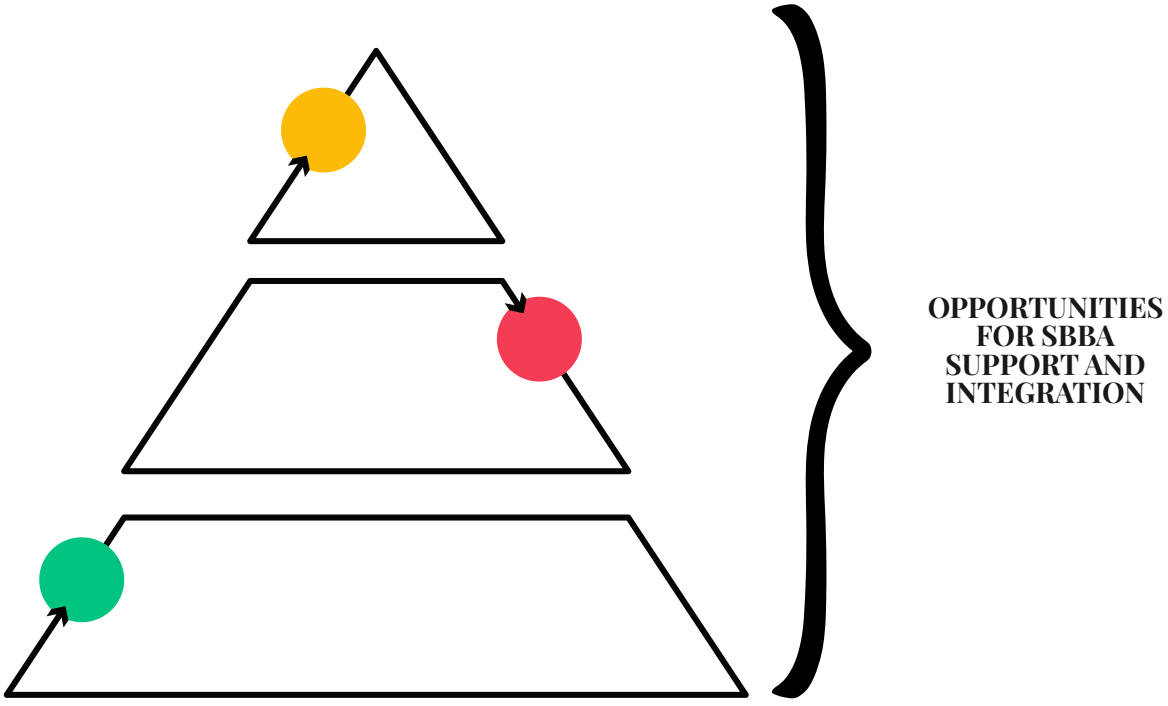
The fiscal return on investment (ROI) of an SBBA is most evident in the prevention of high-cost scenarios. For example:

· External Consultation Costs: Utilizing internally employed SBBAs reduces the need for expensive private contractors.

· Paraprofessional Optimization: SBBAs train paraprofessionals to implement fading protocols, ensuring that 1:1 support is used only when necessary and reduced systematically as student independence increases.

· Litigation Avoidance: Professional data collection and BIP development by an SBBA ensure higher levels of legal compliance with pertinent laws such as IDEA, reducing the risk of costly due process hearings.

The SBBA is not just a provider of student services; they are a capacity-builder. Their primary ROI is the transformation of the school environment from a reactive crisis-response culture to a proactive prevention culture.



APPENDIX C

SAMPLE CASE ANALYSES OF SBBA SUPPORTING SYSTEMS-LEVEL CHANGE AND DEVELOPMENT

Example 1- Introduction

Leadership and Organizational Systems

SBBAs are uniquely prepared for leadership roles as their expertise extends beyond student intervention to the management of personnel and the optimization of school-wide structures through Organizational Behavior Management (OBM).

1. Professional and Ethical Standards in Supervision

BCBAs have training and knowledge in Personnel Supervision and Management (BACB, 2025). SBBAs prioritize:

·Skill Acquisition: Using evidence-based training models to build staff capacity.

· Positive Reinforcement: Applying the same principles of reinforcement to staff performance that are used for student success.

· Self-Determination and Social Validity: Ensuring interventions are meaningful, respectful, and culturally responsive (Wolf, 1978; BACB, 2020).

2. Analyzing the Human Environment

When designing interventions, SBBAs consider all contextual variables, including the bi-directional relationships between students and staff. They analyze how social interactions and environmental factors cause behaviors to manifest differently across settings. SBBAs evaluate:

. Training needs and skill deficits.

. Resource availability and allocation.

. Staff motivation and performance drivers.

APPENDIX C

SAMPLE CASE ANALYSES OF SBBA SUPPORTING SYSTEMS-LEVEL CHANGE AND DEVELOPMENT

3. Organizational Behavior Management (OBM)

At the systems level, SBBAs apply the science of behavior to adult behavior change through two primary OBM frameworks:

· Behavior Systems Analysis: Evaluating how different departments and tiers within a school division work together to produce outcomes (Sigurdsson & McGee, 2015).

. Performance Management (PM): Using data-driven strategies to support and improve the effectiveness of school personnel (Daniels, 2014).

. Strategic Alignment: While OBM uses specialized terminology, its goals are aligned to standard educational models of supervision and support. By leveraging these skills, school districts can move toward proactive, data-informed leadership that sustains long-term organizational health supporting both student achievement and staff retention.

CASE STUDY

SYSTEMIC MTSS IMPLEMENTATION

PRACTITIONER: LAURA, SBBA

SETTING: SMALL SCHOOL DISTRICT (4 ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS)

Phase 1: Foundational Systems (Tier 1)
Laura leveraged her background in OBM and clinical leadership to refine the district's existing MTSS framework.
·Behavioral Clarity: She transformed vague school-wide rules into observable, teachable behaviors by creating clear "examples" vs. "non-examples."
·Instructional Alignment: She introduced Behavioral Skills Training (BST) to the staff, intentionally connecting it to the explicit instruction model, already familiar to educators.
·Function-Based Reinforcement: She expanded the school's reinforcement systems beyond generic stickers to include function-based reinforcers, such as breaks, homework passes, and social time, emphasizing the long-term prosocial benefits for students.

Phase 2: Overcoming Implementation Barriers
When faculty resisted the new systems, Laura treated the resistance as a behavior to be analyzed rather than an obstacle. She used the Performance Diagnostic Checklist-Human Services (PDC-HS) to identify specific barriers:
·The Resource Barrier: One teacher stopped reinforcing students simply because she ran out of tickets and lacked the time to replenish them. Laura coordinated with office staff to create a proactive replenishment system.
·The Autonomy Barrier: Another teacher was reluctant to abandon a high-quality, personal classroom system. Laura utilized behavioral momentum, asking him to use the school-wide system only in common areas (hallways) while reinforcing his existing successes, eventually aligning his custom system with the school-wide model.

CASE STUDY

SYSTEMIC MTSS IMPLEMENTATION

PRACTITIONER: LAURA, SBBA

SETTING: SMALL SCHOOL DISTRICT (4 ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS)

Phase 3: Scaling Support (Tiers 2 & 3)

As the foundation stabilized, Laura shifted her focus to higher-intensity needs, prioritizing sustainability through staff training.

·Tier 2 Fidelity: For small-group interventions, Laura developed fidelity checklists and taught staff how to self-monitor. She normalized fidelity checks by letting staff know she was there to support, not evaluate and by encouraging staff to monitor her performance as well, reducing the stigma of observation.

·Tier 3 Capacity Building: Rather than writing every FBA/BIP herself, Laura trained building-level assessment teams. She modeled the process, provided coached practice, and used behavior-specific praise to build their confidence.

·The Fading Model: As staff fluency increased, Laura systematically faded her direct involvement, transitioning from a "lead" role to a "consultant" role.

Outcomes and Expansion

Through data-based visual analysis, the implementation team identified significant improvements in student outcomes and staff confidence across all four elementary schools. Based on this success, the district expanded Laura's role to lead the MTSS rollout at the middle school level, proving the scalability of the SBBA-led model.

Key Takeaways for Administrators

·Sustainability: Laura didn't do the work but rather built systems that did not require her long-term involvement. She also built capacity so she could shifted responsibility and built capacity of staff to implement independently over time.

·ROI: By addressing staff barriers, she ensured the school's investment in MTSS wasn't wasted due to minor logistical friction.

·Professionalism: Her use of OBM tools provided an objective, non-punitive way to manage staff performance.

APPENDIX C

SAMPLE CASE ANALYSES OF SBBA SUPPORTING SYSTEMS-LEVEL CHANGE AND DEVELOPMENT

Example 2- Introduction

Leadership in Specialized Programming and Personnel Supervision

Because Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBAs®) possess specialized training in managing significant support needs and high-frequency interfering behaviors, they are uniquely positioned to lead programs for students who exhibit significant needs (e.g., Autism, Emotional Disability, or Life Skills programs). Their training supports these programs to remain evidence-based and data-driven.

The development of an SBBA's leadership repertoire begins during their foundational training, which includes:

·Targeted Supervision and Management: Personnel supervision and management content is outlined in the BACB Test Content Outline (BACB, 2025).

· Coaching: Translating complex behavioral theory into actionable strategies for classroom teachers and paraprofessionals is a priority for SBBAs.

. Ethical Decision-Making: Adherence to a rigorous ethical code that prioritizes the least-restrictive environment, social validity, and responsibility to multiple stakeholders is critical for SBBAs.

By leveraging SBBAs in these supervisory capacities, school districts ensure that specialized programs are not only compliant with IEPs, but are also optimized for student independence and staff fluency.

CASE STUDY

SCALING INTERNAL CAPACITY IN URBAN SPECIAL EDUCATION

PRACTITIONER: GRAYSON, SBBA

SETTING: URBAN DISTRICT (INITIAL: 7 CLASSROOMS ACROSS 5 BUILDINGS; FINAL: 20+ CLASSROOMS)

Phase 1: Overcoming Geographic and Time Constraints

Tasked with supporting multiple sites simultaneously, Grayson utilized Behavioral Skills Training (BST) and task analysis to create a scalable coaching model.

·Technological Systems: He developed a centralized library of video models and written protocols. By ensuring these resources were replicable and easy to follow, he provided teachers with immediate access to EBPs.

·Hybrid Coaching: Grayson used a flipped professional development model where staff accessed digital instruction first, followed by scheduled, high-value in-person sessions for individualized feedback and modeling.

Phase 2: Empowering Teacher Autonomy

Grayson recognized that for long-term success, teachers must be the primary drivers of behavioral change, not the SBBA.

·Collaborative Assessment: Rather than acting as the sole expert, he taught teachers to conduct their own FBAs and lead BIP development. This shifted the teacher's role from simply implementer to behavioral leader.

·Contextual Fit: By accounting for urban resource deficits and real-life classroom challenges, he ensured that fidelity checklists and data tools were practical, which built significant rapport and professional trust.

CASE STUDY

SCALING INTERNAL CAPACITY IN URBAN SPECIAL EDUCATION

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Phase 3: The Train-the-Trainer Model (Scaling)
As the program grew from seven to 20 classrooms, Grayson moved from direct support to a systems-oversight role, focusing on district-wide standardization.
·Sustainability: He established a Train-the-Trainer model, coaching veteran teachers to become peer mentors for their own teams.
·Standardization: In collaboration with administrators, he created standardized templates for data collection and intervention planning, ensuring a consistent continuum of support across the entire distirct.
·Liaison & Leadership: By serving as a bridge between district-level administration and classroom teams, he ensured that administrative decisions were informed by frontline data and teacher needs.

Professional Outcome: Promotional Pathway
Grayson's trajectory demonstrates the natural evolution of an SBBA into a supervisory role. He now manages two coaches using the same behavioral principles:
·Targeted Supervision: Using reinforcement-based supervision to strengthen the skills of his coaching team.
·Analytical Problem-Solving: Applying rapport-building and environmental analysis to resolve organizational-level friction.

Key Takeaways for Administrators
·Scalability: Grayson proved that one SBBA can influence 20+ classrooms by focusing on training others rather than doing the work in isolation.
·Internal Capacity: The district reduced its reliance on outside providers by growing their own experts.
·Retention: Providing a clear promotional pathway for SBBAs (from Coach to Supervisor) helps district retain high-level behavioral talent.