



CASP Position Paper: Functional Behavior Assessment in California Schools

Legal Mandates

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) assures that children with disabilities receive a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment, including those with interfering problem behaviors. To ensure students received these rights, the IDEA established, under the U.S. Department of Education, the Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports (PBIS) Technical Assistance Center as a resource for evidenced-based practices (www.pbis.org).

The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) position states, “Students should *not* be excluded from school based solely upon inappropriate social behavior. Appropriate services can readily address and modify many of these behaviors, leading to more positive outcomes than simple punishment” (www.naspcenter.org/).

There are two conditions mentioned in IDEA where functional behavioral assessment (FBA) is to be considered. When a child with a disability has been removed for more than 10 school days in a year due to student conduct, procedural safeguards are to be followed. In this instance, administrators are required to direct the IEP team to conduct a manifestation determination to determine whether the misconduct was a result of, or had a direct relationship to, the child’s disability. In the instance where the behavior(s) were a manifestation of the student’s disability, the IEP team shall conduct a functional behavior assessment, and implement a behavioral intervention plan for the child. If the school had a behavior intervention plan in place before the child was removed for more than 10 days, the team is to *review the plan, and modify it, as necessary to address the behavior.* (20 U.S.C. § 1415(k)(1)(F) (2004)

In the case where the child’s conduct is not a manifestation of the child’s disability, the child shall *receive, as appropriate, a functional behavioral assessment, behavioral intervention services and modifications, that are designed to address the behavior violation so that it does not recur.* (20 U.S.C. § 1415(k)(1)(D) (2004).

As to the question of who may conduct a functional behavior assessment in the schools, the *Education Code* indicates that “trained and knowledgeable” personnel may perform behavioral assessments (*EC* Section 56525(b)). It should also be noted that the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing standards relating to preparation for the School Psychology Credential state that candidates must be well versed in a variety of assessment methods, including behavioral assessment. Therefore, school psychologists can conduct functional behavior assessments because they are specifically trained to do so.

Best Practice

Unfortunately, IDEA gives little direction or detail as to how the FBA should be conducted. Schools are left to the best practice literature in order to provide protection for students with disabilities and use the empirically validated FBA process to address issues with non-disabled students. The 2014 report from the PBIS Technical Assistance Center describes this in the following way:

The substantial empirical evidence combined with the criteria outlined by Horner, Sugai, and

Anderson (2010), supports functional behavioral assessment as a well-defined, research-based practice. The utility of FBAs has extended to include a variety of contexts, age groups, disability categories, and research institutions. Researchers suggest that an FBA should be initiated, “whenever a problem behavior is difficult to understand or a behavior intervention plan is needed to increase student success” (Sugai, Lewis-Palmer, Hagan-Burke, 2000). In other words, FBA is not intended to be reserved for students with disabilities alone.

Furthermore, the FBA should be conducted within the environment where the behavior occurs, so that the general education environment, rather than an alternative placement, is most appropriate. FBA is not meant to be a reactive process, but rather a preventative one, whenever possible. Assessment procedures (record review, interviews, direct observation) need to include information from families, school personnel, and the students themselves. Following the logic of best practice as determined by the literature in the field, an FBA, in order to be technically valid, must include a summary statement that operationally defines the behavior(s) of concern, describes the antecedents that predict the behaviors and consequences that maintain the behaviors, and includes the conditions wherein the behavior(s) are more or less likely to occur (Sugai, Lewis-Palmer, & Hagan-Burke, 2000).

The guidelines for effective behavior planning based on FBA results has been researched as well. There are resources to guide schools and evaluate adequacy of the behavior intervention plans. (Crone, Hawken, Horner, 2015; www.pent.ca.gov)

Functional Behavior Assessment Within a Multi-Tiered Model

The California Department of Education (CDE) supports a multi-tiered problem-solving model to address the comprehensive social, emotional, and behavioral needs of all students. The PBIS Technical Assistance Center has established functional behavior assessment as an evidenced-based Tier 3 intervention. Recently, the basic FBA process and related behavior planning has been successfully used in schools, after training, so that general education teams (limited to no more than two routines, and behaviors which are not physically threatening) can be given access to the same functionally based outcomes for their students who struggle behaviorally and academically (Loman & Horner, 2014).

School psychologists are uniquely trained to address social, emotional, and behavioral issues in all three tiers of the multi-tiered model. IDEA gives some legal guidelines to the use of FBA, and the PBIS Technical Assistance Center provides best practice suggestions. CASP is committed to the application of function-based assessment and support planning, when applicable, in order to help provide for the successful inclusion of all California students.

References

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This CASP position paper, an update of a prior CASP position paper, was written by Jim Wood, M.S., School Psychologist, Adjunct Faculty National University

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