



Guidance

Functional Behavioral Assessment

**Michigan Department of Education Office of Special Education
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This guidance provides an overview of the requirements for conducting a Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA). This document aims to ensure compliance with key obligations under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to identify the function of behavior and develop effective, individualized supports and instructional strategies that promote access to general education. This guidance reinforces the use of FBAs as a foundational step in supporting students with individualized education programs (IEPs) in the least restrictive environment (LRE) and ensuring they receive a free appropriate public education (FAPE).

What is a Functional Behavioral Assessment?

A FBA is a systematic process used by school teams to understand the purpose or function of a student's challenging behavior. The goal of a FBA is to identify why the behavior is occurring, what triggers it, and what consequences are maintaining it. This understanding enables teams to develop effective, individualized supports and interventions that address the root cause of the behavior, rather than just the behavior itself.

The FBA process involves collecting and analyzing multiple sources of data, such as observations, interviews, and record reviews. This analysis helps the team determine why the student is engaging in the behavior, which is typically to gain something (e.g., attention, a preferred activity) or to avoid something (e.g., a task, situation, or demand).

Key Elements of a Functional Behavioral Assessment

A comprehensive and data-informed FBA includes the following key elements, conducted by the FBA team:

- Clearly define the target behavior in observable, measurable terms so all team members understand exactly what behavior is being addressed.
- Gather data on how often, how long, and under what conditions the behavior occurs to establish a baseline for comparison and progress monitoring.
- Use interviews, questionnaires, and rating scales with teachers, parents, and the student (when appropriate) to gather background information and context.
- Conduct structured observations in the natural environment (e.g., classroom, hallway, lunchroom) to record antecedents, behaviors, and consequences (the ABCs).
- Analyze patterns in what happens immediately before (antecedents) and after (consequences) the behavior to identify environmental triggers and reinforcers.
- Develop a data-driven statement that describes the likely function of the behavior (e.g., attention-seeking, escape, sensory stimulation, access to a tangible item).
- Ensure that the FBA results directly inform the development or revision of a Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) that includes strategies for prevention of the challenging behavior, skill-building, and reinforcement of the appropriate behavior.

Conducting a Functional Behavioral Assessment

Conducting a FBA is an essential step prior to designing a BIP that includes strategies tailored to the student's unique needs. Comprehensive and data-informed FBAs help ensure that students are supported in ways that promote positive behavior, engagement in learning, and meaningful access to the LRE. The responsibility for initiating and overseeing the FBA lies with the school team, and the process must comply with the IDEA and the Michigan Administrative Rules for Special Education (MARSE).

A FBA is conducted by a qualified team of professionals who have expertise in behavior analysis, data collection, and special education. This team may include the student's special education teacher, general education teacher, social worker, psychologist, and other related service providers. Importantly, the FBA process should be collaborative and include input from individuals who know the student well, including parents or

guardians. These insights help ensure that the data collected reflects the student's behavior across settings and contexts.

The Role of a FBA During a Manifestation Determination Review (MDR)

A FBA plays a critical role during a Manifestation Determination Review (MDR), which is required when a student with a disability is facing a disciplinary removal for more than 10 consecutive school days or for more than 10 cumulative days where a pattern of behaviors has been identified. During the MDR, the IEP team, including the parent, must determine whether the student's behavior resulting in the disciplinary removal was a manifestation of their disability.

If the behavior is determined to be a manifestation, the team must either conduct a new FBA or review and revise an existing one. The purpose is to understand the function of the behavior and ensure that appropriate supports and interventions, outlined in a BIP, are in place to address it. The FBA provides the foundation for developing effective, individualized behavioral supports that promotes success in the least restrictive environment and helps prevent future incidents.

General Considerations

While FBAs have traditionally been used to support students with disabilities who receive services through an IEP, the use of FBAs has evolved, and they are now widely seen as helpful to students with and without disabilities. FBAs can and should be used as a strategy to support any student whose behavior interferes with learning. By using FBAs, educators can gain a better understanding of a student's needs by identifying factors that contribute to the behavior's occurrence. Data gathered through a FBA allows educators to develop positive and proactive BIPs that use a function-based approach to teaching and learning to create more inclusive, developmental, and educational experiences, without having to resort to removals from the classroom ([OSEP, 2024](#)).

Resource Documents

- [Using Functional Behavioral Assessment to Create Supportive Learning Environments \(OSEP, November 2024\).](#)
- [Functional Behavioral Assessment \(Elementary\): Identifying the Reasons for Student Behavior](#)
- [Functional Behavioral Assessment \(Secondary\): Identifying the Reasons for Student Behavior](#)
- [MiMTSS Technical Assistance Center](#)