

Understanding FBAs and BIPs

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Functional Behavioral Assessments (FBAs) and Behavior Intervention Plans (BIPs)

A student who has an Individualized Education Plan (<https://www.understood.org/en/school-learning/special-services/ieps/understanding-individualized-education-programs>) (IEP) may have challenging behaviors in school. If so, the law requires that the IEP Team review the student's challenging behaviors and decide if they interfere with his learning or the learning of others.

If so, the school must collect data on the student's behaviors, including observing the student in different school settings. Then the IEP Team must meet to complete a Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) and Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) for the student.

Manifestation Determination Review

A Manifestation Determination Review (MDR) is a process for determining whether a student's challenging behavior is a manifestation of his disability. An MDR is required if a student with an IEP is suspended from school for more than ten consecutive days in one school year, or for more than 10 non-consecutive days in one school year, if the suspensions constitute a pattern. See *Policies Governing Services for Children with Disabilities* (<https://www.dpi.nc.gov/media/8754/open>) at NC 1504-2 for more detailed information.

Positive MDR

If the outcome of the **MDR is positive**, that means the IEP Team believes the student's behavior is related to his disability, the suspension cannot occur, and the student immediately returns to school. If the student does not already have a BIP, the IEP Team must conduct an FBA and provide the student with a BIP. If the student already has a BIP, the IEP Team must review and, if necessary, modify the BIP to address the behavior.

Negative MDR

If the outcome of the **MDR is negative**, that means the IEP Team believes the student's behavior is not related to his disability. If the student does not have a BIP, the IEP Team must consider whether an FBA and BIP are needed so the behavior does not recur. If the student already has a BIP, the IEP Team must review and modify the BIP as necessary to address the behavior.

Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA)

A functional behavior assessment (FBA) is a tool used to help identify and understand a child's behavior. Much of the information below comes from NC Department of Public Instruction's Exceptional Children's Division. (<http://ec.ncpublicschools.gov/instructionalresources/behavior-support/resources/functional-behavior-assessment/>)

Three step to creating an FBA

Step 1: Identify the problem behavior

Identify and define the specific problem behavior in observable, measurable terms. This is the job of the IEP Team. An example of a well-defined problem behavior is, “Mary throws her books on the floor during math class.” If the student is having multiple problem behaviors, the one or two behaviors causing the most serious consequences should be selected for the FBA.

Then the IEP Team determines what information will be collected, who will collect each piece of information, and how. Collecting information does not mean writing down stories from teachers, staff, or parents about the child’s behavior while in the IEP meeting. It is a longer process that happens outside of the IEP meeting.

Step 2: Collect information on the specific behavior

School staff should collect information about the behavior through observation, record reviews, and systematic data collection. Systematic data collection involves recording details about the circumstances surrounding the behavior, including the following information:

- When and where the behavior occurred
- Who was present
- How often and for how long it occurred
- What happened just before the behavior started
- What happened after the behavior stopped
- What were the consequences

The collection of information also should include interviews of the child, parents, and staff about the behavior and about the child’s strengths and needs.

Though not required by DPI, we recommend that information collection include a staff member who does not know the student and who the student does not know. That staff member should observe the student without the student knowing he is being observed. The staff members should also observe the student in different school settings. For instance, they might observe the student during classroom instruction with different teachers; in specials, recess, and lunch; and in other structured and less-structured settings during the school day.

Step 3: Analyze the information and write a hypothesis statement

Once all the information is collected, the IEP Team meets to review and analyze the data. Then the team creates a hypothesis statement. The hypothesis statement should use this format: “When x occurs, the student does y in order to z.” For example, “When Mary is asked to work independently in class on a math assignment, she throws her book in order to get sent to in-school suspension so she can avoid revealing to her peers that she cannot independently do the assignment.”

The hypothesis statement may reveal that the student may need additional or different special education services. If so, the IEP Team should ensure that the student gets those services.

Then the IEP Team uses the hypothesis statement to develop a Behavior Intervention Plan.

Behavior Intervention Plan

A behavior intervention plan (BIP) is a written plan that is based on the information gathered in the FBA. The BIP is part of the IEP. The BIP should be positive and focused on giving the student the skills that he needs to interact successfully in school. Additionally, it should not focus on punishing the student. In other words, the BIP is not a ‘behavior contract.’ It should not merely list the consequences a student will receive for undesirable behaviors.

The BIP provides appropriate supports, tools, and skills to the child and the school staff so the challenging behaviors are reduced. The goals of the BIP should be to teach the student **positive behaviors** to replace those negative ones. For example, an appropriate behavior goal for Mary might be, “Mary will ask the teacher for help with her math assignments.” This positive behavior would replace the negative behavior of throwing books on the floor.

Positive Supports in a BIP

For the student to learn positive behaviors, she will need **positive supports**. Positive supports in a BIP can include the following:

- Changing something in the environment to take away the triggers of the behavior
- Changing how adults respond to the behavior
- Educating the student about the triggers for the behavior
- Providing the student with appropriate social skills instruction
- Providing the student with counseling services to help him identify and manage the emotions that trigger the behavior

The BIP should include rewards for replacing the negative behavior with positive ones. It is important to include the student in selecting rewards so they are actually motivating to the student. Examples of rewards include:

- An extra break or a few minutes of playground time
- 10 minutes shooting basketball
- Computer time
- Eating lunch with a preferred staff member or other individual attention from an adult
- A positive note home.

A system of multiple rewards can be useful. For example, Mary might earn a small prize at school each time she asks for help instead of throwing her books. She also might earn a larger prize at home at the end of the week if she has not thrown her books during the whole week. Reinforcing the student's improved behavior at home and at school can motivate him to work even harder.

Tracking progress

The BIP should also include a system for tracking the student's behavior and for determining whether the BIP is successful. The IEP Team might use emails to parents, behavior charts, or sticker sheets to collect data. The team can then use the data to track any improvements in the targeted behaviors.

Remember that the BIP is part of the student's IEP. Therefore, it must be followed by the school staff. Additionally, school staff should review and change the BIP as needed and as required by law. A good resource for BIP development is www.pbisworld.com (<http://www.pbisworld.com/>). (<http://www.pbisworld.com/>).

Sometimes this process doesn't work as smoothly as it should. If that happens, you may need to take additional steps (<https://disabilityrightsn.org/resources/iep-dispute-resolution>) to make sure your child has the supports he or she needs to do well in school.