

NYSSSWA 2026 Conference

Demystifying FBAs & BIPs for School Social Workers

Translating functional assessments into restorative, actionable behavioral support plans that classrooms can actually run.



Dr. Stephanie Columbia, Ed.D, LCSW-R, BCBA, LBA

Lead Presenter & Educational Specialist

CORE FRAMEWORK

FBA + BIP

Bridging diagnostic insight with practical classroom intervention strategies.

1. Functional Assessment

Identify root causes and behavioral drivers.

2. Behavior Support Plan

Deploy restorative, actionable interventions.



WELCOME TO THE FBI

"Your mission, should you choose to accept it:
become an operative in the **F.B.I.** — *Functions
of Behavior Investigations.*"

SCAN/DOWNLOAD



ABC
sheet



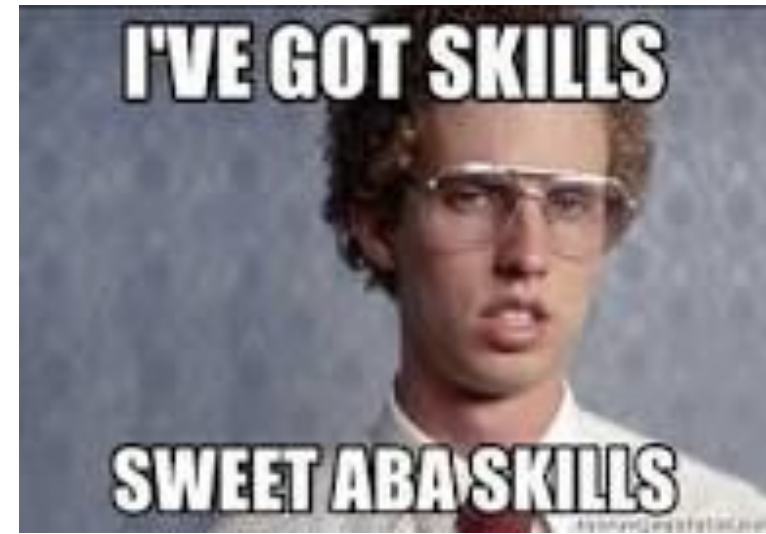
FBA/BIP implementation
packet

Behavior Is Always Communication

100%

Function Driven

Every observable action meets an internal need.



Traditional Disciplinary Lens

Sees defiance, laziness, and disruption to suppress.

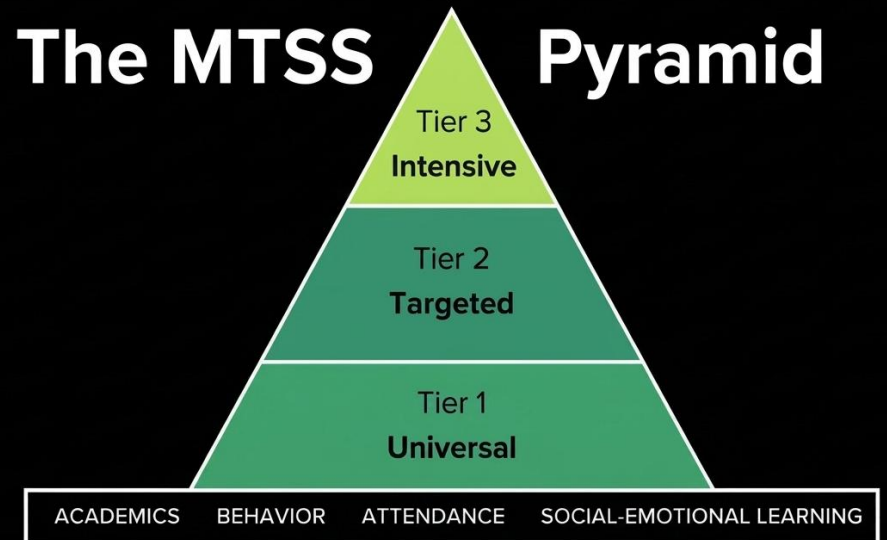
Social Work Functional Lens

Uncovers distress signals, skill deficits, and environmental mismatch.

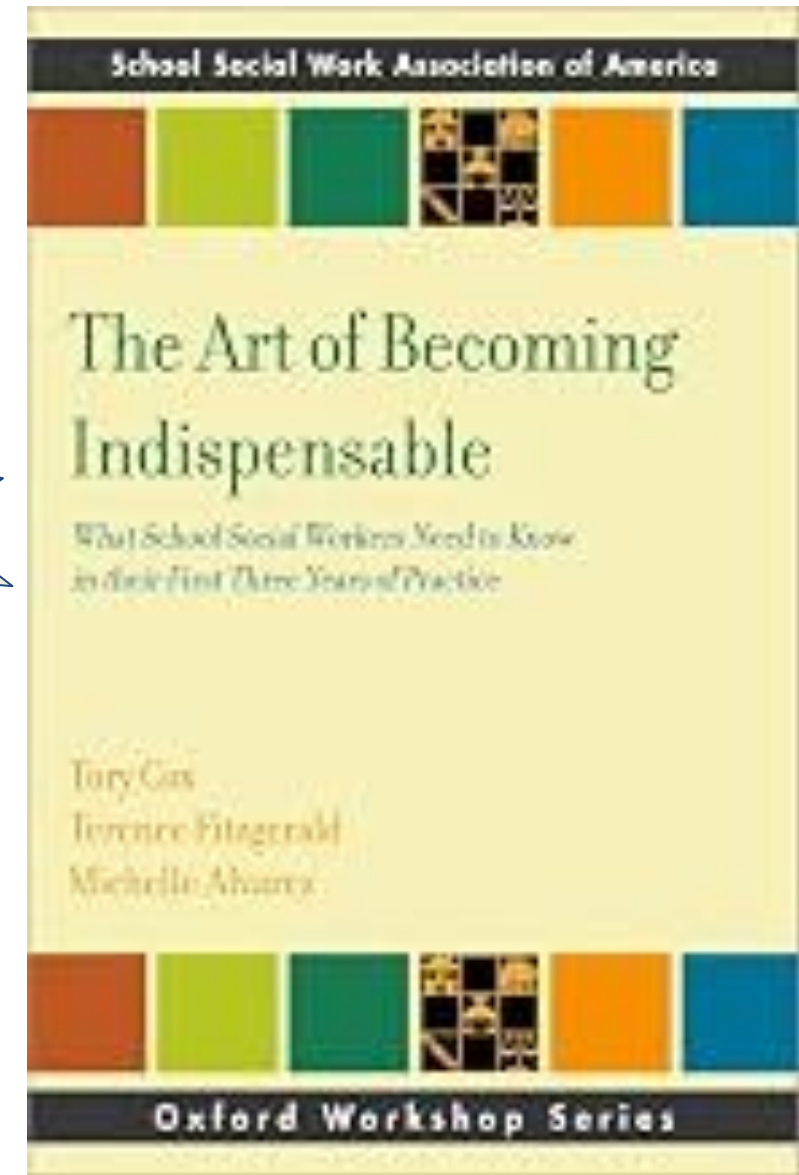
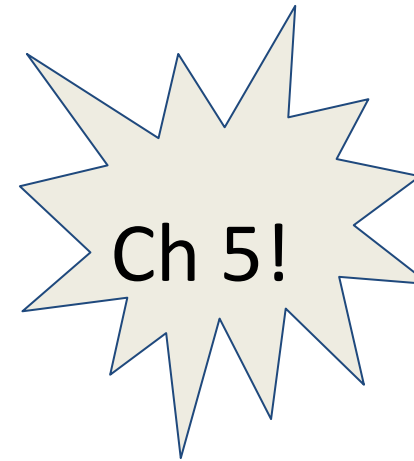
We are discussing tier 3 interventions today, important to note that tiers 1 and 2 must have been attempted prior to any tier 3 intervention



The MTSS Pyramid



Shameless Plug and MTSS



[Amazon link](#)

MTSS is a proactive, data-driven framework that schools use to identify and help students who struggle with academics, behavior, attendance, or social-emotional needs. Instead of waiting for a student to fail, the system provides varying levels of help right away

FUNCTIONS OF BEHAVIOR

5 FUNCTIONS

M medical
E escape
A attention
T tangible
S sensory

WHY?



BUT HOW?

DETERMINING FUNCTION

- ✓ ABC DATA
- ✓ DIRECT OBSERVATION
- ✓ INDIRECT OBSERVATION

Why do we care
why? just do
what I say..

Four Universal Behavioral Drivers/ Functions

Often, you will hear about 4 functions rather than 5, this is because medical and biological conditions (pain, sleep deprivation, missed medication) act as internal physiological **Setting Events / Establishing Operations**



Escape / Avoid

Delaying non-preferred (academic/social/required) tasks.



Attention

Securing peer or teacher engagement.



Tangible

Obtaining desired objects or activities.



Sensory

Regulating internal neurological arousal.

OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

- **Operational Definition:**

- **Topography:** Specific, observable, and measurable physical actions (e.g., throwing instructional materials off the desk, placing head on desk, vocalizing above conversational volume).
- **Onset:** Student engages in non-compliant vocalizations or material disruption within 30 seconds of an independent work directive.
- **Offset:** Cessation of targeted behaviors for a minimum of 3 consecutive minutes. (anything less than this is not offset)
- **Examples:** Pushing a math worksheet off the desk, saying "I'm not doing this," walking away from the assigned work area during independent tasks.
- **Non-Examples:** Sharpening a pencil with teacher permission, asking a peer for clarification in a whisper, putting head down during designated free time.

The Dead Man's Test:

If a dead man can do it it isn't a behavior.

Ogden Lindsley in 1965



4-Part Target Behavior Definition Table

Component	Description	Example (Replacing "Aggression")
Label	A short, clear name for the behavior.	Physical Aggression
Definition	What the action looks and sounds like in objective, observable terms.	Any instance of hitting another person with an open hand or closed fist.
Examples	Specific actions that <i>do</i> count as the behavior.	Slapping a peer's arm; punching a classmate's shoulder during recess.
Non-Examples	Actions that look similar or might be confused, but <i>do not</i> count.	High-fiving a peer; accidentally bumping into someone in the hallway.

During _____ Jessica _____. Typical peers

Before finalizing your worksheet, make sure your definition passes these standard behavioral checks:

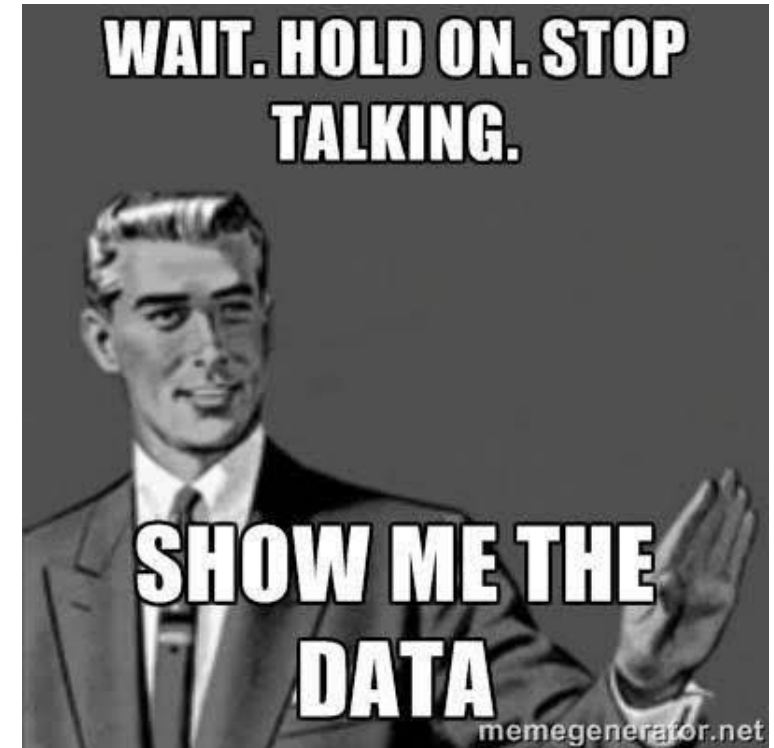
- **The Stranger Test:** Can a complete stranger read your definition and accurately count every time the behavior happens without asking questions?
- **The Dead Man's Test:** If a dead person can do it (e.g., "being quiet" or "not moving"), it is **not** a target behavior. A target behavior must require active movement or speech.

Now that we know WHAT the student is doing.. we need to know how frequently.

- **Baseline Metrics:**
 - **Frequency:** 4 to 6 occurrences per day.
 - **Rate:** 1.2 instances per hour during academic blocks.
 - **Duration:** Average of 14 minutes per episode.
 - **Latency:** Average of 45 seconds following initial prompt.
 - **Intensity:** Moderate (disrupts immediate instructional group; no physical danger to self or others).

DATA

- tantrum example



Does it matter if I measure Rate, Frequency? Latency?
Duration? YUP.

The ABC Framework of Observation



A

Antecedent

Immediate environmental triggers before occurrence.

B

Behavior

Observable, measurable target action defined.

C

Consequence

Environmental reaction maintaining the pattern.

ABC Examples



what's the function?



Your Turn



Layering Trauma & Equity into FBAs

Beyond pure behavioral observation

Setting Events: Track sleep, food insecurity, and neighborhood stressors.

Nervous System: Distinguish fight-flight responses from wilful refusal.

Cultural Context: Audit subjective referral patterns for systemic bias.

MAS: [motivation assessment scale](#)



Internal Setting Events Neurobiology & Polyvagal State

- *Clinical Anchor:* Shift focus from "what is the student trying to get or avoid?" to "what state is their autonomic nervous system defending against?"
- *Operational Nuance:* Distinguish between cognitive non-compliance and sympathetic mobilization (hyperarousal: fight/flight, motor agitation, verbal reactivity) or dorsal vagal collapse (hypoarousal: freezing, non-responsiveness, head down on desk).
- *Assessment Link:* Use trauma-informed setting event interviews and functional environmental inventories to screen for physiological precursors (poor sleep, hunger, sensory overwhelm, unpredictable morning transitions) before assuming operant intent.

The Polyvagal Lens in Behavior Assessment

A Dysregulated Nervous System Cannot Access the Upper Pathway

- **Social Engagement (Ventral Vagal):** Student is receptive to cues, able to negotiate, and responsive to classroom reinforcement systems.
- **Neuroception of Threat (Sympathetic / Dorsal Vagal):** Aggression, task avoidance, or elopement are physiological survival responses, not premeditated operant choices.

Clinical Takeaway: Traditional consequence-driven plans (loss of recess, point reductions) increase physiological threat, accelerating the target behavior rather than extinguishing it.

From Assessment to Intervention

STAGE ONE • DIAGNOSTIC

The FBA

- ✓ Detects environmental antecedents.
- ✓ Measures frequency and intensity.
- ✓ Forms the verifiable hypothesis.



STAGE TWO • INTERVENTION

The BIP

- ✓ Restructures classroom environment.
- ✓ Teaches functional replacement skills.
- ✓ Eliminates payoffs for old actions.

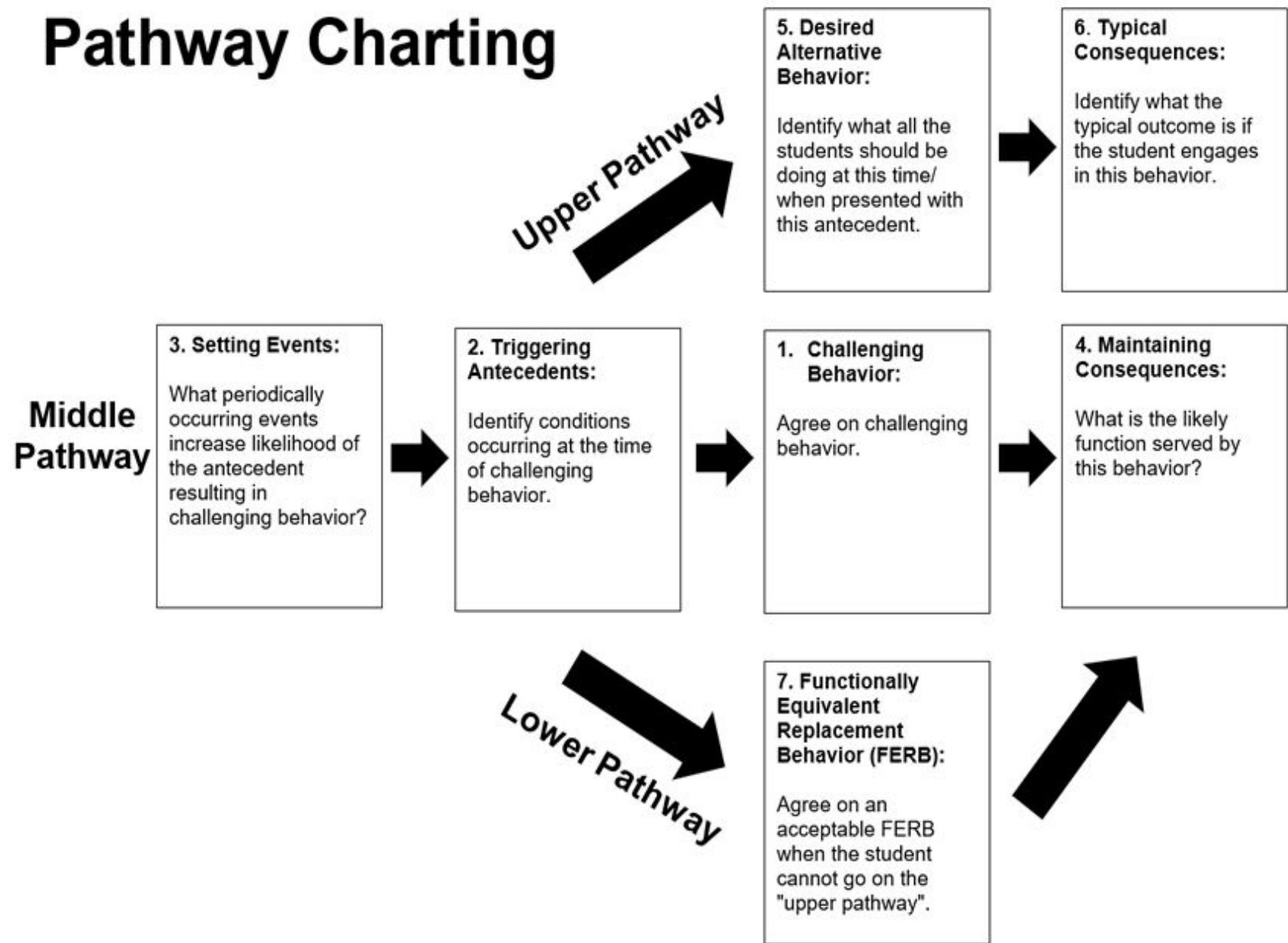
IF I SAY "FIRST OF ALL"

RUN AWAY BECAUSE
I HAVE PREPARED
RESEARCH, DATA,
CHARTS AND WILL
DESTROY YOU.

fb/the idealist

A Functionally Equivalent Replacement Behavior (FERB) is a positive, socially valid skill that serves the exact same function as the target behavior. An incompatible behavior cannot physically occur at the same time as the target behavior.

Pathway Charting



The 3 Critical Pillars of a Robust BIP

01

Antecedent Mods

Proactive adjustments making target behavior unnecessary.

02

Replacement Skill

Directly teaching a functional, efficient substitute action.

03

Consequence Plan

Reinforcing new skill while eliminating payoff for old behavior.

Replacement Skill Compatibility

“

"The replacement behavior must produce the exact same outcome faster, easier, and with less effort."

If slamming a textbook escapes math in 2 seconds, requesting a break must work just as quickly.

“predictable access to the reinforcer”... (why raising your hand doesn’t work as a replacement for calling out...)

Leading the Multi-Disciplinary Team



Social worker as bridge-builder

Teacher Partnership: Co-design steps that fit real 28-student classrooms.

Fidelity Checks: Simple 60-second weekly tracking checklists.

Family Alliance: Aligning home expectations with school behavioral norms.

Simulation: The Case of Jordan

SETTING EVENT

Arrives without breakfast; missed ADHD medication.

IMMEDIATE TRIGGER

Independent silent reading task after chaotic lunch.

TARGET BEHAVIOR

Throws novel, insults peer, storms into hallway.

MAINTAINING CONSEQUENCE

Dean's office visit: escapes reading, listens to music.

TABLE BREAKOUTS (GROUPS OF 4–6)

Your 20–Minute Collaborative Sprint

PART 1 • 7 MINS

FBA Hypothesis

Define primary function: reading embarrassment vs task escape.

PART 2 • 8 MINS

Draft 3 BIP Moves

1 antecedent tweak, 1 replacement skill, 1 modified consequence.

PART 3 • 5 MINS

Cohort Share–Back

3 table volunteers pitch their replacement skill to the full room.

Important things to note:

- FBAs and BIPs are tier 3 interventions
- FBAs do not require BIPs but BIPs require FBAs
- Under NYS Part 200 regulations, initiating an FBA requires parental consent and CSE/504 team action when behavior impedes learning or results in disciplinary change of placement.
- BIPS MUST be reviewed, data analyzed regularly and interventions tweaked or discontinued.
- Good quality BIPS need to have a full group working together including parents teachers and student where appropriate. under NYS mandates, a BIP must include baseline operational metrics, positive behavioral interventions, crisis management protocols, and measurable progress-monitoring schedules.
- BIPS are LEGAL documents, there is no choice about implementation.

Questions & Collaborative Dialogue

Empowering school social workers to champion compassionate, legally compliant, and classroom-ready interventions.

Drstephaniecolumbia@gmail.com

inquiries about training for your district can be sent to me via email .

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