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Creating a Professional Network: A Statewide Model to Support School-Based Behavior Analysts

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Abstract

Despite efforts to increase the presence of behavior analysis in public schools, the process has been slow. Though more Board Certified Behavior Analysts® (BCBAs®) are working in public school settings, supports for this group of BCBAs are varied in both what they look like and their availability. It is not uncommon for BCBAs to work with little or no support from other BCBAs in their school district. Those who do have other BCBA colleagues in their district may not have structures in place to collaborate or grow as a behavior analyst. The current article describes a statewide initiative to increase supports for BCBAs working in public school settings. The network was formed with three chief goals: 1) to build a professional peer network for school-based BCBAs; 2) to provide continuing education events targeted to school-based BCBAs to promote increased competence; and 3) to encourage continued scholarship. This manuscript provides a description of the network efforts to date as well as areas that will continue to be evaluated and addressed.

Keywords Education · Behavior analysis · Network of support · Mentoring · Statewide initiative

Behavior analysts have long worked to influence public education, yet established adoption of applied behavior analysis (ABA) in the public school setting has been slow moving (Putnam & Kincaid, 2015). Bordieri et al. (2012) echoed this sentiment suggesting the field has not realized Skinner's vision for the impact of ABA in public schools. Nevertheless, progress has been made. A major step in this process occurred when the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of* 1997 (IDEA) incorporated functional behavior assessments (FBAs) for those students with disabilities who displayed challenging behavior (IDEA, 1997; Putnam & Kincaid, 2015). Additionally, public schools have begun to adopt positive behavior intervention and supports (PBIS) systems as part of their response to intervention (RtI) or multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) initiatives (Horner & Sugai, 2015; Putnam & Kincaid, 2015). PBIS has been widely adopted in public schools across the United States (Horner &. Sugai, 2015). In alignment with ABA, PBIS promotes the use of operational definitions, a systematic model to change the environment to alter behavior, and the strong emphasis on both fidelity and outcome measures (Horner & Sugai, 2015). The adoption of PBIS is encouraging as its essential components allow for behavior analysts to contribute at all levels of intervention, including the prevention of challenging behaviors (Putnam & Kincaid, 2015).

Despite these positive steps, behavior analysts are still working to gain continued and meaningful traction in public schools. For example, while IDEA (1997) identified FBAs, it did not include a requirement for who conducted these assessments or how they were completed. A great amount of literature exists on behavioral interventions applied in the school setting, yet there is still a dearth of literature on how behavior analysts are supported and function in this unique environment. This article will discuss the implementation of a statewide model aimed at supporting the work of school-based behavior analysts. The model described uses a professional network focused on professional development, scholarship, and increasing the use and understanding of ABA in public schools.

Practicing in Public Schools

The Behavior Analyst Certification Board ® (BACB®) requires Board Certified Behavior Analysts® (BCBAs®) to practice within their boundaries of competence (BACB,

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2019, BACB 2020). The BACB has made it clear, practicing outside of one's scope of competence is not only undesirable but is unethical, according to the *Professional and Ethical Compliance Code for Behavior Analysts,* section 1.02, and the newly released *Ethics Code for Behavior Analysts,* standard 1.05. Engaging in behavior outside of one's scope of competence can result in consequences such as harm to the client, loss of funding or employment, potential legal action, and harm to the field (Brodhead et al., 2018). The public school setting is a unique, complex environment that requires specialized skills and knowledge. Being competent in the school setting means the BCBA must be independent in performing a majority of the tasks in that environment (Brodhead et al., 2018) as well as continuing their education in that area (BACB, 2020). To be effective, BCBAs also need to remain in contact with the literature of the field (BACB, 2020; Carr & Briggs, 2010). However, it is not unusual for BCBAs to work in an environment where there are many more individuals who need their services and expertise than they have capacity to serve (Putnam & Kincaid, 2015) with little expectation or access to remain current with the literature (Carr & Briggs, 2010).

Need for Professional Networks and Peer Supports

Furtado and Anderson (2012) encouraged educators to have active involvement with peers and professional organizations as a means for effective change. Professional peer supports can include peer networking, peer mentoring, and professional learning communities. Though not widely researched by behavior analysts, professional peer supports are not new in other fields, such as nursing and education (e.g., Krutka et al., 2017; Lombardo et al., 2017; Rawle et al., 2016). Professional peer supports are intended to foster supportive, learning-centered environments that support individuals across multiple domains (Lombardo et al., 2017). Specifically, professional peer supports extend beyond formal learning experiences (Krutka et al., 2017) and support individuals in the areas of professional development, social networking, collaboration in educational research, improved mental health, increased satisfaction with their professional lives, and general sharing and broadening of ideas (Lombardo et al., 2017; Rawle et al., 2016; Van Themaat, 2019). Additionally, using professional learning communities provides the ability to change professional development from a passive activity to an active process where professionals support each other's learning in a collaborative manner (Van Themaat, 2019).

While professional peer support models vary in their execution, Rawle et al. (2016) identified a key factor of charging no annual or registration fees for membership or events as contributing to the success of a professional learning community of biology teachers across Ontario. Through their work, Rawle et al. (2016) found the impact of their professional learning community to include increased collaboration, knowledge translation and transfer, appreciation for different perspectives, mentoring and support, building relationships, transformation, and increased engagement with scholarship.

Peer supports can aid in improving knowledge and skills of BCBAs (Brodhead et al., 2018). Further, it is important for professionals to have networking opportunities specific to the targeted subfield (LeBlanc et al., 2012), in this case BCBAs working in public schools. This network should include professionals who have a shared interest in behavior analysis and practicing in schools. Members of one's network can act as mentors, collaborators, information sharers, problem solvers, advice givers, and sounding boards (Becerra et al., 2020). Conferences are one mechanism to grow a professional network (Becerra et al., 2020) by offering access to other professionals, which can provide support at any stage of one's career. However, conferences are costly and school districts may, or may not, be willing to financially support BCBAs in this manner. Even if a school district is willing to support a BCBA to attend a conference, all school districts are likely not positioned to do so, and therefore, attending conferences may not result in finding people who are similarly situated professionally. Thus, BCBAs in public schools need to form a professional peer network in alternative ways.

Despite the positive effects shown using professional peer support models, there is a lack of application of these models for school-based behavior analysts. School-based BCBAs are not unique in their needs for a network of peers or continuing learning opportunities to improve and refine their practice. What is unique about these BCBAs is that the school environment may not be as conducive to providing for these needs as other environments in which BCBAs may practice.

Training to obtain entry-level competence begins during the aspiring behavior analyst's supervision experience. Supervision of those training to become a BCBA has been receiving more recognition in the literature in recent years (e.g., Sellers et al. 2016; Valentino et al., 2016). Yet, little attention has been given to what happens to behavior analysts once they enter the field, particularly in the public school setting. The supervisor fulfills several important functions in the shaping of those working to become BCBAs. A supervisor becomes a mentor to their supervisee and, as LeBlanc and Luiselli (2016) stated, the supervisor helps "establish professional values, coach[es] interpersonal

social skills, and shap[es] effective organizational and time management skills that facilitate success" (p. 271). During the supervision period, LeBlanc and Luiselli (2016) suggested that the relationship between the supervisee and supervisor be established and maintained. Ideally, the supervisor would continue this mentoring relationship, providing on-going support and potentially collaborative opportunities past the supervisory period, which could result in great benefit for the newly-certified BCBA (Valentino et al., 2016). Though the BACB will require those newly certified to receive monthly consultation from a supervisor, this is only required if the new BCBA chooses to supervise others (BACB, 2021a). However, an on-going, positive relationship is not required to continue once supervision requirements have been met.

Group supervision is an opportunity for aspiring behavior analysts to work together while acquiring and practicing their behavior analytic skills. The group setting allows for practicing professional skills, such as speaking in front of others, collaboration, or problem solving in the context of a larger group (Valentino et al., 2016). One important function of group supervision is it can increase the peer network for the supervisee (Valentino et al., 2016). That network can be critical to the individual completing supervision, but also as that individual becomes certified and begins practicing as a BCBA. Having peers with whom they can talk and problem solve as they begin their career can provide increased confidence to new BCBAs. However, simply engaging in group supervision does not directly lead to a network of peers once supervision ends.

Professional Development Supports

Brodhead et al. (2018) suggested the educational setting is distinctive and the BACB code must be considered and addressed within the context of the school-based BCBA's environment. Specialized knowledge is required to work in a public school setting that is typically not provided by behavior analytic coursework (e.g., educational law, curriculum development). While BCBAs engage in roles and activities typical of behavior analysis within public school settings (Mason et al., 2013; Putnam & Kincaid, 2015), they also need additional skills specific to education. These skills include knowledge of educational law and policy, multi-disciplinary teams, instruction and curriculum, and educational assessments (Brodhead et al., 2018; Layng et al., 2011). Professional development for the school-based behavior analyst to ensure they have school-specific knowledge and skills is a critical aspect to their success. Additionally, BCBAs in school settings are often responsible for providing professional development opportunities for non-BCBAs (Mason et al., 2013), who frequently have little to no knowledge of the science of behavior, as well as participating

in teams focused on systemic changes (e.g., PBIS teams; Putnam & Kincaid, 2015). Thus, not only do school-based BCBAs need relevant and meaningful professional development for themselves, but they also need to know how to provide such opportunities to others.

Effective Professional Development

Professional development can encompass a variety of activities and can lead to skill development as well as the ability to remain current on research-based practices (Sellers et al., 2016). Effective professional development must be focused on specified content and incorporate active learning, but should also support collaboration, use effective practice models, provide expert support, and offer feedback and time for reflection (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Conducting professional development through a professional network can support many of these components since it allows for promoting collaboration and incorporating the expertise of its members both in content and in the creation and delivery of professional development opportunities. Additionally, professional development should be sustained in its duration (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

Scholarship

Educators are required to implement evidence-based practices (EBPs) with students (*Every Student Succeeds Act*, 2015; *Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Act*, 2004). School-based behavior analysts fall under this mandate and have an ethical responsibility to provide effective treatment to their clients (BACB, 2020). Because of this, it is essential for school-based behavior analysts to remain current in their knowledge of the pertinent research literature. The ability to obtain and consume research literature can require a high level of effort for behavior analysts once they leave their graduate programs (Carr & Briggs, 2010). School districts may not have easy access to research databases or journal content and, moreover, there may not be contingencies present to support reviewing the literature (Carr & Briggs, 2010).

Need for Support in Schools

After an individual obtains their BCBA credential, a number of supports typically fade, including the support of professors from their coursework, access to the literature available through their university (Carr &. Briggs, 2010), and the end of their formal supervisory relationship. Despite these losses, BCBAs are expected to maintain and grow in their skills once they have achieved certification (BACB 2019; Becerra et al., 2020; Brodhead et al., 2018). Effective supports are needed for this to occur.

Behavior analysis is still growing within public education. Not only do BCBAs in schools need to establish their own practice as a professional, but they are still disseminating and supporting the field to grow in this applied environment, which may or may not embrace the science of behavior. Doing all of this in isolation can be challenging at best. Engaging in a professional network that supports relevant professional development to facilitate continuous learning is a critical activity for BCBAs in the field. Thus, we present a statewide model for supporting school-based BCBAs.

A Statewide Model for School-Based BCBAs

The Virginia Public Schools Behavior Analyst Network (VAPSBAN) was developed to focus on three major factors specific to school-based BCBAs: 1) building a professional peer network (Valentino et al., 2016) for school-based BCBAs; 2) providing continuing education events targeted to school-based BCBAs to promote increased competence (BACB, 2020); and 3) encouraging continued scholarship (Carr & Briggs, 2010). The final focus of the network was on increasing the use and understanding of ABA in schools. Multiple activities occurred to address each of these, including providing continuing education (CE) events; offering opportunities to read, analyze, and discuss scholarly literature; creating networking events for members; and developing subcommittees to determine how to continue to meet member needs as well as to disseminate and improve understanding of ABA in schools. See Fig. 1 for a diagram of the process of the model.

State Support

In 2020, Virginia passed legislation stating the Virginia "Department of Education shall develop guidance and resources relating to the provision of applied behavior analysis services in public schools…" (Virginia House Bill 1722, 2020). Specifically, the bill provided suggested areas to address through the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) guidance, including determining the appropriateness of ABA services, management and monitoring by school boards, and using BCBAs employed by the school to provide ABA. The guidance related to this bill was published in November 2020 (Virginia Department of Education, 2020).

In the fall of 2020, VAPSBAN was developed through a grant provided by the VDOE using IDEA Part B funds to Old Dominion University. The purpose of this annual state grant
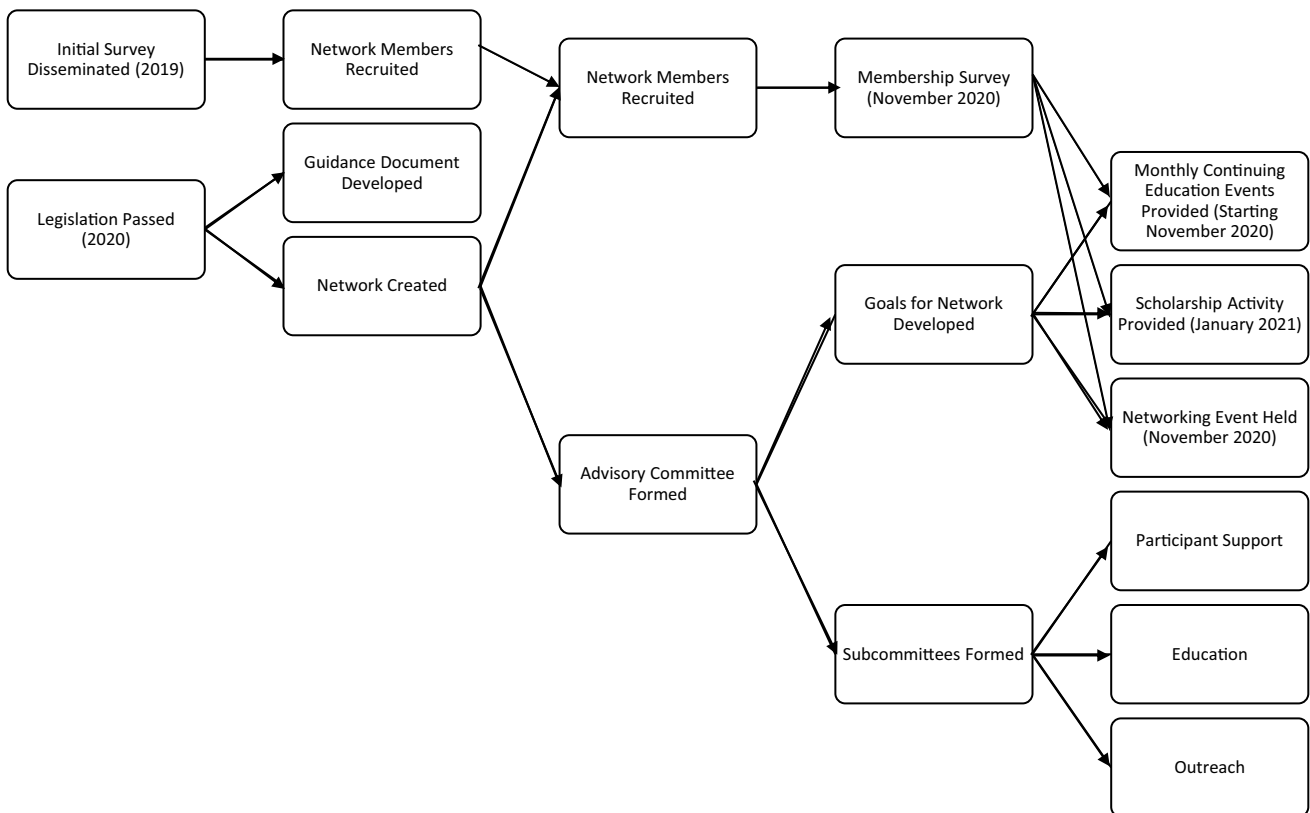

Fig. 1 Diagram of SPSBAN Process

was to partner in developing guidance from the VDOE as well as to create informational and training resources related to the guidance. This led to the conception of a network of BCBAs who work in public schools within the state. The network was born out of input from stakeholders through a statewide survey described below and through the process of gathering stakeholder information required when developing guidance from the VDOE. The intent was to provide training and support for BCBAs working in public schools. VAPSBAN was created and begun identifying and recruiting members while also forming an advisory committee. This was followed by gaining member input and developing goals for the network. Subcommittees were formed to begin work on the developed goals. VAPSBAN focused on building the professional network, providing CE events, and encouraging scholarship. Each of these factors will be described below.

Building the Network

The first step in developing VAPSBAN was to recruit members. Once members were identified, efforts continued to grow the membership while also refining the purpose of the network and creating networking opportunities for members. Subcommittees were also formed from member volunteers to advance the goals of the network.

Identifying Members

There were several early barriers in trying to determine how to support BCBAs in schools. The most significant barrier was no central repository of BCBAs working in public schools in Virginia existed. There is great variability as to professional titles held by this group of BCBAs including, but not limited to, BCBA, Behavior Specialist, Autism Specialist, Educational Coordinator, or Teacher. Thus, the first goal was to find BCBAs working in public schools and identify potential members.

In the summer of 2019, a partnership between the VDOE and Old Dominion University was formed and a brief, online, anonymous survey consisting of nine questions was developed and disseminated to all BCBAs and Board Certified Assistant Behavior Analysts® (BCaBAs®) working in Virginia through the BACB mass e-mail service. The survey was also e-mailed to a list of special education contacts from the VDOE, which included BCBAs working in schools who were known to the author as well as special education administrators throughout the state. At the time of the survey dissemination, Virginia had 1233 certificants who met the above criteria. Despite dissemination efforts, only 46 people responded with 10 of those indicating they were not a BCBA, BCaBA, or BCBA at the doctoral level (BCBA-D®) leaving a total of 36 valid responses.

The survey was intended to capture a snapshot of BCBAs working in public schools. The survey results provided the first information captured about this group by the VDOE. See Table 1 for survey questions. Specifically, through the survey, participants shared their certification level, their role in the school district, and the portion of their time providing behavior analytic services. Additionally, participants were asked to share whether they were providing supervision as part of their job responsibilities. A summary of results from the survey can be found in Table 1. Of the 36 responses, 34 reported having a BCBA credential and the remaining

Table 1 Initial Survey Questions and Summary of Result

Question	Results
Are you a BCBA-D, BCBA or BCaBA currently employed in a Virginia public school system?	BCBA: 34 BCBA-D: 2 BCaBA: 0
Is behavior analysis specifically listed anywhere in your job description?	Yes: 21 No: 13 Unsure: 2
What portion of your time (0%–100%) is spent providing direct or consultative behavior analytic services?	M: 57.2% Mdn: 50% Range: 0–100%
What is your role in the school district?	Behavior Analyst: 17 Specialist: 7 CO Admin: 6 SpEd Teacher: 2 Other: 4
As part of your job responsibilities for your school district, do you provide behavior analytic supervision for BCaBAs, or RBTs?	Do Not Provide: 24 Do Provide: 12
Contact Information (Optional)	

n = 36. CO admin = Central Office Administrator; SpEd Teacher = Special Education Teacher.

two reported having a BCBA-D. There were no BCaBAs who completed the survey. When asked their role in the district, 17 responded they were a behavior analyst, seven reported being a specialist, six reported being a central office administrator, two identified themselves as special education teachers, and the remaining four were a school psychologist, alternative placement coordinator, consultative teacher, and a regional consultant. When asked if behavior analysis was listed as part of their job description, 21 said yes and 13 said no with the remaining two stating they were unsure. Participants were asked to estimate the percentage of their time spent providing direct or consultative behavior analytic services. All 36 participants reported their estimates yielding a range of 0–100% with a mean of 57.2% and a median of 50%. Participants were asked whether they provided supervision to BCaBAs, Registered Behavior Technicians™ (RBT®), or those pursuing a behavior analyst credential. Most participants reported that they do not provide supervision as part of their responsibilities to the school district ($n = 24$) with only 33% ($n = 12$) reporting they do provide supervision.

At the end of the survey, participants had the opportunity to provide their contact information, not connected to their survey responses, to join a list of behavior analysts in the state that would be used to begin providing supports for this group. Of the 36 valid responses, 29 people provided their contact information. The survey information had limitations but did provide important initial information used to inform the VDOE about this population of professionals.

Establishing the Network

The network was established with the intent of providing school-based BCBAs and those working to obtain a behavior analyst credential with support within their specific roles and to improve behavior analytic services in schools within Virginia. An advisory committee was formed to collaborate and drive the work of the network. This group included eight members representing the VDOE, higher education, school-based BCBAs, and members of the state funded technical assistance centers located throughout Virginia. All members of the advisory committee held a BCBA or BCBA-D credential and either were currently working in public schools or had previously done so. Six of the members were currently or had previously worked in public schools as a teacher and/or administrator. The remaining two members had worked in consultative roles with public schools. This group offered diversity of roles and experience as well as geographic diversity; an important factor within Virginia.

The first goal of the network was to build a professional peer network for school-based BCBAs. To become a member, two criteria had to be met: 1) the individuals had to be a BCBA, BCBA-D, or BCaBA and 2) the individual had to work in a public school setting or state-funded educational center. The initial invitation list did not include those working to obtain their BCBA credential, but if individuals were working in a public school and working toward their BCBA credential, they were permitted to join as well by registering with their school district e-mail address.

Despite some information gained through the statewide survey, there were still many unknowns, including who this group of professionals were and where they were located. The first step of the advisory committee was to find school-based BCBAs in Virginia. Using the survey results and personal knowledge from advisory committee members, a list of approximately 50 BCBAs who worked in schools was developed and individuals were invited to join the network. Additionally, the advisory committee strongly encouraged sharing the invitation with others who met the above criteria.

To initiate VAPSBAN, the advisory committee decided to offer a free CE event as the initial introduction. This is described in further detail under the section Providing CE Events. BCBAs are required to obtain 32 CEs during each two-year certification cycle (BACB, 2021b). It is not unusual to have to pay for these CEs, so by offering CEs that were not only pertinent to their role, but free as well, the advisory committee presumed this would be motivating to encourage participation.

Networking Opportunities

Aligned with the first goal of the network, VAPSBAN offered a networking event during the first event in November 2020. Having a professional network is important for most professionals to have the opportunity to experience mentorship, engage in collaboration, share information, solve problems, provide and receive advice, and improve knowledge (Becerra et al., 2020; Brodhead et al., 2018). Unfortunately, for many BCBAs working in public schools, this network of peers can be difficult to build. It can be hard to find others who work in a similar environment, thereby understanding the challenges or barriers that may be faced. It is also not unusual to have a small number of BCBAs, or even just one, working in a public school system, which can make it difficult to even meet others who have similar interests and work activities. LeBlanc et al. (2012) highlighted this need for professionals to have the opportunity to network with others in their subfield, in this case, school-based BCBAs.

The first event, held in November 2020, included an hour-long virtual session, which was dedicated to having members get to know each other by breaking into small groups of four or five members. As Becerra et al. (2020) mentioned, the people in an individual's professional network can serve

many roles, including collaborators, givers of advice, and sharers of information. Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) also emphasized the importance of supporting collaboration in creating and implementing effective professional development and the networking opportunities were a step in promoting collaborative efforts. But, before a professional network can be formed, members must meet each other. During this time, members were asked to introduce themselves and, to promote discussion, talk about questions provided by the advisory committee. These questions asked participants to describe their work, discuss what they enjoy about their work, and identify what barriers they had encountered as a school-based BCBA. This allowed for participants to communicate about their own experiences and find others who shared in those experiences. Much in the same way as before, this portion of the event offered a benefit seen with conferences in that members could interact informally with other professionals in the field as well as create new networking contacts (Becerra et al., 2020). This is of particular importance given this occurred during the Covid-19 pandemic, meaning professionals in these roles were even less likely to attend events, such as conferences, where these types of networking activities occur.

This networking time was also used to gather information from participants using a Google form on their needs in their current roles as school-based BCBAs. Participants were given a link and approximately 20 min to complete the online survey during the networking event. The link was also e-mailed to all members after the event in case some members were not able to be present for this session or did not want to complete it during the networking session.

The questions from this survey were intended to gather information about the structure and types of events members wanted. Questions included asking what types of events members wanted (e.g., presentations, networking opportunities, work groups), what topics members were interested in, what topics members may be interested in presenting on, and how often CE events should be held (e.g., shorter events monthly, longer events 2–3 times per year). Additionally, the form asked members what kinds of resources might be helpful to them and how the network could support their work. The form asked members if they were interested in greater participation in the network in terms of work groups or other roles. Finally, to promote a greater sense of belonging and ownership of the network, the form asked members for name suggestions for the network. See Table 2 for a list of questions. Based on the data collected, which had a 62.2% response rate, members were pretty evenly split on how frequently to hold events between holding shorter events monthly and holding one to two longer events with shorter events between. Respondents indicated they wanted a variety of event types including presentations, panel presentations, article review groups, and networking opportunities.

Respondents also provided several topic options which were used to develop future CE events. Approximately half of respondents (49%) indicated they were willing to further participate in the network in terms of work groups or other roles.

Growing the Network

"The most effective system is one that sustains itself over time," (Kelly et al., 2019, p. 448). Continued and sustained efforts have commenced to support the current members. However, the potential for impact beyond the members is an important consideration. BCBAs have great skills and knowledge, but the combined power of multiple BCBAs can have greater impact by creating partnerships and strategic alliances and can also be more effective at dissemination (Kelly et al., 2019) as well as improving their practice. Once initial members were identified, to further promote the network and avoid isolation of the initial group, efforts continued to expand membership and activities of the network.

Subcommittee Work

The advisory committee reviewed the survey results from the November 2020 survey and based on the information gathered and with input from the VDOE, three subcommittees were formed: 1) participant support; 2) education; and 3) outreach. Also based on the information gathered, a ninth member was asked to join the advisory committee representing individuals who are in training to become a BCBA. Each subcommittee was assigned a pair of co-facilitators from the advisory committee. Members of each committee were gathered from those who had volunteered through the survey or had e-mailed the author expressing interest. Members were allowed to choose which subcommittee they wanted to join based on their goals and interests. The initial subcommittee volunteers included 31 people; nine advisory committee members and 22 additional VAPSBAN members.

The participant support subcommittee focused on meeting the needs of the members, specifically BCBAs in public schools. This subcommittee encouraged members to take greater ownership of the CE events. Planning and implementing the CE events was a chief mission for this subcommittee, which included many of the logistical tasks, such as taking attendance and supporting the presenters. This subcommittee was also charged with determining what other needs members had that could result in activities or resources (e.g., informational or training) that would support members.

The education subcommittee had a dual purpose of determining how to promote behavior analysis in school districts by creating resources for school district personnel (e.g.,

Table 2 Network Member Survey Questions

Question	Response Options
• What kinds of events would you like to see offered by this community of practice?	Presentations; Panel Presentations; Article Review Groups; Networking Opportunities; Work Groups; Other
• We would like to offer a variety of events to meet your needs. What topics are you interested in learning more about?	Open textbox
• Given we are working to create a community of practice, what areas are you passionate about? What are topics might you be interested in presenting?	Open textbox
• We understand time is valuable. One of our goals is to provide enough events to help members of the network gain a good number of their required CEs for certification. Understanding the BACB currently requires 32 CEs over two years, which of the following is your preference for frequency of events?	Shorter events, monthly; Longer events, 2–3 times per year; Hold 1–2 longer events combined with a few shorter events; Other
• In addition to providing CE events, we are interested in creating resources that are helpful to you as a behavior analyst working in public schools as well as to your colleagues to help facilitate greater collaboration. What types of resources or resource topics would be helpful to you?	Open textbox
• Would you be interested in serving as part of a work group to develop specific resources?	Open textbox
• How can this group support the work you do in public schools?	Open textbox
• Are you interested in serving in a leadership role in this group? This could mean being a member of the advisory team, leading a subcommittee, helping plan and facilitate events, or other roles. If yes, please include your name. If no, please skip to the next question.	Open textbox
• Finally, it is important for us to have an identity. What should we name our group?	Open textbox

All "other" options offered a textbox for participants to write in their responses.

special education directors, human resources personnel) about behavior analysis, how to hire a behavior analyst, and how to support behavior analysts employed by the district. The intent was to provide informational resources to non-BCBAs working in schools about behavior analysis and those professionals practicing behavior analysis. Second, this subcommittee was charged with determining how to maintain and foster more collaborative relationships between school-based BCBAs and private BCBAs providing services in the home or other settings to mutual students.

The outreach subcommittee focused on promoting school personnel who were interested in becoming a BCBA and especially supporting newly certified BCBAs in schools. The intent of this subcommittee was to increase the number of school-based BCBAs and support them upon obtaining their credential. The chief function of this subcommittee was to develop a mentoring program for newly certified BCBAs so that the network could capitalize on the combined experience and expertise of its members while supporting those new to the field. As previously mentioned, supervision is critical for creating well-rounded, capable BCBAs (LeBlanc & Luiselli, 2016), but after supervision ends, there is no guarantee of supports for new BCBAs in the field, particularly given not all school districts who hire a BCBA have

more than one. The subcommittee has begun gathering data from members and the literature and at the time of this article, the mentoring program was in development.

During the formation of subcommittees, members of the network began to share they were supervising aspiring behavior analysts and asked if their supervisees could join the network. Members stated the benefits they saw of connecting their supervisees to other professionals in the field who also work in schools as well as the value of the events that had occurred. Membership was opened to individuals currently enrolled in a university program for behavior analysis who were also working in a public school setting already. If someone had a supervisee who was not yet working in a public school but showed interest, membership would be considered on a case-by-case basis. Based on the efforts to grow the network, opening membership to include those individuals accruing supervised experience toward national certification increased network membership. By opening the membership to individuals taking coursework while working in schools as well as the word-of-mouth effect from members, the current membership of the network is 168 members, and growing.

Participation in the subcommittees has grown to 52 individuals and those who volunteered initially have remained

active in the subcommittees. Anecdotal data from participants in the form of e-mails and personal conversations continues to remain positive with many members reaching out to provide their thanks for the opportunities VAPSBAN has and continues to provide.

Providing CE Events

To achieve the second goal of the network, to provide CE events targeted to school-based BCBAs to promote increased competence, CE events were offered on a monthly basis. It was critical that CE events were relevant to the school-based BCBAs who were members of the network. Thus, event topics were typically chosen through member feedback apart from the first event where topics were chosen by the advisory committee. CE events typically lasted between one to two hours, resulting in one to two CEs for each event. Evaluation data for each event were collected by having participants complete an online Google form that asked three questions. Intentionally created as a short survey to promote completion, these questions asked participants to rate their satisfaction with the event on a scale from 1 to 5, asked participants whether the event met their goals in attending providing a yes/no option, and then offered an open-ended question asking participants if they would like to share anything that went well or anything that could be improved in the future. Please see Table 3 for evaluation questions and their response type.

The First CE Event

The first event was held during the Covid-19 pandemic in November 2020, thus the event had to be offered virtually. Old Dominion University offered the CEs, as an approved provider through the BACB. The CE event was spread over two days and consisted of 6.5 h of meeting time. If people attended the entire event, they could earn 5.5 CEs. As described above, an additional hour-long networking event was also part of this CE event, though CEs could not be earned for that hour. The advisory committee expected approximately 60 participants. There were 98 total participants during the two-day event. This event served to introduce the network along with the guidance that had been developed in response to the Virginia legislation. CE

sessions focused on collaboration, supervision, and assessment methods in the public school setting. Aligned with Darling-Hammond et al. (2017), the PD sessions were content-focused and provided information from experts, but also allowed for time for reflection. Specifically, the first day included two sessions. The first session provided an overview of the network and the state guidance that had just been released, provided by the VDOE representative. The second session was a panel session that included four current, school-based BCBAs, each from a different school district, discussing supervision considerations in public schools. The second day consisted of two CE sessions and the networking event. The two sessions on the second day were on training public school staff to eliminate problem behavior using a safe, dignified, and reliable assessment approach and on reinforcing a positive, collaborative leadership approach focused on collaborating with school building administrators, such as principals.

Following the event, participants were sent the evaluation with questions listed in Table 3 and these were completed by 88.8% of participants. Overwhelmingly, participants indicated satisfaction with the event. For the first day, 95.4% of participants responded with a 4 or 5 to indicate they were satisfied with the event overall and 100% providing a 4 or 5 for the second day. For both days, 99.4% of participants indicated, yes, the event met their goals for attending. Members shared comments such as: "please hold more of these. I need connections with other school based BCBAs"; "thank you for the time and effort to put this together – I'm hopeful to gain much professional development and insight through this professional community"; and "hearing from BCBAs with varying lenses within public education was enlightening, thank you!"

Subsequent CE Events

Building on the momentum of the first event, a second CE event was announced for the following month. Based on member feedback, the December 2020 CE event featured a professional who was both a BCBA and school administrator from another state to provide a different experience and perspective; 78 participants registered and attended this event. Evaluation data from 88.4% of participants indicated 64.7% of participants responded with a 4 or 5 that they were

Table 3 Evaluation Questions

Question	Response Type
1. How would you rate your overall satisfaction with today's event?	Likert Scale 1–5
2. Did the event meet your goals for attending today?	Yes/No
3. Is there anything you'd like to share about what went well or what could be improved in the future?	Open-ended text box

Likert scale ratings of 1 were indicative of "Not Satisfied" and ratings of 5 were "Very Satisfied".

satisfied with the event with the additional 26.5% responding with a 3. Regarding meeting their goals for attending, 82.6% indicated yes, their goals were met.

In December 2020, the BACB released the new *Ethics Code for Behavior Analysts* (BACB, 2020). The network strives to keep members up-to-date with the BACB requirements and recommendations. In response to member requests and needs, a CE event was created for February 2021 to review the new ethics code and discuss its application within the school setting through scenario-based activities. These activities consisted of ethical scenarios created by the presenters that promoted the identification of the section of the *Ethics Code for Behavior Analysts* and discussion about its application in the school setting. This type of active learning, that also supports collaborative efforts from participants, aligns with the effective PD components suggested by Darling-Hammond et al. (2017). Additionally, participants were able to offer feedback to each other and had time for reflection (Darling-Hammond et al. 2017). Registration included 86 members. In the evaluation, 98.5% of the 79% of participants indicated a 4 or 5 as their level of satisfaction and 100% of respondents indicated the events met their goals for attending.

Monthly CE sessions, networking, and scholarship activities were held and scheduled for future months. Evaluation data from all the sessions have resulted in a mean of 90.7% (range 64.7%–100%) of participants indicating a rating of 4 or 5 in terms of satisfaction with the events and a mean of 95.5% (range 82.6%–100%) of participants indicating sessions met their goals for attending. Monthly CE events are scheduled through the next several months and members have begun registering for all scheduled CE events.

The CE events proved to be a valuable resource to participants as they provide opportunities for BCBAs in schools similar to those available during conferences; namely, to learn from and about others in their field, as well as interact with these professionals, access new research and procedures, offer new techniques and best-practice procedures, and listen to discussions from others who have expertise in their specific area of interest (Becerra et al., 2020). Furthermore, there is additional incentive to attend the events offered by VAPSBAN because there is no monetary cost for the participants (Rawle et al., 2016).

Encouraging Scholarship

The third goal of VAPSBAN was to encourage continued scholarship by providing a forum for discussing and analyzing research. Carr and Briggs (2010) emphasized the importance of remaining in contact with the literature of the field. This was echoed by Becerra et al. (2020), stating practitioners should read scholarly articles to be aware of developments in the field and continue to build their knowledge.

However, for practitioners in schools, this can be met with several barriers; loss of access to university libraries from graduate school, few, if any, peer contingencies, and little to no expectation from supervisors to engage in scholarly activities (Carr & Briggs, 2010). VAPSBAN has worked to reduce these barriers and encourage engagement in scholarly activities.

In January 2021, members were asked to participate in a scholarship activity. Specifically, members were asked to read a journal article, summarize it for themselves, and then attend an online, synchronous session. During the synchronous session, members would discuss and analyze the article together. Members were offered 1.0 CE for the hour-long, synchronous discussion analyzing and applying the information in the article.

From the survey results in November 2020, telehealth and virtual instruction with behavior analysis was identified as the topic for the article review. This topic was very salient to members given the Covid-19 pandemic had caused most schools to provide virtual instruction to at least some, if not all, of their students, and so network members were provided with an opportunity to review literature on this topic. The university faculty member representative on the advisory committee located two recently published behavior analytic article options from a special issue of the *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis* (JABA) focused on telehealth. During the December 2020 CE session, members voted on the article on which they wanted to focus. Both articles identified were from JABA as all certified members have access to that journal through the BACB. Members who are completing coursework toward certification typically have access through their university as well. Members were required to read the article ahead of time and were given a brief article summary form to guide their reading if they wanted to use it (See Appendix A). When members joined the sessions, they were broken into small groups of 5–7 people, including the group facilitator. Facilitators included both advisory committee members and other members of the network who were not on any network-related committee but had volunteered in the November 2020 survey. Group facilitators were given guiding questions ahead of time to facilitate the conversation. The guiding questions used are available in Table 4. However, the intent was not to cover all the guiding questions during the session, but to allow participants to delve into the article, analyze what was read, and then focus on applications in their settings. Thus, participants were allowed to steer the discussion as long as it applied to the article and its topic.

Though the event used virtual breakout rooms to keep the groups small, the event had a total of 53 participants. Evaluation data, completed by 83% of participants, revealed 100% provided a ranking of 4 or 5 for overall satisfaction and for meeting their goals for the session. All shared feedback

Table 4 Guiding Questions Used for Article Discussion and Analysis Events

Number	Question
1	What does this article mean for your work?
2	Is there anything you could add or change to your work based on what you read in the article?
3	Does this article have any impact on your short-term planning and implementation? If so, what?
4	Does this article have any impact on your long-term planning and implementation? If so, what?
5	Are there questions you still have about what you read related to how to apply this to your work?
6	What are two takeaways you have from what you have read or the discussion today?

through the evaluation was positive. Specifically, participants provided feedback including: "it was great to exercise that article analysis muscle again… it's been a while since I got to nerd out with other behavior analysts!"; "I really enjoyed being able to engage in research with other BCBAs. It is much more in-depth of a discussion when you are talking to other people that also speak the language or are certified"; and "it was a great experience to network and collaborate with other behavior analysts in public school settings about… the summary/limitations of the article. … It can feel lonely sometimes trying to create a network with other BCBAs doing similar work."

Though engaging in scholarly activities was a goal of the network, it was unclear how this would be received be network members. Based on attendance and evaluation data from those who attended, it appears this type of event was valuable for participants. Thus, future events like this would be incorporated into the monthly CE event schedule.

Looking to the Future

While the network and many of its activities are still in development, it is important to plan for the future. The subcommittees will continue their work, informational and training resources will be developed, activities will be planned and implemented, and the network will, hopefully, continue to grow. The initial goals of the network are being accomplished. Valentino et al. (2016) suggested newly-certified BCBAs could benefit from on-going support and collaborative opportunities beyond supervision. VAPSBAN promotes the membership of professionals who are working in public schools and supports not only newly-certified BCBAs, but more veteran professionals as well. By forging this network, members have access to a supportive, learning-centered opportunity (Lombardo et al., 2017) that encourages professional development, social networking, collaboration, and general sharing and broadening of ideas (Lombardo et al., 2017; Rawle et al., 2016; Van Themaat, 2019). The second goal was to provide continuing education events which are relevant to school-based BCBAs to promote competence. The BACB (2020) stated BCBAs have an ethical requirement to practice within their scope of competence and remain current while increasing their knowledge through professional development activities. The network provides CE events based on member input of what is relevant to them in their roles. These monthly sessions aid school-based BCBAs in their efforts to ensure their competence. The third goal was to encourage continued scholarship. Carr and Briggs (2010) expressed that, despite the need to remain current with the field's literature, there may be little expectation to do so. The network has created an environment that promotes contact with the literature by organizing events where participants read current research and discuss among peers. Finally, the focus of increasing the use of understanding of ABA in schools is an on-going process that is being supported through the network's subcommittees.

In addition to the benefits VAPSBAN has provided its members, it stands as a preliminary model for others. Though Skinner's vision of education may not have yet been realized (Bordieri et al., 2012) and the growth of behavior analysis in schools has been slow (Putnam & Kincaid, 2015), behavior analysis can have a great impact on public education. However, individual behavior analysts working in public schools may not have the capacity or collective efficacy to make the changes needed. A statewide network, such as VAPSBAN, offers individual school-based behavior analysts the ability to collaborate and improve their effectiveness but also permits these individuals to participate in a larger group that can provide the means to greater collective impact. VAPSBAN is supported through the VDOE and can provide feedback to the VDOE on its members' behalf. While the full impact of VAPSBAN is yet unknown, preliminary data suggests it is valued by its members and is continuing to be supported by the VDOE. Behavior analysis, as a field, may consider the impact of focused networks, such as VAPSBAN, to further promote the field in specific applications, such as education.

Continued Growth and Improvement

Despite the initial success of the network, a few aspects need to be addressed and considered for continued growth and improvement. First, there needs to be a concerted effort

to continue to support the members. This includes seeking out new members as well as growing leadership within the network. Identifying potential professionals who meet the criteria for the network who may not have learned of it yet, while continuing to position VAPABAN to be valuable for its members is critical. Members of VAPSBAN also need to take on greater leadership roles within the network, including joining and leading subcommittees, developing and disseminating informational and training resources, and generally supporting and promoting the activities of the network. Increasing member involvement will aid in spreading the workload to meet the goals of VAPSBAN.

Second, though the development of VAPSBAN has been supported by the VDOE, the network is committed to collaborating with others who have similar interests and goals. It will be important to seek out and foster collaborative relationships with other organizations such as the state's association for behavior analysts, which has a broader representation throughout the state beyond public schools, as well as individuals, including private ABA providers and school administrators. Though the members of the network, including the advisory committee, have and are working in public schools not only as school-based BCBAs but also as teachers, administrators, and related service providers, it is important to collaborate with school personnel to gain input to further our collaborative efforts. VAPSBAN was created to support a specialized group of BCBAs, but there is a clear need to avoid isolating from the rest of the fields of both behavior analysis and education. Instead, VAPSBAN is striving to keep its feet in both areas. Information should be gathered from non-BCBAs in the public schools to determine what resources and supports may be beneficial and to learn more about what schools find valuable about employing school-based BCBAs and how to continue to support them. Because the membership of VAPSBAN is varied in terms of roles (i.e., school-based BCBAs who are also teachers, administrators, or related service providers), feedback from the members is helpful to ensure the network is not isolated, but future endeavors should focus on gaining feedback from school-based professionals who are not BCBAs as well.

Third, though VAPSBAN is still new, one area to address is retention of BCBAs in the schools. Future research should examine whether the existence of VAPSBAN reduces attrition for BCBAs in Virginia and if so, to also identify the essential components. Future research should look at the impact of the network on encouraging other BCBAs to specialize in education. School-based BCBAs should strive to avoid burnout (Kelly et al., 2019), and future activities of the network should include concerted efforts to address this. There are many school districts throughout Virginia; yet, though the network has grown in terms of membership, there are still vast areas of the state that are unrepresented,

either because those school districts do not currently employ BCBAs or because the BCBAs in those school districts do not yet know about VAPSBAN or do not wish to join.

Limitations

The description of VAPSBAN should be considered with the following limitations in mind. One limitation to note is while some social validity data have been collected, additional and more specific data in this area should be collected and analyzed. Social validity data specific to the networking events would also be important to separate from the CE events. Additionally, data regarding change in behavior would be valuable to determine if the activities of the network are leveraging change in the members' behavior. Future studies should consider measuring behavior change in members and the impact of that change on students or other school-based professionals.

Future Research

While VAPSBAN may serve as a preliminary model for school-based behavior analysts, further research should be conducted. A paucity of research on school-based behavior analysts exists in the extant literature. Future studies should focus on describing the roles and responsibilities of school-based behavior analysts, looking at effective models in schools, and identifying factors needed for school-based behavior analysts to be successful in schools. Research should examine professional networks, such as VAPSBAN, and their potential role in promoting ABA in public schools and supporting school-based behavior analysts. Specifically, future studies should consider whether VAPSBAN impacts the performance of school-based behavior analysts and to what extent. Additionally, future research may consider whether VAPSBAN reduces attrition of school-based behavior analysts and/or increases the number of school-based positions available.

Important Factors to the Success of the Network

Finally, this network has been made possible because of specific factors: 1) the interest of the VDOE; 2) the financial support in the form of a grant by the VDOE; 3) the time and efforts of employees from the state-funded technical assistance centers; and 4) existing structures through the university, most specifically, the technological infrastructure (e.g., web conferencing tools, web sharing tools) and access to the university library and its resources. Based on the work of Rawle et al. (2016) and experience gained from implementing the network, the intent is to maintain VAPSBAN as a free opportunity available to its members. The existing framework, which includes the four factors mentioned,

support the continuance of VAPSBAN. Members of the network will continue to evaluate the network's effectiveness and will continue to make data-driven decisions that support VAPSBAN's members and promote the field of behavior analysis.

Though other fields, such education and nursing (Krutka et al., 2017; Lombardo et al., 2017; Rawle et al., 2016), have examined the use of professional peer supports, behavior analysis has not yet fully explored the use of such supports. If behavior analysts want to see change in educational organizations, engaging with peers and professional organizations may be one means for effective change (Furtado & Anderson, 2012).

Conclusion

VAPSBAN furthers the collaborative efforts to promote ABA in the field of education. Education has not yet realized Skinner's vision for the potential impact of ABA (Bordieri et al., 2012) but professional peer networks, such as VAPS-BAN can support enhanced competence of school-based BCBAs while potentially increasing awareness and understanding for school district personnel. The public schools are distinctive from other environments where behavior analysis is applied (Brodhead et al. 2018) and BCBAs practicing in this setting need a comprehensive set of skills in both behavior analysis and education (Brodhead et al., 2018; Layng et al., 2011; Mason et al., 2013; Putnam & Kincaid, 2015). Based on research from other fields, professional peer networks, such as VAPSBAN, can also support professionals in their sharing and broadening of ideas through professional development, social networking, and collaboration in educational research as well as improving mental health and job satisfaction (Lombardo et al., 2017; Rawle et al., 2016; Van Themaat, 2019).

The process of creating and implementing this network is replicable and potentially generalizable. First, other states could replicate this process creating a state network to support their school-based BCBAs. Second, should the state departments of education not wish to pursue such endeavors, the process could be replicated on a regional or even district level if there are multiple BCBAs available. The reach or intended outcomes may vary based on the size of the network but, ultimately, the goal is to create a network of support for BCBAs who work in public schools. What that support looks like, or how it is accomplished, may be necessarily different for different groups. The model could also be generalized to other subgroups of BCBAs who may not have a ready-made network of professionals for support. The current article provides one case example of how to support this group of behavior analysts, albeit on a statewide level.

VAPSBAN has capitalized on existing structures while forging a new path for behavior analysts to consider. Though this article focused on school-based BCBAs, the idea of supporting BCBAs through a member-driven network offers a solution to issues through its goals of 1) building a professional peer network for school-based BCBAs; 2) providing continuing education events targeted to school-based BCBAs to promote increased competence; and 3) encouraging continued scholarship. To accomplish these goals, VAPSBAN provides support to newly-certified BCBAs who may lose their supervision supports as well as more veteran BCBAs. Second, it provides a method for professionals to remain current in the field and increase their knowledge and skills through scholarly engagement and continuing education events, even if they do not have access to other means of professional development, such as conferences. Finally, it provides a mechanism to allow BCBAs to feel supported, which may, in turn, reduce burnout and attrition.

Appendix A

Article Discussion & Analysis Outline

Title of Article:
Author(s):
Year of Publication:
Please answer the following questions about the article you read:

1. What were the research questions posed by the author(s)?
2. Who was the population studied?
3. What was the intervention (or what did the authors report was done)?
4. What was the methodology used?
5. What were the results (a brief summary)?
6. Were there any limitations reported that impact your understanding of the article?
7. What was your take-away from the article?
8. Any other important information?
9. Thoughts about how to apply this in your setting.

Declarations

Conflict of Interest The author discloses the following conflict of interest: funding was received by the author to create and implement the network described herein.

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