

ABA Goes to school: Defining and planning for applied behavior analytic services in the school setting.

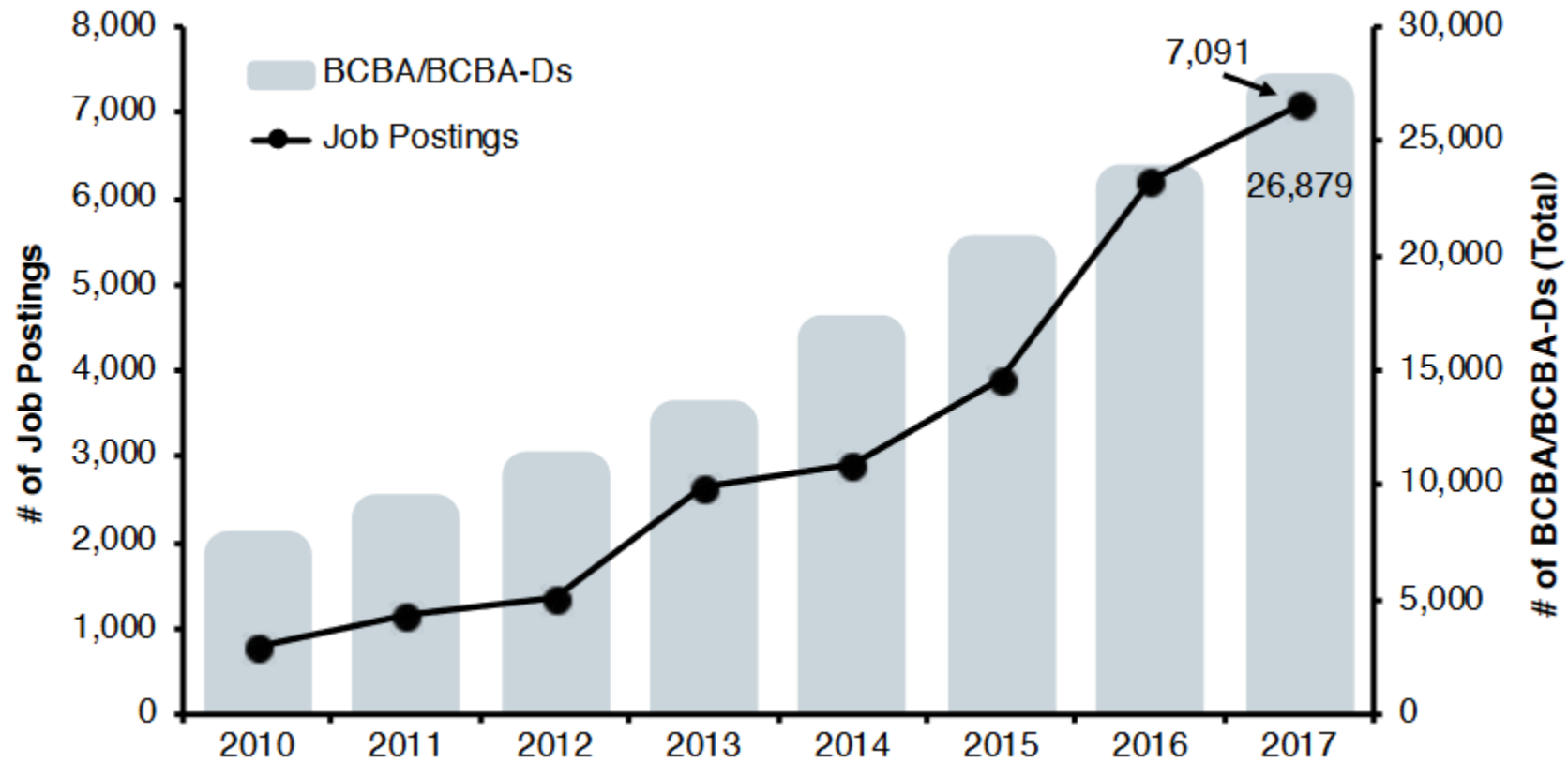
Dr. Vanessa Tucker, Ph.D.,  
BCBA-D, LBA

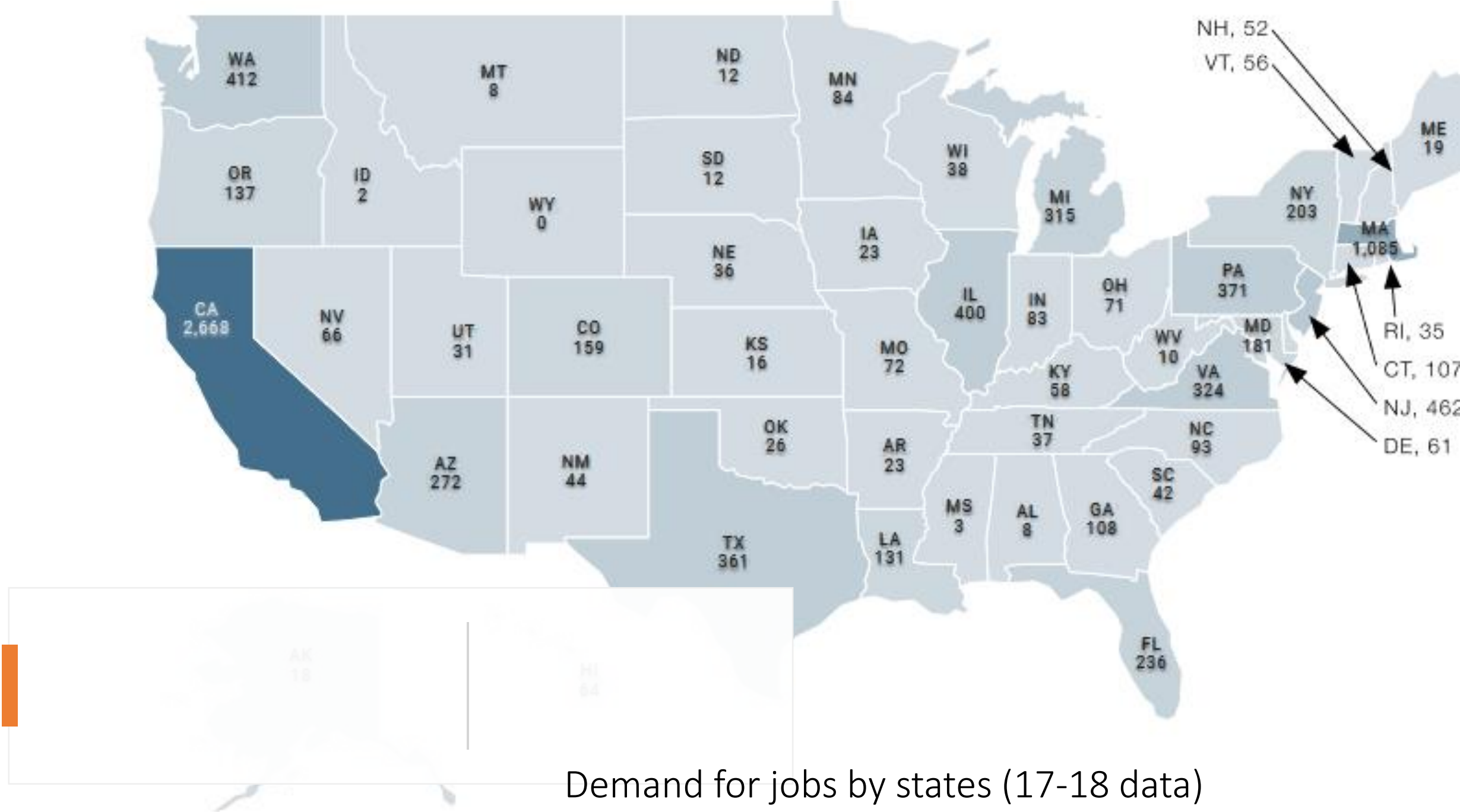


# Brief Agenda

- Increasing presence of BCBAs and related providers in schools,
- Roles of BCBAs in schools,
- Diversification of those roles along with general increase,
- Comparison of school vs. clinic roles and model,
- Ethical challenges,
- Training and support needs,
- Your questions and suggestions!

# Demand for jobs is growing...





# Demand for BCBAs and related staff in schools

- Demand is growing in all levels of education (K-12)
- What's driving this demand?

Parent  
Press

Due  
Process

Changes  
in practice

What  
else?

## A few research questions in process:

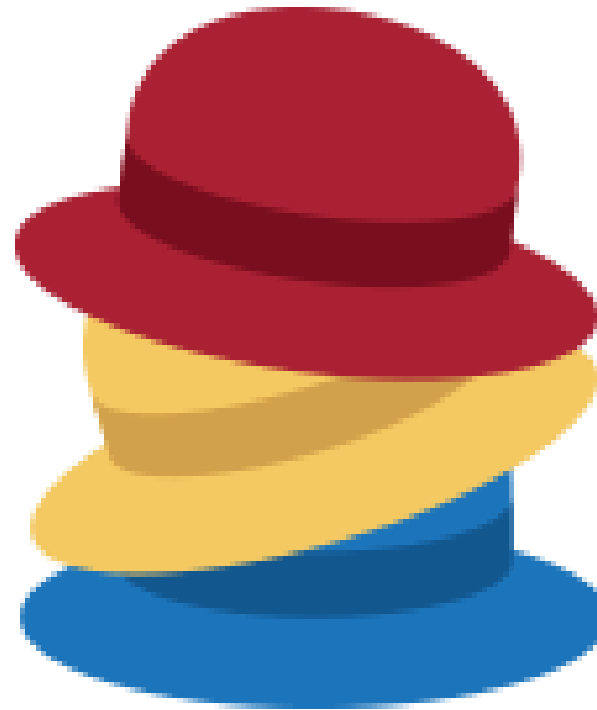
- How many districts are currently employing BCBA's, BCaBA's or RBT's?
- How are preparation programs addressing the skill set for BCBA's who may work/practice in schools?
- What training needs exist for BCBA's and related staff who are employed (in some capacity) in schools?
- What are BCBA's doing in their roles in schools?
- What are the ethical concerns BCBA's report?
- Currently, this work is being conducted in WA State with plans for expansion/replication.

It sort of feels like  
this...

**WE ARE  
ALL  
MAKING  
IT UP  
AS WE  
GO ALONG**

# What are potential roles of BCBA's in schools?

- Consultant
- Direct provider
- Behavior specialist
- Teacher on special assignment
- Supervisor
- And many others...





# Defining roles has been complicated...

- Questions that complicate things include:
- Who is ABA for?
- Is the BCBA (and related) the only one “doing ABA?”
- What is the natural environment for students with autism?
- How does ABA “look” in schools vs. clinic?
- Do schools really understand how to utilize the skill sets?
- Does the BCBA who practices in schools have the knowledge to do so effectively in that setting?



Roles and  
Expectations

# Roles, Expectations and Background Knowledge

- Design, implement and evaluate behavioral interventions, within the school setting with access in mind,
- Educate, mentor and support staff with behavioral interventions,
- Analyze behavior effectively and design plans that promote socially significant behaviors for access in the school setting, using school-related tools,
- Collaborate with other professions and professionals,
- Work within the parameters of the evaluation and IEP,
- Work within the parameters of the current school system, culture and climate (not to mention, budget),
- Answer to all constituents, including parents,
- Understand IDEiA and local (State) procedures.

# Designing behavioral interventions:

- BCBA's can run into some serious “cognitive dissonance” problems with this!
- School systems are inherently different from the clinic type of a model,
- School systems run within the structures and processes of the IEP,
- 1:1 “program book” styles are not designed to lead to access, generalization and maintenance in a school setting,
- FBAs-consent and content,
- Instructional/clinical control is different in the messiness of school,
- There are more players in the game...not just one person running the show,
- Interventions are about access to the general ed curriculum and require multiple sources of input.



# Barriers to Effective Treatment/Practice (and what you can do about it)

- Lack of information about how schools and classrooms function,
- Negative opinions about schools as compared to clinic settings,
- Negative opinions about teachers and their training,
- Negative opinions or inappropriate expectations of BCBAs,
- Unrealistic case loads or job expectations,
- Misunderstandings about others' roles (e.g. related service providers),
- Potential ethical issues that arise in practice,
- Isolation, job stress and operating out of scope.

# Care and Feeding of BCBAs in Schools

- Clarify training, expectations and roles at the outset of the hire,
- Clarify ethical obligations under the BACB code with supervisors,
- Provide training in special education practices and procedures (local, state and federal),
- Provide training in the use of IEP software and the FBA/PBIP forms used in districts,
- Provide training on whatever PBIS system(s) exist,
- Provide introductions to staff and administrators,
- Pair with a mentor and encourage connection to other school-based BCBAs,
- Provide for monthly “case reviews” in order to develop mutual understanding and professional development.



BCBAs: This is for you

# Advice for BCBA's

- Do not run “program book” models in schools as a general practice, seek “access” behavioral interventions instead,
- Listen, learn and figure out where you agree (e.g. sensory),
- Seek partnerships and a way to work yourself out of a job, each time,
- Provide a lot of layman’s education about the immense terminology we use,
- Provide extensive use of training on data collection tools,
- Provide SR+ for the things you see admin, teachers and staff doing, (e.g. make yourself a walking, talking m&m all the time),
- Provide interventions that lead to access skills and check for social validity,
- Refer back to your code often and don’t be afraid to speak up if something is wrong,
- Seek others’ input, advice and mentorship,
- Rely on the research as your guide,
- Learn more about special education and keep learning!





You can do this!



Yes We Can

- Questions?
- [tuckerve@plu.edu](mailto:tuckerve@plu.edu)
- Interested in being a part of the research?  
Contact me!