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The Role of Foster Parents in Improving Educational Outcomes for Youth in Foster Care

A Dissertation Presented

by

GWENDOLYN BASS

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

February 2017

College of Education
The Role of Foster Parents in Improving Educational Outcomes for Youth in Foster Care

A Dissertation Presented

by

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I would like to thank my advisor Dr. Jay Carey for the opportunities he has offered me throughout this experience, for the endless support, and for calmly communicating his belief in me. I am also grateful for the dedication of my committee members, Dr. Janette Dolan, Dr. Sarah Fefer, Dr. Michael Krezmien, and Dr. Sharon Rallis, whose wisdom and expertise inspired me and helped guide this research. I extend my appreciation to Karen Harrington for her immense assistance with the data collection, analysis, and refinement of this manuscript. I am also appreciative to the social workers at the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families who see value in this project and aided with recruitment.

I wish to thank the foster parents whose tireless commitment to children makes a difference every day. This project was founded on a deep belief in foster parents’ skill and ability to improve the lives of our most vulnerable children. A special thank you to those who shared their perspectives and assisted with this work by participating in the focus group and interviews. I believe that this research is infinitely more meaningful because it has been informed by the brilliance of such intelligent and dedicated foster mothers.

I am forever grateful to the dozens of young people whom I have come to know through my own experiences as a foster parent and educator. Many thanks to my three spirited children, who entered my life through adoption and who inspire me daily. These relationships remind me of the tremendous resilience of the human spirit and the power we all have to make meaning of our challenges, and to forge new and more intentional paths.
Foster parents have been excluded from efforts to improve educational outcomes for foster children, yet they have the potential to serve as powerful advocates for youth in schools if they are adequately trained and supported on how to do so. The purpose of the present study is to identify key skills and to develop an instrument that can be used to assess competence among Massachusetts foster parents in parenting skills that have been identified in the literature to underlie academic engagement. This research is based on the idea that foster parents have the potential to contribute positively to youth engagement and success in school if they are trained to implement parenting practices that support youth development in ways that improve school performance. While foster parent training is required in several states, extant research suggests that there is limited benefit of the most commonly adopted training curricula (Dorsey et al., 2008; Festinger & Baker, 2013). No surveys to date specifically evaluate foster parents’ preparedness to meet the unique developmental and educational needs of youth in foster care. This instrument was informed through a comprehensive synthesis of literature on foster parent training outcomes and an analysis of the Massachusetts Approaches to Partnerships in Parenting (MAPP; Department of Children and Families, 2001) curriculum. Through these analyses, six domains of parenting skills emerged: building relationships with youth, empathy towards youth,
educational process and role, developmentally appropriate expectations, behavior management, and social-emotional development. The instrument was then refined through an iterative process that was informed by a focus group with expert foster parents and cognitive interviews with foster parents. Findings from the focus group were used to explore the relevance of the underlying constructs. The cognitive interviewing led to the refinement of the questions based on foster parents’ feedback on the appropriateness and clarity of the content. The resultant measure is intended for use improving foster parent training content and pedagogy, to ensure foster parents’ preparedness to parent in ways that set the stage for educational attainment and success in adulthood, and in future research on long-term outcomes for youth in foster care.
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CHAPTER 1
LITERATURE SYNTHESIS ON FOSTER PARENT TRAINING OUTCOMES

Federal standards for child welfare require that foster parents are trained and evaluated in skills in a range of domains, including parenting, relationship-building, and effective behavior management (Buehler, Rhodes, Orme, & Cuddeback, 2006). Accordingly, preservice training should prepare foster parents for the role, with particular focus on authoritative parenting skills (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998), fostering social and emotional skills (e.g., social competence, self-regulation) (Farrington et al., 2012; Shonk and Cicchetti, 2001), and developmentally appropriate parenting (Buehler et al., 2006), as a means of reducing placement disruptions, improving foster parent retention, and enhancing outcomes for foster youth. Despite the existence of federal mandates regarding training, states use a patchwork of programs to prepare preservice foster parents to meet the demands of the role. There is a dearth of evidence to demonstrate that the current state-level foster parent training effectively teaches parents how to address the educational and behavioral needs of youth in care (Dorsey et al., 2008). However, training programs have the potential to teach skills that foster parents need to help youth develop characteristics that could offer protective effects that lead to more positive outcomes in school and in life. The present study examines research on foster parent training to explore how evaluated outcomes relate to skills that, according to educational research, foster parents should possess if they are to positively affect the educational trajectory for youth in their care.

Background

Educational status of foster youth
Overall, youth who have experienced maltreatment and out-of-home placement display poorer school functioning than their peers (Geenen & Powers, 2006; Scherr, 2007; Smithgall, Gladden, Howard, Goerge, & Courtney, 2004; Trout, Hagaman, Casey, Reid, & Epstein, 2008). Due to a host of risk factors, this population demonstrates chronic academic deficits (Scherr, 2007; Stone, 2007; Trout et al., 2008), school behavior problems (Smithgall, Gladden, Yang, & Goerge, 2005; Smucker & Kauffman, 1996; Zima, Bussing, Yang & Belin, 2000), juvenile delinquency (Barrett, Katsiyannis, Zhang, & Zhang, 2013), transition concerns (Courtney, Piliavin, Grogan-Taylor, & Nesmith, 2001), and long-term mental health issues (Lee & Jonson-Reid, 2009; Malmgren & Meisel, 2004). Furthermore, approximately 30–50% of foster youth are eligible for special education (Lightfoot, Hill, & LaLiberte, 2011; Trout et al., 2008), compared to 10% of youth in the general population (Zetlin, 2006). This may actually be an underrepresentation of the number of foster youth who are eligible for special education because placement moves and failure to perform evaluations often interferes with the special education process (Zetlin, 2006). Special education referral is particularly problematic for foster youth, as it has been correlated with school-based outcomes such as increases in truancy (Malmgren & Meisel, 2002) and home-related outcomes such as foster placement instability (Courtney et al., 2004; Helton, 2011), as well as long-term outcomes in adulthood (e.g., employment and mental health issues; Courtney et al., 2007). These findings have underscored the need to tailor programs and policies so that they include youth with disabilities and sufficiently support those with special needs.

In a review of the literature on educational outcomes for youth in foster care, Trout et al. (2008) synthesized multiple studies and found that across all indicators of academic functioning and school performance, youth in foster care were at greater risk of school failure than
comparison groups. Specifically, foster children tended to perform below grade and age levels on standardized measures of academic achievement and cognitive functioning and were retained at higher rates than nonfoster youth (Trout et al., 2008). Another large-scale statewide comparison of educational outcomes between foster youth and nonfoster youth yielded similar results (Burley & Halpern, 2001). Burley and Halpern’s (2001) analysis, which involved four samples, each comprising 60,000–70,000 students, determined that nonfoster youth outscored foster youth by 15 to 20 percentile points on statewide achievement tests. Across the kindergarten through 12th grade continuum, twice as many foster youth were retained and/or changed schools during the year as nonfoster peers (Burley & Halpern, 2001). Moreover, Smithgall et al. (2004), in a study with a sample of nearly 20,000 students, found that a majority of foster youth in the Chicago Public Schools performed in the bottom quartile on standardized measures of reading ability and that they were 1½ times more likely to repeat a grade than were their peers who had not experienced foster care.

Youth in foster care are 3 times as likely as their peers to be in special education, with studies having found that an overwhelming proportion of the 30–50% of foster children who are diagnosed with special needs receive services due to emotional and behavior disorders (EBD; Sullivan & Knutson, 2000). This high rate of special education involvement resulting from EBD is significant, as, overall, youth with EBD experience poorer outcomes than other youth in special education (Trout, Nordness, Pierce & Epstein, 2003). Youth receiving special education experience poorer outcomes than foster youth without disabilities (Lee & Jonson-Reid, 2009; Smithgall et al., 2005; Sullivan & Knutson, 2000). School-based placements for foster youth with disabilities also tend to be more restrictive (Zima, Bussing, Yang & Belin, 2000), and foster youth with disabilities experience high rates of placement disruptions (Courtney et al., 2004).
One study conducted in the Chicago Public Schools indicated that youth in foster care who receive special education services due to EBD are as likely to graduate from high school as they are to be incarcerated (Smithgall et al., 2005).

Despite these well-documented struggles in school, some researchers have found promising results related to potential protective factors and opportunities for intervention with foster youth. For example, Shonk and Cicchetti (2001) conducted a study with a sample of 229 socioeconomically disadvantaged children between the ages of 5 and 12, 146 of whom had experienced maltreatment. The purpose of Shonk and Cicchetti’s (2001) research was to examine the influence of maltreatment on academic and socioemotional functioning and to explore how levels of competency in these domains affect academic and behavioral skills. Findings indicated that maltreatment had a significant effect on behavior problems and that, in some cases, the prevalence of behavior problems was moderated by positive social skills and impulse control. This suggests that when children develop social and self-regulation skills, they are less likely to present with challenging behavior that interferes with learning. The determinations of this research are consistent with findings from literature on social and emotional skills development (e.g., Farrington et al., 2012). Herein arises the possibility that targeting social and emotional skills, such as social competence and emotion management, in foster youth could help youth develop characteristics that serve as a protective factor and that, in turn, contribute to improvements in academic achievement.

Outcome studies on the Casey Family Programs model (Graner & Emerson, 2002; Pecora et al., 2006), which found that children in Casey Family foster placements graduated from high school at a higher rate than nonfoster peers, have suggested the new direction of inquiry that underlies the present research. Casey Family Programs is a national foundation that provides
multidimensional family foster care placements for youth age 10 to 17. In Casey homes, youth receive augmented services, such as ongoing foster family support, mental health services, funds to participate in extracurricular activities, and regularly scheduled interagency meetings. In a 2006 study of the educational attainments of foster care alumni who had been placed in homes overseen by Casey, Pecora et al. reported that high school completion rates (87.8%) exceeded the national average (80.4%). The authors also found that placement changes were more highly correlated with the likelihood of high school completion than was disability status. In other words, the Casey model effectively improved outcomes for the most vulnerable children in the foster population. The results of this study are particularly profound given that the population served by Casey is considered to be at the highest risk for juvenile delinquency, referrals to special education for emotional and behavioral issues, and foster placement disruptions (Barrett et al., 2013; Smithgall et al., 2005; Trout et al., 2008). Youth in these specialized homes experienced the benefits of enhanced services such as weekly access to social workers, vouchers for extracurricular activities, mental health providers, ongoing foster family support and training, and transition services. Although the benefits of specific services and supports have yet to be analyzed, these activities address developmental vulnerabilities among foster youth and reduce interagency coordination issues, which are a major cause of foster parent resignation.

Factors influencing educational success

Although the literature has clearly demonstrated the academic struggles of maltreated and foster youth, it is difficult to draw universal conclusions about the reasons for educational failure. First, differences between states’ policies governing child welfare and the implementation of educational regulations complicates the exploration of possible causes for various outcomes.
(Geenen & Powers, 2006. For example, child welfare agencies across the United States have varying rates of out-of-home placement, kinship care, and in-home services provision. Likewise, schools across the country have different policies related to retention, drop-out prevention, suspension, special education, and standardized measures of academic achievement. Second, there has been little consistency across research studies in the duration of placement in foster care. Whereas some samples of foster youth included those who were in care for a particular length of time, other samples comprised youth who were in care at the time of data collection. These samples of foster youth could have differed significantly in terms of how their status affected their educational experience. Multiple studies have noted that although as many as half of all foster youth are identified as having a disability, most large-scale studies of foster youth and foster care alumni have not included individuals with disabilities (e.g., Geenen & Powers, 2006). As a result, it is not possible to determine with certainty which education-related factors are salient in determining educational outcomes across the national population of foster youth.

Nonetheless, research has suggested that several variables are likely related to the school experiences and educational attainment of foster youth. Many of the notable impediments to success in school are directly or indirectly related to issues across three domains: biopsychosocial factors; school mobility and foster care placement disruptions; and the preparedness of educators to meet the complex developmental, mental health, social, and educational needs of foster youth in schools. Accordingly, responding to these obstacles requires an integrated approach that increases placement stability, addresses the influence of trauma on readiness to learn, and prepares caregivers to address the behavioral and educational needs of youth in care. Teaching foster parents to play a more prominent role in teaching prosocial skills and accessing services for young children with special needs is an important step (Bass, Shields,
& Behrman, 2004). Research has supported the notion that positive school engagement and educational attainment are correlated with better outcomes (Fan & Chen, 2001) and that education moderates some of the effects of maltreatment (Shonk & Cicchetti, 2001). However, as evidenced by their school and transition outcomes, students who experience foster care seldom reap the benefits that could be provided through a quality education.

Biological factors, such as prenatal exposure to drugs and alcohol, and experiencing trauma and maltreatment can have significant effects on psychological, physical, and social development (Stone, 2007). A number of factors are known to hinder healthy development in maltreated and foster youth, including behavioral and mental health problems that can interfere with learning (Jonson-Reid, Drake, & Kohl, 2009). Certain demographic subgroups are at greater risk of becoming involved with child welfare agencies— for example, those living in poverty, substance abusers, and people with cognitive impairments (Mason, 2014). These biopsychosocial variables influence children’s developmental health, readiness to learn, and exposure to skills that underlie positive school engagement. Although nearly half of all youth in care receive special education services for an identified disability, recent research has purported that this figure may, in fact, be an underrepresentation (Zetlin, 2006). Once a student is identified as eligible for special education, she or he has an increased likelihood of school failure and criminal justice involvement (Barrett et al., 2013; Sullivan & Knutson, 2000).

Further, the severity, type, and duration of child maltreatment have been correlated with disability status (Jonson-Reid, Drake, Kim, Porterfield, & Han, 2004; Lee & Jonson-Reid, 2009; Sullivan & Knutson, 2000). That is, youth with disabilities are more likely to experience maltreatment. Some research has suggested that the physical challenges and behavioral demands of youth with disabilities could increase the risk of abuse (Sobsey, 2002), whereas other studies
have underscored the threats to brain development that can result from abuse, thus causing permanent disabilities (Cicchetti & Toth, 1995; Strathearn, Gray, O’Callaghan, & Wood, 2001). Though it is nearly impossible to pinpoint the exact cause, evidence has shown that maltreated youth disproportionately experience attachment issues (Morrison, Frank, Holland, & Kates, 1999), mental health issues (Cicchetti & Toth, 1995), and developmental delays that increase the likelihood of school-related problems (Sonnander & Claesson, 1999).

Second, school-aged foster youth relocate twice as frequently as nonfoster youth (Eckenrode, Rowe, Laird, & Braithwaite, 1995) and experience changes in schools and home placements that can impede educational progress (Conger & Rebeck, 2001; Zetlin, Weinberg, & Luderer, 2004). Approximately half of all foster youth experience four or more school changes over the course of their academic careers (Powers & Stotland, 2002). When students experience placement moves and transfer schools, a host of educational challenges arise. According to research on mobility, it can take youth as long as 4 to 6 months to recover academically from a change in schools (Calvin, 2001), which poses unique challenges to this highly transient population. Furthermore, disruptions in school and foster placement have been connected to absenteeism (Conger & Rebeck, 2001; Eckenrode et al., 1995) and poor academic achievement (Burley & Halpern, 2001; Conger & Rebeck, 2001; Smithgall et al., 2004; Zetlin et al., 2004).

In addition, school changes can result in the loss of educational records (Choice et al., 2001), interruptions in school attendance (Powers & Stotland, 2002), and issues with transferring previously earned academic credit (Zetlin et al., 2004). The consequences of these issues are amplified for maltreated youth with disabilities, as their records include legal documentation of their special education needs and entitlements (Choice et al., 2001). Foster youth with disabilities experience more frequent disruptions in child welfare placements, particularly when
the youth are served by non-kin caregivers (Helton, 2011). Furthermore, when youth do not remain in one school long enough to establish long-term relationships with peers and adults, which is particularly important for youth who have experienced trauma and loss in their relationships, they are at greater risk of social problems (Sullivan, Jones, & Mathiesen, 2010). Some have also argued that the traumatic effect of placement disruption can lead to the same behavioral concerns that result in the over-identification of EBD among foster youth, who truly need mental health treatment rather than alternative educational placements (Smithgall et al., 2005). Overall, foster youth are highly mobile, which puts them at great risk of academic failure.

Third, due to the effects of recent and recurrent exposure to violence or trauma and the developmental and mobility factors identified above, the learning needs of foster youth are complex. Foster youth can be stigmatized by teachers and peers who may make assumptions about their capabilities and behavior, which makes schools feel unwelcoming (Noh, 2013). For a plethora of reasons, these students are often misunderstood and are, consequently, inadequately served in educational contexts. For instance, a significant proportion of foster youth are classified as having EBD, though rates of behavior problems have not been found to decrease with special education identification and intervention (Smithgall et al., 2005). This suggests that issues in the evaluation procedures may cause foster youth to be erroneously labeled as EBD or that the type of special education interventions offered for EBD are inappropriate. Several researchers have suggested that students exhibit high rates of clinically significant externalizing and internalizing behaviors as a result of recent and recurrent trauma and should be treated with mental health services rather than restrictive placement (Haight, Kayama, Kincaid, Evans, & Kim, 2013). To address these issues, foster youth require tailored supports and interventions to facilitate their learning and school engagement.
Current approaches to improving educational outcomes for foster youth

Educational researchers have painted a clear picture of the disparities in academic achievement, school behavior, and disability status (Trout et al., 2008) between foster youth and typical students. Responding to an increase in accountability standards, in part resulting from the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB; 2001), educators and policymakers have made some progress in addressing school mobility among youth in foster care. Two important pieces of legislation have laid some of the groundwork for enabling schools to minimize educational interruptions due to placement disruptions: the McKinney-Vento Act (2001) and the Fostering Connections Act (FCA; 2008). The first provides transportation for youth who are in transition; the second holds state and federal child welfare agencies accountable for meeting the educational needs of youth in state custody. The FCA also enables youth to remain in foster care until the age of 21 as opposed to 18. In addition, the FCA increases communication between schools and child welfare agencies, enhancing educational advocacy efforts, adding educational progress data to states’ required child welfare accountability reporting to the federal government, and increasing educational and employment opportunities and supportive resources for youth in foster care (Krinsky & Liebmann, 2011).

However, there are practical and logistical challenges associated with educating foster children that have not been alleviated through these policies. Placement disruption is a frequent occurrence, and if children are relocated a great distance from their original school, it is not always practical to transport them back and forth. Similarly, child welfare agencies have difficulty maintaining and monitoring educational progress after such relocations, and social workers are often not trained to do so (Bass et al., 2004). The aforementioned legislation
represents crucial strides towards improving educational equity for youth in foster care, yet the effect of such programs will be limited without efforts to reduce placement disruptions and secure educational and emotional stability by providing improved training and support for foster parents.

To date, the most widely adopted approaches to improving educational supports and oversight for foster youth have involved placing social workers or school personnel in the role of interventionist. Providing foster youth with court-appointed educational advocates, supplementing caseworker training on educational issues, and concerting efforts around interagency communication have yielded some improvements (Altschuler, 2003). The Education Liaison model (Zetlin, Weinberg, & Shea, 2006), for instance, involves providing social workers with comprehensive professional development on educational law and staffing child welfare agencies with educators who can serve as resources for consultation on complex school-related issues. While studies of this program have suggested that it improves social worker contact and case file documentation, only modest academic gains have been shown (Zetlin, Weinberg, & Shea, 2010). Other studies have shown that some of the benefits of caseworker and teacher involvement on educational outcomes are limited, as youth still experience the academic consequences resulting from foster placement disruptions (Perry, 2006; Salazar, Keller, & Courtney, 2011). Extant research on interventions that improve educational outcomes for foster youth has justified the emphasis on school-related supports but has not specifically addressed the role of foster parents. However, some of the programs that have been found to most successfully improve school functioning include supplemental education, service, and supports for foster parents (Pecora et al., 2006; Pecora, 2012). A more comprehensive model of foster care can, in essence, level the educational playing field for youth. These results are very promising and
suggest that the benefits of high quality, comprehensive family foster care can have a
tremendous influence on educational attainment, even for older youth who have experienced
multiple placement changes and present with numerous other risk factors.

The role of the foster parent

Several factors correlated with improved educational outcomes can be addressed in the
family context. Considering that at least one third of youth in foster care have special needs, the
demand for parental involvement in educational support is significant (Trout et al., 2008). Foster
parents, unlike social workers and court-appointed advocates, have daily contact with children
and are effectively positioned to take on the role of educational advocate if given the tools to do
so. Importantly, literature on educational outcomes for youth has not included research on foster
parent attitudes and feelings of competency. Thus, many practices that are proven effective for
enhanced educational outcomes have yet to be employed with this population. A few studies
have indicated that foster parents wish to be more involved in schooling (Geenen & Powers,
2006; Haight et al., 2013; Smithgall et al., 2004), yet there is a dearth of literature on how foster
parent involvement contributes to educational outcomes for youth in foster care.

Buehler et al. (2006) conducted a study synthesizing state and federal laws governing
foster parent training and responsibilities, as well as competencies informed by the Casey
research. The authors concluded that foster parents need training on 12 competency domains.
This list included competencies related to promoting educational success and long-term
outcomes for youth, supporting youth’s socioemotional development, and providing a nurturing
and safe home (Buehler et al., 2006). These areas of skill are similar to those identified in
research on positive parent engagement, foster care placement disruption, and improving
educational attainment for at-risk youth (Fan & Chen, 2001; Gomby et al., 1995; Heller, Smyke, & Boris, 2002). In other words, research from these areas has suggested that engaging foster parents in training could improve foster parent retention and satisfaction while also enhancing educational outcomes for youth. Such training helps foster parents improve their parenting skills, foster social and emotional skills in youth, and communicate investment and belief in students’ potential.

Some studies have explored the perceptions foster youth, teachers, caseworkers, and foster parents have about barriers to school success (Altschuler, 2003; Smithgall et al., 2004). Findings from these and other studies have consistently pointed out the need for improved communication between agencies serving youth, for specific supports related to attendance and mobility issues, and for the development of relationships between youth and supportive adults who value education and convey high expectations. Unlike many youth who can turn to their parents for help with problems at school, foster youth often do not have adults in their lives who know them well and who feel comfortable participating in their education. Similarly, when children are wards of the state, school personnel often do not know to whom they should direct requests for conferences, information about student performance, etc. Because different states have different laws determining who is afforded legal rights for educational involvement with a child (foster parents, caseworkers, biological parents, or court-appointed advocates), de facto ambiguity exists (Choice et al., 2001). This confusion has implications for students who are served through general and special education, especially as special education law (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA], 2004) includes services for parents of youth with special needs. Although research on parent engagement has demonstrated that when caregivers are involved, students experience more positive school outcomes (Zellman & Waterman, 1998),
foster youth consistently lack quality educational support from their foster homes (Smithgall et al., 2004).

Efforts to expand foster parent skills and responsibilities in regards to education must acknowledge how foster parent retention affects home stability and school stability. Foster parents are extremely difficult to retain, with nearly half quitting after the first year (Pasztor & Wynne, 1995). Foster parents’ reasons for discontinuing range from lack of clarity about the role (Le Prohn, 1994) to perceived incompetence at managing challenging behavior (Buehler, Cox, & Cuddeback, 2003). Research on foster parents’ attitudes and characteristics has suggested that high burnout rates are, in part, fueled by feeling undervalued (Heller et al., 2002). Conversely, foster parents who feel adequately supported, who successfully implement consistent and developmentally appropriate routines, and who demonstrate tolerance are more satisfied with the role (Buehler et al., 2003). Unless foster parent burnout is reduced and foster parents’ feelings of preparedness for coordinating with schools are enhanced, placement disruptions will continue to impede the efforts of caseworkers and school personnel. Therefore, training that prepares foster parents to meet the home- and school-based needs of youth is particularly necessary, especially for foster parents of youth with special needs (Bass et al., 2004), who are more likely than other foster youth to experience placement disruptions and poorer outcomes (Lee & Bowen, 2006).

Effects of parental involvement on student outcomes

Research has indicated that parent involvement and support are positively correlated with several school-related outcomes, such as educational attainment (Fan & Chen, 2001; Gonzalez-DeHass, Willems, & Holbein, 2005), improved engagement (Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch, &
Darling, 1992), and stronger socioemotional skills, such as motivation and self-regulation (Gonzalez-DeHass et al., 2005; Jeynes, 2003). Across the research on this topic, various labels have been used to describe parents’ behaviors and attitudes relating to their children’s schooling. Parent engagement is a malleable factor unlike, for example, a parent’s level of educational attainment, which tends to be a fixed variable. In other words, although school officials and researchers cannot change the socioeconomic position of a family, parents can be trained on how to participate in their children’s education in ways that tend to lead to improved academic outcomes. For the purpose of the present literature review, terms such as parent engagement, participation, and involvement are used to reference the role of parents in relation to their children’s school and learning. This section will emphasize parent-level variables that, according to previous research, correlate with students’ school success.

With the adoption of No Child Left Behind (2001), schools are required to employ evidence-based strategies for promoting positive relationships with families and to engage caregivers in the education process, as parent engagement is known to enhance student achievement (Elementary and Secondary Education Act, NCLB, Section 1111.d). Similarly, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) mandates parental involvement throughout the special education evaluation process and when developing and monitoring educational plans for students with disabilities. While schools implement a range of strategies to comply with these regulations, the general goal is to encourage parents to invest in their children’s learning in ways that research has demonstrated will improve achievement. The regulatory mandates stemming from these educational policies have fueled research efforts on the topic of parent engagement and the effects of such support on outcomes in school and into adulthood.
The effects of parent engagement on children’s learning and school performance have been examined through multiple lenses, each of which poses unique research opportunities and challenges. For example, some research has explored how parental involvement can enhance school-based interventions (Henderson & Berla, 1994), whereas other studies have focused on correlations between parent-level variables (e.g., time spent helping with homework, attendance at school-based activities, parenting style) and student outcomes (e.g., aspirations, grades, subject-specific test scores). Operational definitions for terms such as parental involvement, parent engagement, parenting practices, and parental school engagement have often blurred and overlapped. As a result, though the findings of studies on this topic are encouraging, results can appear disjointed and inconclusive.

Fan and Chen (2001) conducted a meta-analysis on the effect of parental involvement on academic achievement, in which they assessed 25 studies on the topic. The authors wrote, “Although the idea that parental involvement has a positive influence on students’ academic achievement is intuitively appealing, there is still a great deal of inconsistency in the empirical research literature” (Fan & Chen, 2001, p. 17). However, their analysis did uncover that, despite variations in methods and measures, studies consistently showed that parent involvement enhanced student outcomes. According to Fan & Chen (2001), the most powerful parent-related variable was parents’ academic expectations and aspirations for their children, which was highly positively correlated with students’ academic achievement and personal aspirations. In other words, when parents communicated to their children a belief that they could succeed and demonstrated high expectations related to school, students tended to perform accordingly. Although there are some challenges associated with comparing studies on the effects of parental
engagement and involvement, significant evidence suggests that parent participation and encouragement play a pivotal role in student outcomes.

Overall, academic achievement can be enhanced through parent involvement. Students whose parents exhibited education-related involvement tended to demonstrate higher rates of on-time graduation, lower rates of dropping out, and higher educational attainment in high school than comparable peers (Barnard, 2004, p. 56). Parent engagement at the elementary school level has been positively correlated with student achievement, attitude towards school, attendance, and academic self-concept (Gonzalez-DeHass et al., 2005; Paulson, 1994; Steinberg et al., 1992; Trusty, 1996). When parents have received consistent feedback about their child’s participation in school, students have been found to demonstrate improved self-regulation (Jeynes, 2003). Additionally, school-based student improvement programs have been found to be more effective when parents were included in the intervention (Henderson & Berla, 1994). Moreover, consistent with a growing body of research underscoring the value of socioemotional traits that underlie achievement, parent participation has been found to improve students’ skills in this domain, such as intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and self-management (Gonzalez-DeHass et al., 2005, p. 100).

To better understand the influence parents can have on student outcomes, researchers have explored parental attitudes and practices that are specifically related to school, such as attendance at special events and parent-teacher conferences, as well as those that take place at home, such as academic support, approaches to discipline, and home-based learning activities. One common conceptual model for determining the necessary components of parental involvement programs in schools includes six categories of behaviors: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the
community (Epstein, 2001). Other researchers (e.g., Jeynes, 2003) have argued that additional categories should be added to this model to ensure the representation of some of the more subtle aspects of involvement. For example, when parents believed in their own ability to be helpful to their children in school, they were more likely to engage in the process (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Evidence has suggested that particular student populations may, in fact, be more significantly affected by their parents’ attitudes about learning and school than by other forms of school engagement (Jeynes, 2005).

In a comprehensive meta-analysis Jeynes (2005) examined which types of involvement had the greatest positive influence on achievement among urban youth. The author found that parental beliefs and attitudes about their children’s educational capabilities, rather than specific actions like helping with homework, were paramount in improving educational outcomes. Furthermore, family literacy and parenting style were significantly correlated with academic achievement. In this study, literacy was defined as the frequency with which parents read to their children. Parenting style referred to the extent to which parents displayed warmth and support while also enforcing clear and reasonable disciplinary practices. These three areas of significant effect suggest that rather than inviting parents to in-school activities, efforts should emphasize teaching parents how to communicate high expectations for their children, facilitate regular educational or learning activities in the home, and implement parenting practices that help their children develop socioemotional skills that will serve them well in school. This is consistent with research on the development of resilience and academic competence, which has found associations between academic success and authoritative parenting (Baumrind, 1978; Steinberg et al., 1992). Because these parent-level variables are malleable, parent training
should include education about parenting style and family routine as a means of improving academic outcomes for students (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998).

Group training programs are a useful method for teaching parents skills that enable them to address behavioral and mental health issues in their children and have been shown to have long-lasting effects (Barlow & Stewart-Brown, 2000). Research on parent training has demonstrated the significant benefits of educating parents about authoritative parenting skills, which involve presenting a nurturing demeanor, establishing clear and consistent routines, and communicating high expectations (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). Parent education and training are integral components of interventions that target socioemotional skill development among at-risk youth and have been correlated with protective effects (Mendez, Ogg, Loker, & Fefer, 2013; Yoshikawa, 1994; Zigler, Taussig, & Black, 1992). For example, the behavioral parent training (BPT) approach has been successful in improving parenting strategies for parents of youth with a range of behavioral and socioemotional challenges (Chronis, Chacko, Fabiano, Wymbs, & Pelham, 2004). The positive effects of BPT were indicated by parents’ reports of reduced stress, as well as improvements in students’ home and classroom behavior (Chronis et al., 2004).

Interestingly, studies on foster parent retention and competence have revealed that foster caregivers regularly struggle with the same types of skills that are often addressed through programs like BPT. Although the structures of BPT and other multidimensional treatment interventions for parents of challenging youth are not perfectly translatable to foster parenting, there are several striking similarities.

Orme and Buehler (2001) assessed parenting skills among a sample of foster parents and determined that nearly one fifth of these parents used styles and tactics that were described as “limited” or “troubling.” Though this does not indicate that all foster parents are inadequately
suited to the job, it is consistent with foster parent self-reports about characteristics of successful foster homes and causes of attrition. In addition, youth in foster care often present with internalizing and externalizing behaviors in the clinically elevated range (McCrae, 2009) and are at acute risk for long-term mental and behavioral health struggles (Barrett et al., 2013; Malmgren & Meisel, 2002, 2004). Foster parents consistently report feeling overwhelmed by managing children’s challenging behaviors, as well as high levels of stress associated with the role (Bass et al., 2004; Orme et al., 2004). Conversely, they acknowledge that effective foster parenting involves instituting routines and family structures that help children feel safe and establishing effective practices for preventing and responding to challenging behavior (Shireman, 2009). If foster parent training were to incorporate development in these areas, it is likely that the results would be positive in addressing the specific socioemotional skill deficits of foster youth (e.g., self-regulation, social competence) and foster caregivers (e.g., parenting skills), as well as addressing foster parents’ expressed needs. This could, in turn, improve foster parent retention and educational outcomes for foster youth.

Foster parent training

Research on foster parent training has underscored the lack of evidence base for the training models currently used and the dearth of training content on the educational needs of foster youth (Dorsey et al., 2008; Festinger & Baker, 2013). A total of four peer-reviewed studies have been conducted on the two most prominent training programs in the country: Parent Resources for Information, Development, and Education (PRIDE; Child Welfare League of America, 2003) and Model Approaches to Partnerships in Parenting (MAPP). Meanwhile research on foster parents’ perceptions of competency has consistently found a need for more
clarity about the role as well as enhanced training on caring for youth with special needs (Brown, 2008; MacGregor, Rodger, Cummings, & Leschied, 2006). A limitation of the existing research on enhancing educational opportunities for foster youth is that it has not identified or assessed the value of including foster parents as interventionists and educational advocates. Frequent foster parent burnout and questions about who is responsible for a foster child’s needs, educational or otherwise, pose obstacles to engaging foster parents in schools and reducing mobility for youth. When foster parents do advocate for youth, sometimes their words fall on the deaf ears of school personnel and social workers who do not take their opinions seriously (Brown & Rodger, 2009).

Despite the evidence to suggest that foster parents and foster parent training are crucial to the placement stability and educational success of foster youth (Whiting, Hither, & Koech, 2007), limited research has been conducted on the effectiveness of existing models of foster parent training (Dorsey et al., 2008; Festinger & Baker, 2013; Grimm, 2003). Additionally, despite federally mandated standards for foster parent training, the training expectations for foster parents vary widely across the United States, with only 26 states requiring preservice foster caregivers to participate in formal training (Festinger & Baker, 2013). Literature on parent training, the benefits of parent engagement, and positive parenting practices, as well as research on foster parent retention, has suggested that there is value in educating future caregivers on the nature of the role and how to best serve youth (e.g., Bass et al., 2004; Buehler et al., 2006). Some models have incorporated components that address the educational needs of foster children. Specialized foster parent training programs, specifically those targeting treatment foster care, contain modules related to the educational needs of foster youth. Treatment foster care is typically offered only to youth who possess a level of need, due to socioemotional or
behavioral concerns, that cannot be met in a typical foster placement. Even though such youth are particularly disadvantaged, multidimensional treatment foster care (MTFC) has been found to reduce placement disruption by supplementing typical foster parent supports with additional trainings, ongoing case worker involvement, and parenting strategies (Fisher, Burraston, & Pears, 2005). Specifically, the Keeping Foster Parents Trained and Supported program (KEEP; Chamberlain, Leve, & DeGarmo, 2007) incorporates content related to school–foster home relationships and provides foster parents with ongoing support (Price, Chamberlain, Landverk, & Reid, 2009).

Although minimal research has explored which specific foster parent training and support components contribute to positive educational results, the extraordinary outcomes associated with the Casey model suggest that additional investigation is warranted. One study on the economic value of a comprehensive model of foster care confirmed the cost–benefit of the Casey Family Program (Zerbe et al, 2009). The study compared parenting styles (e.g., authoritative, disengaged), incidence of abuse while in foster care, services and activities available to youth (e.g., employment training, extracurricular activities), and placement changes. Although the purpose of the study was to demonstrate the benefit of investing in quality foster care, the analysis also uncovered key differences between the typical state child welfare model and the Casey Family Program approach. Specifically, Casey foster parents were significantly less likely to be disengaged, experienced higher rates of retention and satisfaction, and reported higher levels of perceived helpfulness than did foster parents in the state child welfare agency (Pecora, 2012; Zerbe et al., 2009). These findings, juxtaposed with literature on the benefits of parental engagement and parenting practices on educational attainment, suggest that providing adequate
training and ongoing support to foster families may be the key to bettering the educational future of youth in foster care.

Research on the Casey Family Programs and on the training and support models used in treatment foster care has clearly shown that when youth were provided with school-related services and supports and when placement disruptions were limited, youth were more likely to graduate from high school (Graner & Emerson, 2002; Pecora et al., 2006). Treatment foster care programs have demonstrated positive effects on parenting quality and placement stability, but it is difficult to generalize the findings of these specialized models. Nevertheless, it appears that providing a range of services to youth and foster families does minimize placement disruption, which is, in essence, an indicator of foster parent satisfaction. In other words, when foster parents are afforded the training and support they request, they are more likely to remain caregivers for youth. Most foster parents have altruistic motivations for assuming the role (Tyebjee, 2003) and desire clarity in the boundaries and expectations of their role (Hudson & Levasseur, 2002). When foster parents feel self-efficacy for meeting the demands of the position and addressing behavioral needs, they experience greater satisfaction in foster parenting (Whenan, Oxlad, & Lushington, 2009). Foster parent retention, appropriate parenting practices, and behavior management skills are vital to the placement stability and developmental growth of youth in care. If adequate training and support are provided, the increase in foster parent satisfaction could provide monumental benefits to student outcomes. For example, such training could include parent education that has been proven successful for improving socioemotional skill development for at-risk youth.

Although some studies have identified the advantages of empowering foster parents to engage in advocacy for the educational needs of youth in their care (e.g., Altshuler, 2003),
several barriers exist. Recruiting and retaining foster parents to care for the nearly half a million youth in the foster system is incredibly challenging. Evidence suggests that most foster families do not remain in the position for more than a year (Cooley & Petren, 2011; Rhodes, Orme, & McSurdy, 2003). Foster parents are not always independently equipped with the educational background or means to forge relationships with school personnel and to advocate on behalf of youth with such complex needs (Foster Coalition, 2015; The National Center for Children in Poverty, 1990). Most foster parents have a high school diploma or less and earn substantially lower incomes than average families in the United States (Grimm & Darwall, 2005). Foster parent turnover rates are high and are often linked to lack of support with difficult behavior (Brown & Bednar, 2006). When asked, foster parents have indicated that they wish for improved training so they can better address the socioemotional and behavioral development of their foster children (Kriener & Kazmerzak, 1994) and so they are better prepared to manage the stress associated with foster parenting (Cooley & Petren, 2011).

The advantages of supportive parenting and educational involvement have been studied extensively (Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2005). Overall, parental engagement can lead to the development of important academic and socioemotional skills that result in higher educational attainment (Jeynes, 2005). Despite public awareness of the dismal trajectory for youth in foster care, a relatively small body of research (Buehler et al., 2006) has focused on the role of foster parental involvement as a means of improving student outcomes. Foster parents have often expressed feeling excluded from school affairs and feeling unclear about which learning-related responsibilities they should spearhead (Cuddeback & Orme, 2002; Smithgall et al., 2004). Meanwhile, research has consistently shown that parent training and engagement efforts can be
utilized to successfully increase parents’ skills and attitudes in ways that correlate with student achievement gains (Mendez et al., 2013) for comparable populations of at-risk youth.

In a comprehensive review of the literature on foster parent training programs, Dorsey et al. (2008) examined the evidence base for treatment foster care and other widely adopted training models. The two most commonly adopted models are PRIDE and MAPP, both of which involve in-person training and are intended to convey policy-based content as well as lessons that address how foster parents can meet the needs of youth in care (Festinger & Baker, 2013). However, according to a comprehensive assessment of the literature on foster parent training, neither of these programs are supported by sufficient evidence to suggest that they are at all beneficial (Dorsey et al., 2008). One study surveyed foster parents pre- and post-training and discovered no significant differences in skills or attitude (Lee & Holland, 1991). Conversely, a few studies have measured the effect of parent training programs (The Incredible Years and Cognitive Behavioral Parent Training) on foster parents and found positive results in improving parenting and reducing externalizing behavior in youth (Linares, Montalto, Li, & Oza, 2006; MacDonald & Turner, 2005). The goals of each training program differ, as do the corresponding measures of effectiveness. This dual disparity underscores the need to align training programs with competencies that are known to improve foster parent retention and the need to identify appropriate measures for assessing the outcomes of these programs.

Buehler et al. (2006) identified 12 domains of foster parent proficiency through an analysis of the foster parent competencies required by federal standards and considered best practices in foster care research. The authors argued that, based on the laws, policies, and best practices governing foster parenting, 12 domains of foster parent competency should be addressed during preservice foster parent education. Among the areas of competence are
responsibilities that relate directly to addressing the educational problems of foster youth: promoting educational attainment and success, promoting social and emotional development, and providing a nurturing environment (Buehler et al., 2006). The list of skills created by Buehler et al. (2006) provided an important basis for research on foster parents’ perceptions of competence (Cooley & Petren, 2011) and policy recommendations (Bass et al., 2004). However, extant studies have examined neither how foster parent training curricula addresses each domain nor the relationships between the development of competence in these areas and youth outcomes. Further research is necessary to explore this question and to examine the effectiveness of current training programs in teaching these competencies (Buehler et al., 2006; Dorsey et al., 2008).

**Literature Synthesis**

The literature synthesis in this proposal expands on literature reviews by Dorsey et al. (2008) and Festinger & Baker (2013) to explore the role of training programs in helping foster parents develop competencies correlated with improved educational outcomes for youth. This research is part of a larger study on the MAPP program, one of the most commonly implemented foster parent trainings nationwide (Dorsey et al., 2008). The guiding logic of the current study is that the educational outcomes noted in the relevant research provide important information about the effects of training on variables that are associated with educational attainment. In particular, this analysis examines how the educational outcomes evaluated through extant literature relate to the skills, knowledge, and parenting practices that foster parents should employ to facilitate the development of the social and emotional skills (e.g., self-regulation and social competence) that underlie academic achievement (Buehler et al., 2006; Jeynes, 2005). Additionally, because mobility is correlated with educational progress (Calvin, 2001), I analyzed the literature included
in this review to assess the relationship between training and placement stability. The effect of training on parenting skills and attitudes, placement stability, and child behavior have, to date, been interpreted from a child welfare perspective. However, the positive outcomes of training may also correspond to school-related benefits such as school stability, foster children’s socioemotional skill development, and foster parents’ preparedness to provide educational support.

Figure 1 contains a logic model that conveys the hypothesized theory of change that underlies this study. Logic modeling can be a valuable way to illustrate connections between variables in the systematic review process (Anderson et al., 2011). The logic model framework used here is derived from the work of Frechtling (2007) because it is particularly well-suited to assessing program outcomes. In this framework, the interrelated elements are categorized as inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes. For this study the inputs are the foster parent training pedagogy and content. The activities are the curriculum components of the training, such as behavioral principles for addressing difficult behavior, description of the foster parent role, information about child development and the influence of trauma, and opportunities to practice skills using role-play. Outputs refer to the desired competencies that foster parents should possess as a consequence of training, such as clarity about their role in the educational process, competence managing difficult behavior, and the ability to identify and maintain high, developmentally appropriate, school-related expectations for foster youth. Activity and output components were derived from literature on foster parenting and federal policy, as well as from research on parental competencies that enhance outcomes for at-risk youth. Finally, the outcomes refer to the benefits that are expected to result from the activities and outputs.
If the activities and outputs described are implemented, several short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes should occur. The short-term outcomes in this model are organized into three categories: foster parent outcomes (e.g., improved role satisfaction and authoritative parenting), foster youth and foster parent outcomes (better relationships with school personnel and increased attachment between parents and youth), and foster youth outcomes (e.g., improved socioemotional skills and a positive attitude towards school). If foster parents and foster youth develop the short-term competencies described, this would positively affect placement stability, school mobility, academic engagement, and referrals to special education for EBD. The resultant long-term outcomes would have benefits for youth in the form of improved academic outcomes and on foster parent retention.

In essence, the theory of change is this: If foster parent training leads to improved foster parent competence in areas that (a) inform parenting practices associated with educational engagement and (b) help parents to foster the socioemotional skills in youth that lead to high educational attainment and school engagement, then foster parent retention and youth educational outcomes will also improve.

Based on the articulated theory of change, this literature review examines the following research questions:

1. How do the foster parent and foster youth outcomes assessed in the research on foster parent training correspond to parenting competencies (skills and attitudes) and youth behaviors (e.g., self-regulation and social competence) that are known to underlie educational attainment?
2. What is the effect of foster parent training on foster parent retention and placement stability?
3. Among studies of the MAPP training program, how do the foster parent and foster youth outcomes correspond to parenting competencies (skills and attitudes) and youth behaviors (e.g., self-regulation and social competence) that are known to underlie educational attainment?

**Method**

**Data Collection**

I used a two-pronged approach to collect and review peer-reviewed research on foster parent training outcomes. Notably, two comprehensive literature reviews of outcome studies on foster parent training were conducted recently: one on the quality of evaluations on foster parent training (Festinger & Baker, 2013), the other on the evidence base for foster parent training (Dorsey et al., 2008). The current literature analysis is concerned with how foster parent training contributes to foster parent and youth outcomes on variables that underlie educational attainment. Additionally, I sought to explore training programs that are used in the general population of foster parents who care for typical foster youth, rather than characteristic-specific programs (e.g., trainings that are intended for caregivers of infants or for urban foster mothers). Therefore, some articles included in the aforementioned literature reviews were excluded from the current analysis, using the procedures described below. Relevant data from the literature reviews, as well as from articles obtained through an electronic search, were analyzed to address the research questions. Consistent with the Dorsey et al. (2008) literature review, this analysis includes studies that measure foster parent behavior/success or children’s behavior/success. I compiled studies that met the following criteria for inclusion:

1. Published in English in refereed journals
2. Assessed training programs for nonspecific populations of foster youth or foster parents

3. Evaluated training outcomes on foster parents or foster youth in one or more domains that are known in research to underlie academic achievement: (a) children’s behavior; (b) foster parents’ skills and/or knowledge about foster parenting; (c) foster parents’ empathy and/or attitudes towards youth; (d) placement stability or foster parent retention/satisfaction

First, I examined the studies evaluated by Dorsey et al. (2008) and Festinger & Baker (2013) and eliminated those that did not relate to the present research questions. Because this literature synthesis focuses on foster parent training, not interventions for foster youth who possess particular characteristics, studies that measured effects only for specialized populations were excluded. Among the 42 peer-reviewed studies presented in the Dorsey et al. (2008) and Festinger & Baker (2013) samples, 21 did not meet the inclusion criteria for the following reasons: 1 assessed the international applicability of a foster parent training model (Herczog, van Pagee, & Pasztor, 2001); 11 studied programs that targeted only youth with specific characteristics, such as infants, those with prenatal drug exposure, or victims of sexual abuse (Barth, Yeaton, & Winterfelt, 1994; Burry, 1999; Chamberlain, Moreland, & Reid, 1992; Dozier, Lindiem, et al., 2009; Dozier, Peloso, et al., 2006; Fisher, BurraSton, & Pears, 2005; Leathers, Spiefogel, McMeel, & Atkins, 2011; Minnis, Pelosi, Knapp, & Dunn, 2001; Pacifici, Delaney, White, Nelson, & Cummings, 2006; Pithouse, Hill-Tout, & Lowe, 2002; Treacy & Fisher, 1993); and 3 studies examined small samples of foster parents who met certain criteria (Fabry & Reid, 1978; Levant & Slattery, 1982; Levant, Slattery, & Slobodian, 1981). Additionally, 6 were excluded because they did not report outcomes for the variables of interest noted in the research

Next, I conducted a comprehensive search for peer-reviewed articles by entering the term “foster parent training” into multiple databases, such as Electronic Resources Information Center (ERIC), PsychInfo, and PsychArticles. The purpose of this search was to identify articles that were not included in the Dorsey et al. (2008) and Festinger & Baker (2013) analyses. The initial inquiry returned 258 studies, most of which were disqualified because they did not meet the inclusion criteria or because they were evaluated in one of the previous reviews. A total of 6 new studies were identified through the electronic search and ancestral searches of the yielded articles (Buzhardt & Heitzman-Powell, 2005; Price, Chamberlain, Landsverk, & Reid, 2009; Price, Chamberlain, Landsverk, & Reid, 2009; Price, Roesch, Walsh, & Landsverk, 2015; Van Camp, Montgomery, et al., 2008; Van Camp, Vollmer, et al., 2008). Ultimately, these two methods of data collection yielded a total of 27 studies that met the criteria for inclusion in this analysis and were used to explore the research questions.

To address the third research question regarding the MAPP training program I used a similar method. In addition to reviewing all of the studies obtained using the search methods explained above, I also specifically searched for studies of the MAPP program. Because the purpose of this analysis was to examine and understand the effect of the MAPP training program, I took special effort to ensure a comprehensive search for pertinent studies. First, I included studies from Dorsey et al. (2008) that assessed outcomes of the MAPP training (n = 2). Second, I conducted an electronic search of multiple databases—including Electronic Resources
Information Center (ERIC), PsychInfo, and PsychArticles—using the following search terms arranged in two fields: (a) foster parent or foster parent training, (b) MAPP or Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting. I examined only articles published in refereed journals on the MAPP foster parent training specifically. This search returned six studies; only two were outcome studies, both of which had been included in the Dorsey et al. (2008) analysis. I also performed an ancestral search for each article from the Dorsey et al. (2008) and the Festinger & Baker (2013) studies to locate additional studies on the MAPP training program, which recovered no new studies. After a thorough review of the articles obtained through these methods, two studies met the three criteria for inclusion in the present analysis. Only two studies that specifically address the MAPP training program were included in this study. However, MAPP was revised in the early 1990s (Dorsey et al., 2008), and only one of the articles (Puddy & Jackson, 2003) was conducted after these updates were incorporated into the training program. Of the six studies returned in the original search, one involved data that was collected outside of the United States (Van Pagee, Van Miltenburg, & Pasztor, 1990), two were comments on the 2003 research performed by Puddy and Jackson (Morton, 2004; Puddy & Jackson, 2005), and one assessed the effect of marital status on foster parenting (Combs-Orme & Orme, 2014).

Note about included articles

A total of 27 articles were included in this study. Eight of the studies involved preservice foster parent training, and the remaining 19 were of multi- or single-session in-service interventions that target the development of particular skills related to foster parenting. Importantly, 5 studies evaluated outcomes related to the KEEP program, which is meant for youth in therapeutic foster care. Because the criteria for receiving therapeutic versus regular
foster care is vague and because the sample sizes were very large, these studies were included in the analysis despite the exclusion of studies that target youth with specific characteristics. Furthermore, 6 of the studies pertained to two different datasets: 4 articles (Chamberlain, Price, Leve, et al., 2008; Chamberlain, Price, Reid, & Landsverk, 2008; Price et al., 2008; Price, et al., 2009) presented different analyses of one dataset, and 2 articles (Van Camp, Montgomery, et al., 2008; Van Camp, Vollmer, et al., 2008) are related to another dataset. See Table 3 for a comprehensive overview of all included articles.

Exclusions

Studies that did not address issues and outcomes that have been demonstrated in previous research to underlie positive educational outcomes were excluded. Moreover, research that focused on age-group-specific programs (e.g., attachment training for foster children in early childhood) were eliminated, as the goal of this study is to identify outcomes associated with programs that are intended for foster parents caring for youth of all ages.

Data analysis and coding protocol

I reviewed all studies in the sample and identified the following for each: (a) training model; (b) training type, e.g., pre- or in-service; (c) training delivery method, e.g., in-person, online, group/in-home; (d) research design; (e) sample characteristics; (f) outcome domains; (g) outcome measures; (h) results. This protocol is loosely based on the strategies employed in previous literature reviews on foster parent training (Dorsey et al., 2008; Festinger & Baker, 2013). The aim of the present literature synthesis is to explore the effect of training programs on preparing foster parents to meet the educational needs of youth in care. Figure 1 contains the
theoretical framework informing the analytic approach. Because the studies included in the analysis measured various outcomes, I sought to organize the findings according to their applicability to areas that have been shown to affect the educational experiences of foster youth. Therefore, the protocol involved categorizing parent- and child-level outcomes into domains that have been demonstrated by previous research to correlate with academic achievement and using codes to quantify the findings.

Each outcome variable from the 27 included studies was coded thematically based on the presence of evidence corresponding to each of the five types of outcomes identified in previous literature: foster parent skills and knowledge; foster parent attitudes; child behavior; placement stability; and foster parent retention/satisfaction. Table 2 contains detailed explanations of each domain. For example, a study that found changes in foster parent knowledge of behavioral principles and in reports of child behavior following training was coded as foster parent skills and knowledge and child behavior. The resultant data (displayed in Table 3) were then analyzed to identify themes in program type and outcomes. This procedure resulted in a synthesis of how all 27 articles in the sample correspond to the five education-related outcomes of interest.

The resultant information was used to address the following central research questions.

**Research Question 1**

_How do the foster parent and foster youth outcomes assessed in the research on foster parent training correspond to parenting competencies (skills and attitudes) and youth behaviors (e.g., self-regulation and social competence) that are known to underlie educational attainment?_
To determine the effect of training on outcomes related to competencies that are known to underlie achievement, I categorized the outcomes evaluated in each study into the following domains: parenting skills and knowledge (n = 16), foster parent attitudes (n = 8), and child behavior (n = 12). The purpose of highlighting these outcomes is to note what kinds of practical skills and information that are applicable to enhancing educational outcomes foster parents gain as a result of trainings.

The *parenting skills and knowledge* category includes studies that measure the presence of specified parenting practices and knowledge of theories, such as behavior management or child development, that were addressed in the training. The *foster parent attitudes* category includes articles that assessed outcomes related to the parent-child relationship and/or nurturing behaviors, such as foster parents’ acceptance of and sensitivity towards foster youth. Foster parents’ attitudes and empathy towards children are characteristics that relate directly to authoritative parenting strategies and nurturing, which are correlated with educational outcomes (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). Finally, the *child behavior* domain includes studies that evaluated child-level variables, such as the socioemotional skill of self-regulation, in any way. Self-regulation and social competence have been identified as potential protective factors for at-risk youth (Farrington et al., 2012; Shonk & Cichetti, 2001). Studies that addressed multiple outcomes were coded into more than one category when appropriate. The coding protocol was intended to organize outcomes to explore how they correspond to the parent and child characteristics that have been demonstrated in previous research to correlate with educational success.
**Research Question 2**

*What is the effect of foster parent training on foster parent retention and placement stability?*

Studies that addressed foster parent retention or satisfaction and placement stability were coded into two categories: foster parent retention/satisfaction (n = 5) and placement stability (n = 5). The first of these categories includes studies that measured retention in a given training program or satisfaction with the fostering role in general. The placement stability category includes studies that measured the effect of foster parent training on placement stability. As with Research Question 1, studies that reported outcomes on more than one variable were coded into all relevant domains. After I categorized the literature addressing both domains, I examined the results from all relevant studies to determine the effect of foster parent training on foster parent retention and satisfaction, as well as on placement stability. The findings are organized in Table 3 and a summary of key findings is presented in the Results section below.

**Research Question 3**

*Among studies of the MAPP training program, how do the foster parent and foster youth outcomes correspond to parenting competencies (skills and attitudes) and youth behaviors (e.g., self-regulation and social competence) that are known to underlie educational attainment?*

As noted above, only two studies that evaluated the MAPP training program could be located for this analysis. The findings of these studies were coded using the protocol identified for Research Questions 1 and 2 and are presented in Table 3.
Additionally, I surveyed how the reported outcomes corresponded with the curriculum content. The MAPP curriculum targets 12 criteria, 5 of which relate to a family’s decision to foster and 7 of which address parental competencies that are correlated with educational attainment. These 7 areas are as follows: know the children, build strengths/meet needs, be loss and attachment experts, manage behaviors, build connections, build self-esteem, assure health and safety (Mayers-Pasztor, 1987). I specifically examined the reported changes in the foster parent skills and knowledge category to see if they corresponded with the 7 MAPP curriculum content areas that relate to educational attainment. A summary of particular outcomes associated with MAPP is provided in the results section.

Results
The sample of 27 articles included in the present literature synthesis possess some characteristics of note. First, the training programs differed significantly in terms of content, instructional method, and length. There was also variability in the curriculum topics contained in the preservice training programs and in-service parenting interventions. For example, two of the training programs were offered online, whereas the rest were delivered in person, and six complemented group trainings with in-home components (see Table 3). Additionally, the federal regulations for foster parent preservice training were updated and reissued through the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 (H.F. 3443). However, 11 of the studies included in this analysis were conducted prior to this date. This is of particular importance for the 7 articles on preservice training included in this review, because those published before 1999 (Boyd & Remy,
1978; Lee & Holland, 1991; Simon & Simon, 1982) offer valuable insights but are not verifiably
aligned with current standards.

Previous reviews of the research on foster parent training noted methodological
limitations (Dorsey et al., 2008; Festinger & Baker, 2013; Rork & McNeil, 2011) that affected
the validity and generalizability of the results. Specifically, these reviews noted the lack of
consistency in the research approach, sample characteristics, and quality measures used to
evaluate foster parent and/or child variables. Although I certainly note the effect of these
limitations on the quality of extant research, this literature synthesis will not report on quality.
Instead, this analysis examines the outcomes that result from the inclusion of particular elements
related to preparing foster parents to meet the developmental and educational needs of youth in
care. Thus, regardless of the design flaws in the body of research on foster parent training, the
information contained therein provides ample data for addressing the research questions posed in
this analysis. The results for each of the three central research questions are presented below.

Research Question 1

*How do the foster parent and foster youth outcomes assessed in the research on foster parent
training correspond to parenting competencies (skills and attitudes) and youth behaviors (e.g.,
self-regulation and social competence) that are known to underlie educational attainment?*

To answer this question, I organized the outcomes from the studies into three domains of
competencies that foster parents can develop to become better equipped to foster youths’
socioemotional development and to manage their educational and developmental needs. These
domains are as follows: foster parent skills and knowledge, foster parent attitudes, and child
behavior. A total of 24 articles reported on outcomes related to foster parent competence—in
Foster Parent Skills and Knowledge.

Five of the 17 studies in this category examined the effects of preservice training programs on preservice foster parents’ knowledge and parenting skills, whereas the rest evaluated parent education interventions for current foster parents. Essentially, the benefits of three different preservice trainings on foster parent skills and knowledge were assessed: PRIDE, KEEP, and MAPP. Among the three studies on PRIDE, two measured changes in PRIDE content knowledge (Christenson & McMurtry, 2007, 2009), whereas the third focused on how foster parents’ drew on PRIDE knowledge when evaluating youth in their care (Nash & Flynn, 2009). Christiansen and McMurtry (2007, 2009) found that foster parents demonstrated better knowledge of PRIDE concepts following the training but that foster parents also reported low levels of perceived preparedness to care for youth with special needs. Nash and Flynn (2009) assessed foster parent knowledge and changes in child behavior but found no significant improvements in either realm. Interestingly, they did determine that foster parents were more likely to note poorer child functioning following the training. Finally, both evaluations of MAPP outcomes (Lee & Holland, 1991; Puddy & Jackson, 2003) explored how foster parents’ knowledge of the MAPP curriculum content changed as a result of the training, but neither indicated significant improvements in knowledge of MAPP concepts or parenting skills.
Overall, the KEEP program most effectively enhanced foster parent skills and knowledge in areas that were also correlated with positive youth outcomes (Chamberlain, Price, Leve, et al., 2008; Price et al., 2009).

Twelve studies of in-service foster parent training programs included evaluations of outcomes related to foster parent skills and knowledge, with somewhat mixed results. The theoretical bases of these trainings varied somewhat, but the trainings were primarily intended to promote foster parents’ skills for addressing challenging behavior. The two studies of the KEEP program (Chamberlain, Price, Leve, et al., 2008; Price et al., 2009) measured the transfer of parenting skills to the home environment. These studies also evaluated the effect of behavioral parenting practices on reports of children’s behavior at home. The findings indicated that when foster parents were educated on principles of behavior management, were offered supplemental in-home support, and were provided the opportunity to practice corresponding skills, outcomes included increased foster parent knowledge and improved ratings of children’s behavior. Van Camp et al. (Van Camp, Montgomery, et al., 2008; Van Camp, Vollmer, et al., 2008) explored the effect of behavioral trainings and a booster session on foster parents’ skills in the area of behavior management. Similarly, Timmer, Urquiza, and Zebell (2006) evaluated the effects of parent-child interaction therapy (PCIT), which highlights strategies for improving children’s behavior, on foster parents’ behavior management skills. Two of the in-service trainings were delivered online (Buzhardt & Heitzman-Powell, 2005; Pacifici, Delaney, White, Cummings, & Nelson, 2005); they presented content about responding to disruptive behavior and resulted in statistically significant improvement in foster parents’ knowledge about managing children’s externalizing behavior. Linares et al. (2006) examined outcomes of an Incredible Years (Webster-Stratton, 2001) intervention, which teaches positive disciplinary strategies, and
identified improvements in positive parenting practices. Another two studies (Hampson, Schulte, & Ricks, 1983; Hampson & Tavormina, 1980) compared the effectiveness of behavioral versus reflective counseling training programs. Foster parents in the behavioral training program experienced greater gains in skills, whereas those in the counseling-oriented training program primarily demonstrated improvements in attitude. MacDonald and Turner (2005) assessed the effects of a cognitive behavioral parent training and determined that, although foster parents acquired some new knowledge about behavioral principles, there were no significant differences in their actual parenting skills or behavior.

In sum, these studies found that trainings that taught skills for responding to difficult behaviors generally improved foster parents’ behavior management tactics. However, the measures used to assess these skills varied and, as is evidenced by the aforementioned study (MacDonald & Turner, 2005), gains in foster parents’ knowledge did not always indicate improvements in skills. Additionally, eight of these studies explored correlations between gains in behavior management skills and child behavior (Chamberlain, Price, Leve, et al., 2008; Hampson & Tavormina, 1980; Hampson et al., 1983; Linares et al., 2006; Timmer et al., 2006), placement stability (MacDonald & Turner, 2005; Pacifici et al., 2005), or both (Price et al., 2009). With one exception (MacDonald & Turner, 2005), placement stability and/or favorable reports of child behavior were positively correlated with foster parents’ skills and knowledge.

Foster Parent Attitude.

All eight of the research articles that addressed how foster parents’ attitudes and relationships with foster youth were affected by training programs also evaluated in-service models. Two studies found that trained foster parents reported significantly lower levels of stress
than foster parents in control groups reported. Price and colleagues (2015) found reductions in stress level associated with the behavior-based KEEP training, whereas Timmer et al. (2006) identified lower stress levels among foster parents who received an in-service PCIT training. The remaining studies in this category examined foster parents’ attitudes (Hampson & Tavormina, 1980; Hampson et al., 1983; Runyan & Fullerton, 1981) and acceptance of foster children (Guerney, 1977; Guerney & Gavigan, 1981; Guerney & Wolfgang, 1981). Foster parents’ attitudes, which were measured using self-report instruments (e.g., the Herefore Parent Attitude Survey), generally improved following the trainings. In particular, improved attitudes were correlated with exposure to reflective counseling training sessions (Hampson & Tavormina, 1980; Hampson et al., 1983) or found when foster parents were provided information about the socioemotional development of youth in foster care (Runyan & Fullerton, 1981). In the latter of these two cases, the benefits to foster parent attitudes were less pronounced than when parents were trained to use specific counseling-based strategies. Guerney and colleagues (Guerney, 1977; Guerney & Gavigan, 1981; Guerney & Wolfgang, 1980) studied the effects of a ten-session foster parent training program, which emphasized empathy and behavior management equally. The researchers found that foster parents who participated in the program scored significantly higher on measures of acceptance and parenting practices. However, none of the three studies examined whether such improvements corresponded with any other variables, so the actual benefit in terms of placement stability or reductions in children’s challenging behavior is undetermined.

The five other studies on foster parent attitudes (Hampson & Tavormina, 1980; Hampson et al., 1983; Price et al., 2015; Runyan & Fullerton, 1981; Timmer et al., 2006) included analyses on the resultant effects of training programs on child behavior. Specifically, Hampson &
Tavormina (1980) and Hampson et al. (1983) found that foster parents who were trained with the reflective counseling strategy reported higher ratings of challenging youth behavior than did those who were trained with a behavioral approach. On the contrary, PCIT training (Timmer et al., 2006), which is a model based on relationship building, and the behavior-focused KEEP training program (Price et al., 2015) both resulted in positive child behavior outcomes. These findings are noteworthy, as they support the notion that attitudes are malleable and that they have the potential to translate into more positive developmental outcomes for youth, especially in the area of self-regulation. Overall, the results of these studies indicate that foster parents’ attitudes about children and sensitivity to youths’ needs can be enhanced when training content teaches foster parents about developing empathy, building relationships, and understanding the complex experiences of foster children.

Child Behavior

Child behavior was generally measured using formal rating scales or reports of children’s behavior (e.g., Child Behavior Checklist, Parent Daily Report). Although challenging behavior is believed to be associated with placement disruption and is therefore an important variable to measure, other skills, such as social competence (see Shonk & Cicchetti, 2001), have been found to serve as protective factors for at-risk and foster youth. However, only one study (Nash & Flynn, 2009), which reported children’s ratings of the quality of their relationships with foster parents, included an assessment of a child-level variable other than self-regulation. Additionally, most of the studies in this category also included concurrent measures of foster parents’ skills or attitudes based on the content of the training program in question. For example, all four studies of KEEP that explored the effects of the training on child behavior explored other variables as
well: foster parent skills and knowledge of behavior management techniques (Chamberlain, Price, Leve, et al., 2008), foster parent retention and satisfaction (Chamberlain, Price, Reid, et al., 2008), foster parent attitudes (Price et al., 2015), and foster parent skills and knowledge along with placement stability (Price et al., 2009). An important note about the KEEP program is that the training includes sessions on behavior management and skill transfer, so foster parents can practice using particular parenting techniques. Overall, this training program, which is geared towards parents with children who are considered to be highly at risk, appears to be the most highly correlated with improvements in behavioral problems (Chamberlain, Price, Leve, et al., 2008; Chamberlain, Price, Reid, et al., 2008).

Other research also investigated multiple training outcomes in addition to child behavior, such as foster parent attitude (Runyan & Fullerton, 1981) and foster parent skills and knowledge (Hampson & Tavormina, 1980; Hampson, et al., 1983; Linares et al., 2006; Timmer et al., 2006). In addition to child behavior, researchers MacDonald and Turner (2005) studied outcomes related to placement stability, foster parent skills and knowledge, and foster parent retention and satisfaction, but they found limited benefit to the cognitive behavioral training program they implemented. Similarly, Nash and Flynn (2009) researched the effect of preservice training programs on child behavior and foster parent skills and knowledge but found no significant relationships. However, Runyan and Fullerton (1981) found that a state training program that educated foster parents about the unique needs of youth in care was correlated with modest improvements in child behavior and in foster parents’ attitudes, especially in regards to their understandings about the needs of youth in their care.

The types of implemented training programs range in theoretical orientation from behavior-based to counseling- and/or relationship-focused. Only one of these trainings (Timmer
et al., 2006), which involved individualized PCIT, was provided in a one-to-one setting. The rest were delivered weekly to small groups of foster parents. In general, all studies demonstrated that training programs are positively correlated with behavioral improvements. Two studies (Hampson & Tavormina, 1980; Hampson, et al., 1983) examined differences in outcomes based on the training approach (behavioral or reflective counseling) and found that foster parents in both groups made gains in skills/attitudes and that both training types resulted in improvements in children’s behavior. However, one study of a cognitive behavioral training approach (MacDonald & Turner, 2005) found no change in foster parents’ reports of child behavior following the training. Research on the PRIDE training (Nash & Flynn, 2009) exposed a negative relationship between foster parents’ enhanced knowledge of child development and their ratings of child functioning, which the authors attributed to an increase in foster parents’ expectations of youth. With the exception of the two aforementioned studies (MacDonald & Turner, 2005; Nash & Flynn, 2009), research has shown that when foster parents were provided behavior management skills in training, they tended to report lower incidence of challenging behavior and, in some cases, reduced parental stress (e.g., Chamberlain, Price, Leve, et al., 2008, Price et al., 2015) and more positive parenting practices and attitudes (Linares et al., 2006; Runyan & Fullerton, 1981). Interestingly, although four studies of the KEEP preservice training (Chamberlain, Price, Leve, et al., 2008: Chamberlain, Price, Reid, et al., 2008; Price et al., 2009, 2015) examined the effect of the training on child behavior, only two studies of preservice training programs provided to parents performing nontherapeutic foster care assessed relationships between the training programs and child behavior (Nash & Flynn, 2009; Runyan & Fullerton, 1981). This finding is consistent with previous literature reviews that indicated the
lack of evidence base for some of the most commonly adopted preservice foster parent training programs (e.g., Dorsey et al., 2008).

**Research Question 2**

*What is the effect of foster parent training on foster parent retention and placement stability?*

Studies that addressed foster parent retention, satisfaction, and placement were coded into two categories: foster parent retention/satisfaction (n = 5) and placement stability (n = 5). Two of these studies (Chamberlain, Price, Reid, et al., 2008; Pacifici et al., 2005) measured foster parents’ retention in a particular training program or foster parents’ satisfaction with a specific training experience rather than long-term retention and satisfaction with foster parenting. Thus, although they were coded into this category, the reported outcomes are program-specific and do not yield information about the effect of foster parent training on overall satisfaction or retention as a foster parent over time. Of the remaining eight studies, five assessed foster parent retention following preservice programs, including one behavioral training (Boyd & Remy, 1978), the NOVA training (Fees et al., 1998; Simon & Simon, 1982), and KEEP (Price et al., 2008, 2015). Studies by Boyd and Remy (1978) and MacDonald and Turner (2005) evaluated foster parent retention or satisfaction as well as training effects on placement stability. Boyd and Remy (1978) determined that a behavioral training was associated with better outcomes on both accounts, whereas MacDonald and Turner (2005) found that a cognitive behavioral program did not yield any significant changes in placement stability or foster parent satisfaction. One study of the NOVA program (Fees et al., 1998) demonstrated that foster parents who were satisfied with the training were more likely to report satisfaction with their role one year later. Additionally, Simon and Simon (1982) found that NOVA-trained foster parents had far fewer placement
disruptions than a control group. Moreover, both studies of the KEEP program (Price et al., 2008, 2015) demonstrated that the program reduced negative placement changes (e.g., psychiatric hospitalization, unplanned disruptions) and increased positive placement (e.g., adoptions, reunification with biological family). Notably, the studies on the effects of the KEEP program (Chamberlain, Price, Reid, et al., 2008; Price et al., 2008, 2015) analyzed the same dataset, which could have had an impact on the generalizability of the results.

In sum, these findings suggest that foster parent training can have a positive effect on placement stability and foster parent satisfaction. Nearly all of the studies showed that trainings were effective in increasing placement stability and foster parent retention. However, the program content is key, as studies of behavior-oriented programs (Boyd & Remy, 1978; Chamberlain, Price, Reid, et al., 2008; Price et al., 2008, 2015) showed more reductions in placement disruptions. Perhaps this is an indication that when foster parents are equipped with specific strategies for managing behavior, they can more effectively meet the needs of youth in their care. Although placement stability and retention could be indicative of improvement in foster parents’ skills and/or children’s behavior, additional research is needed to explore the specific effects of training on parenting. Interestingly, only 4 of the 27 studies in this literature review that measured foster parent retention and satisfaction or placement disruption also explored outcomes in other domains (Chamberlain, Price, Reid, et al., 2008; MacDonald & Turner, 2005; Pacifici et al., 2005; Price et al., 2009). One such study (MacDonald & Turner, 2005) found no significant effect of the training, whereas the others identified that the positive outcomes extended into other domains, such as foster parent skills and knowledge (Pacifici et al., 2005), child behavior (Chamberlain, Price, Reid, et al., 2008), or both (Price et al., 2009).
Again, this suggests that when training prepares foster parents to respond effectively to behavior and improve youth outcomes, the result is improved placement stability.

**Research Question 3**

*Among studies of the MAPP training program, how do the foster parent and foster youth outcomes correspond to parenting competencies (skills and attitudes) and youth behaviors (e.g., self-regulation and social competence) that are known to underlie educational attainment?*

The two studies in the sample that focused on the MAPP training program measured changes in foster parent skills and knowledge (Lee & Holland, 1991; Puddy & Jackson, 2003) within the 12 MAPP competencies. As previously mentioned, the 7 areas that correspond to educational attainment are (a) know the children; (b) build strengths/meet needs; (c) be loss and attachment experts; (d) manage behaviors; (e) build connections; (f) build self-esteem; and (g) assure health and safety (Mayers-Pasztor, 1987). The first of these studies (Lee & Holland, 1991) evaluated foster parents’ understandings of child development and parent-child roles, as well as beliefs about physical punishment, and foster parents’ empathy towards children before and after the training. Using the Adolescent/Adult Parenting Inventory (AAPI; Bavolek & Keene, 1984; Cocoran & Fischer, 1987), the researchers found no significant differences between those trained in MAPP and a control group. These findings may indicate a measurement error, such that the AAPI may not adequately assess the gains made by foster parents as a result of MAPP, or that the measured skills were already in an acceptable range at the pre-test stage. Nevertheless, this study by Lee and Holland (1991) does not support the notion that MAPP enhances the skills foster parents need (e.g., empathy, child development knowledge, parenting skills) in order to provide a home that fosters development in areas known
to underlie academic achievement. Similarly, research by Puddy and Jackson (2003) evaluated changes in MAPP curriculum knowledge, parenting knowledge, and parenting behavior associated with the training. The researchers found significant differences in trained foster parents’ knowledge in 4 MAPP content areas, none of which were among the 7 domains related to educational attainment, and modest improvements in knowledge related to rewards and punishments. Although knowledge of rewards and punishments is associated with behavior management approaches, the improvement in foster parents’ knowledge of these types of consequences does not indicate that other necessary and related skills were also developed as a result of the training. In summary, neither of these studies demonstrated that training led to improvements that are directly related to authoritative parenting skills or to the foster parents’ ability to foster socioemotional skill development in youth in their care. This suggests that the MAPP training does not comprehensively provide foster parents with the skills necessary for supporting foster youth in schools.

Conclusion

In the present literature analysis, I organized findings from studies on foster parent training into outcome domains that correspond to obstacles that tend to interfere with educational stability and success: (a) foster parent knowledge and skills, (b) foster parent attitudes, (c) child behavior, (d) placement stability, and (e) foster parent retention and satisfaction. A range of foster parent trainings were implemented across studies in the sample. The training content, delivery methods, and measured outcomes varied. Many of the studies assessed curriculum content knowledge rather than skill transfer, so it is difficult to determine the extent to which increased knowledge actually corresponded to favorable parenting outcomes. A majority of the
27 studies (n = 17) in the analysis evaluated the relationship between training and foster parents’ skills and/or content knowledge. At first glance, the emphasis on targeting foster parents’ skill development appears to suggest that this body of research evaluated key characteristics associated with quality and stability in foster care. Yet, the parenting skills and presented content varied across studies, as did the variables measured by the researchers. Some researchers evaluated knowledge of course concepts (Christianson & McMurtry, 2007, 2009), whereas others assessed the transfer of content knowledge into corresponding parenting practices (e.g., Chamberlain, Price, Leve, et al., 2008; Macdonald & Turner, 2005). Therefore, the skills and knowledge foster parents acquired through training and the measures used to assess mastery were inconsistent across the researched trainings, making it difficult to generalize findings from the research.

**Discussion**

Foster youth are at distinct risk of academic failure. As Zetlin et al. (2006) states, “Because children in foster care lack parents to advocate on their behalf and because of the poor achievement outcomes of this population, it is critical that public schools and child welfare agencies work together to develop formal procedures for supporting the educational functioning of foster youth” (p. 271). Current approaches to addressing their educational needs are inadequate, with even the best efforts often falling short due to placement disruptions and school mobility (Bass et al., 2004; Shea, Zetlin, & Weinberg, 2010). Based on the notion that educational attainment could be a valuable protective factor for youth in foster care, this literature review examined the extent to which outcome research on foster parent training has demonstrated effects related to areas that are known to underlie educational attainment. Studies
to date have not acknowledged the role of the foster parent as a member of the child welfare team, nor have researchers explored the extent to which foster parent training prepares foster parents to meet the educational needs of youth. In addition, previous literature reviews (Dorsey et al., 2008; Festinger & Baker 2012) have underscored the limitations of extant research on proving that current models of foster parent training have yielded meaningful benefits. However, training has the potential to provide valuable information and practical skills that increase authoritative parenting, reduce behavioral challenges, and encourage social and emotional skill development in foster youth, all of which can improve educational outcomes (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998).

Consistent with previous analyses of research on foster parent training (Dorsey et al., 2008; Festinger & Baker, 2012), this literature review indicates that there is limited evidence to support preservice training programs. Training content is not always directly related to daily child-rearing practices, so although some studies found that foster parents’ knowledge had increased following the session (e.g., Christianson & McMurtry, 2007, 2009), there is no indication that this particular improvement contributed to decreased placement disruption, enhanced positive parenting practices, or lower rates of child misbehavior. For instance, most preservice training provides future foster parents with information about how the child welfare system works and about role expectations, with limited focus on skills foster parents can use to address the unique needs of the children in their care. Studies that included evaluations of multiple outcomes to identify whether, for example, greater foster parent knowledge was related to better child behavior offer valuable insight about how particular content correlates with stability for youth and families (e.g., Chamberlain, Price, Leve, et al., 2008; Hampson & Tavormina, 1980). Several of the in-service foster parent trainings were found effective in
targeting key variables, such as child behavior, parenting practices, and placement stability. In-service interventions tend to be delivered with the assumption that foster parents are aware of their roles and, thus, present specific skills that can be used to manage the types of behaviors that foster youth often demonstrate.

In particular, self-regulation skills in youth have been correlated with long-term outcomes, such as health, criminal justice involvement, and substance abuse (Heckman, 2006; Moffitt et al., 2011; Heckman, Pinto, & Savelyv, 2013). Educational attainment has positive associations with the same long-term outcomes, as well as others such as income, housing security, and job security (Barnard, 2004). A growing body of research suggests that educational attainment is a strong predictor of success in the workplace, as it incorporates both cognitive (e.g., IQ) and socioemotional traits (Jones, Greenberg, & Crowley, 2015; Levin, 2012). Socioemotional factors, such as motivation, self-regulation, and social competence, have been found to be strongly predictive of long-term quality of life and are highly correlated with school success (Farrington et al., 2012; Kautz, Heckman, Diris, Ter Weel, & Borghans, 2014). As such, efforts to increase educational attainment for youth in foster care must also include interventions targeting the development of socioemotional skills.

Specifically, the results of the current study highlight the benefits of behavior-based foster parent trainings on parenting skills, child behavior, and placement stability (Chamberlain, Price, Leve, et al., 2008; Chamberlain, Price, Reid, et al., 2008; Guerney & Gavigan, 1981; Price et al., 2009). Parents demonstrated improvements in managing children’s behavior when they were provided with training that emphasized specific skills and offered opportunities for practice. For example, foster parents’ attitudes about children in their care and parent-child relationships were enhanced when trainings addressed specific skills regarding empathy,
relationship-building, and the emotional needs of youth in care (Price et al., 2015; Timmer et al., 2006). When measured, foster parents’ skills gains were correlated with better ratings of child behavior and with placement stability (Chamberlain, Price, Leve, et al., 2008; Price et al., 2009). Conversely, when foster parents were merely given general information about fostering and child welfare, limited benefits were observed (Lee & Holland, 1991; Nash & Flynn, 2009). Placement stability and foster parent retention were best achieved through behavioral training programs, especially when participants were satisfied with the training and when they were learning behavioral skills they believed would be useful in practice (Fees et al., 1998; Price et al., 2008; 2009). The behavior-based KEEP program was correlated with the greatest number of positive outcomes in all five of the assessed areas (Chamberlain, Price, Leve, et al., 2008; Chamberlain, Price, Reid, et al., 2008; Price et al., 2008, 2009, 2015) that correspond with educational attainment. This has important implications for the re-envisioning of preservice training to incorporate curriculum content and instructional methods that facilitate the development of the competencies foster parents need in order to address the unique educational needs of foster youth.

The present literature synthesis examines outcomes from extant research on foster parent training to identify whether participants learn the competencies relevant to parent involvement in the educational experiences of youth in care. Several educational research studies have identified school mobility, behavior problems, and lack of family stability as the most significant obstacles to educational success (Bass et al., 2004; Trout et al., 2008; Zetlin et al., 2006). Child welfare literature on foster parenting has noted that the primary reasons for placement disruptions are children’s behavior problems, parents’ feelings of incompetence, and lack of adequate preparation and support for parents (Brown & Bednar, 2006; Cooley & Petren, 2011; Kriener &
Kazmerzak, 1994). The lack of evidence base for foster parent training has been well-documented (Dorsey et al., 2008; Festinger & Baker, 2013; Grimm, 2003), yet no studies have explored how foster parents could be better prepared to meet the educational needs of foster youth. Despite the wealth of research highlighting the importance of parental engagement in school, I was unable to locate any studies that specifically examine the role of the foster parent in enhancing educational outcomes for youth in care.

In the current literature review, I explored how foster parent training educates parents to develop knowledge and exhibit skills that have been correlated with improved outcomes for at-risk youth. I derived the foster parenting skills and attitudes of interest in the present analysis from previous research on parental engagement (Jeynes, 2005; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998), parent education on behavioral and mental health (Barlow & Stewart-Brown, 2000), and federal child welfare policies that govern foster parent training (Buehler et al., 2006). The foundational belief associated with this research is that if foster parents have opportunities to develop these skills and attitudes, children will experience fewer placement disruptions and will be provided with a more suitable level of parenting that will have a positive effect on their school experiences. The results of the study suggest that some training programs do address these skills and attitudes, and when foster parents learn to manage behavior and build relationships with youth, children in their care often experience greater placement stability and fewer behavioral issues. Another area for future research is how the content in the MAPP training program, which is widely adopted nationwide (Dorsey et al., 2008), corresponds to the parental skills and attitudes of interest. The two studies of the MAPP training located for this analysis do not provide evidence that these programs are effective in teaching foster parents the skills they need to improve educational outcomes for youth.
Future directions

The results of this study show some promising directions for future research, training, and practice. Findings indicate that behavior-based programs, in which foster parents have opportunities to practice skills, can lead to positive outcomes in areas that are known to underlie academic achievement. The most promising program identified through this research, KEEP, is geared towards foster parents providing treatment foster care. Future studies should examine whether this model may offer similar benefits for the foster parent population at large.

Additional research is also needed to examine how particular training types (i.e., curriculum content and theoretical underpinnings) and teaching methods (e.g., online, in-home, role-play, multimodal) correspond with training outcomes. Although efforts have been made to define what foster parents should know about the foster parent role, researchers have yet to prove that (a) trainings lead to foster parents’ mastery of content and (b) the skills and/or attitudes that result from training are correlated with variables of importance, such as child behavior, placement stability, and foster parent retention. Because measures of children’s behavior were based largely on reporting from foster parents immediately following the training, further study is needed to evaluate the long-term effect of foster parent training on children’s behavior, as well as the perceived effect of foster parent training from perspectives other than foster parents’ (e.g., teachers’).

Future research should explore not only variations in curriculum content but also service delivery components. One of the primary similarities between KEEP and the Casey Family model is that both offer ongoing in-home support in the form of hotline assistance and regular in-home contact with foster families, as well as a range of supports for the youth themselves. The
marked success of such approaches at retaining foster parents, maintaining placement stability, and improving educational outcomes for the most marginalized foster youth suggests that the service delivery model is of particular importance and is worthy of future study.

Foster parent recruitment and retention are incredibly challenging, and outcomes for foster youth are often dismal. Clearly, there is more to be understood about where the system is breaking down and about the role of foster parent training. All of the studies of preservice trainings included in this analysis looked at the effects of researcher-developed programs on foster parents’ knowledge of content. Similarly, many of the studies of in-service trainings did not effectively demonstrate that training gains led to foster parent outcomes that translated to skills youth need to be successful. Some studies have explored foster parents’ perspectives on successful fostering, but this information has yet to be integrated into trainings. Future research should examine competencies that effective foster parents possess and how these skills and attitudes could be developed through training.

Although the MAPP program has been deemed largely ineffective, it remains unclear whether this is due to a curriculum issue or a problem related to outcome measurement. In other words, it is possible that the curriculum domains are aligned with the competencies foster parents need but that the measures used to assess the effectiveness of the training are unreliable or invalid. Both long-term analysis of MAPP and validation of assessment instruments are necessary for ensuring that the appropriate competencies are being adequately measured.

**Limitations**

The present analysis has a few notable limitations. First, included studies were drawn from previous literature reviews on the topic and from an electronic search, but it is possible that
the search terms used to locate studies did not yield all articles on the topic. Based on the criteria for inclusion in the present review, I excluded several studies of foster parent training. Furthermore, I included studies of the KEEP training program, which is a therapeutic foster parent training program, but excluded other research on trainings for specific populations. Although a description of inclusion and exclusion is provided, this analysis was conducted by a single researcher, so there were no external measures used to demonstrate reliability of the inclusion and exclusion process.

Second, I identified parenting competencies that are demonstrated in educational research to contribute to more positive educational outcomes for youth and coded them into categories by themes that related to the identified skills. The constructs upon which this analysis was founded were drawn from literature on protective factors for at-risk youth. While it is likely that these variables, such as authoritative parenting and socioemotional skill development, are relevant factors for foster youth, there may be others that influence the academic outcomes of foster youth.
### Table 1.1 Overview of foster parent training curricula

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<tr>
<th>MAPP</th>
<th>PRIDE</th>
<th>KEEP</th>
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<tr>
<td>12 skills</td>
<td>5 competencies 1. Protect and nurture children.</td>
<td>6 goals for foster parents 1. Increase use of positive reinforcement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Assess individual and family strengths and needs; build on strengths and meet needs. 2. Communicate effectively with child welfare workers. 3. Identify strengths and needs of youth in care; recognize the impact of abuse and neglect. 4. Build strengths; meet needs. 5. Work in partnership with youth, birth families, and child welfare to help youth achieve permanency. 6. Help children and youth develop skills to manage loss and attachment and minimize the risk of future trauma. 7. Teach healthy behaviors and safe choices by helping youth identify their emotions and through parenting practices. 8. Help youth develop/maintain relationships that keep them connected to their pasts. 9. Help youth develop a positive self-concept and positive family, cultural, and racial identity. 10. Assure health and safety. 11. Assess impact: Assess the ways fostering and/or adopting will affect your family. 12. Make an informed decision.</td>
<td>2. Meet children’s developmental needs and address developmental delays. 3. Support relationships between children and their families. 4. Connect children to safe, nurturing relationships to last a lifetime. 5. Work as a member of a professional team.</td>
<td>2. Consistently use non-harsh discipline. 3. Understand the importance of monitoring youth whereabouts and peer associations. 4. Implement strategies to avoid power struggles. 5. Manage peer relationships. 6. Improve success at school.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1.2 Foster parent training outcome domains

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Rationale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Foster parent skills    | 1. Foster parents are required by law to receive training in a range of skills that are vital for the role (Buehler, 2006).  
2. Lack of perceived competence in managing child behavior (Shireman, 2009), limited parenting skills (Orme & Buehler, 2001; Orme et al., 2004), and lack of role clarity are known to lead to placement breakdown (Brown & Bednar, 2006) and lack of parental engagement in education (Cuddeback & Orme, 2002; Smithgall et al., 2004).  
3. Authoritative parenting skills (Baumrind, 1978) and application of developmentally appropriate practices are correlated with better educational attainment and improved noncognitive skills (Jeynes, 2003; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Zigler et al., 1992). |
| and knowledge           |                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Foster parent attitudes | 1. Parental expectations about children and parents’ communicated beliefs about education are correlated with improved academic performance (e.g., Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2005).  
2. Foster parents’ attitudes about youth and empathy towards youth impact the foster parents’ ability to parent authoritatively (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998) and the foster parent-youth relationship, which is a common cause of placement disruption (Brown & Bednar, 2006) and attachment issues among foster youth.  
3. Outcomes related to foster parent attitude have been consistently assessed in the literature on foster parent training (Dorsey et al., 2008; Festinger & Baker, 2013). |
| Child behavior          | 1. Difficulties managing child behavior are a primary cause of placement breakdown (Brown and Bednar, 2006; Leslie et al., 2005).  
2. Strong socioemotional skills, such as self-regulation, are predictive of educational attainment (Farrington et al., 2012; Kautz et al., 2014).  
3. Poor noncognitive skills lead to high rates of identification of EBD* in foster youth (Smithgall et al., 2004), but social competence can serve as a protective factor among foster youth (Shonk & Cicchetti, 2001). |
| Placement stability     | 1. Placement disruption is negatively correlated with educational attainment, such as the likelihood of high school graduation (Pecora, 2012).  
2. Placement disruption is associated with negative effects on foster parents and foster parent retention (Brown & Calder, 1999). |
| Foster parent           | 1. Lack of role satisfaction and foster parent retention increases placement disruption (Cuddeback & Orme, 2002).  
2. Commitment to foster parenting has been correlated with positive youth outcomes and the development of strong attachment (Dozier, 2005). |
| retention/satisfaction  |                                                                                                                                                                                                           |

* EBD = emotional and behavioral disorders
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author/Year</th>
<th>Training Type</th>
<th>Pre-Service (Y/N)</th>
<th>Training Delivery</th>
<th>Research design</th>
<th>Sample characteristics</th>
<th>Outcome domains</th>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Guerney, 1977</td>
<td>Foster parent skills training program</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>10 (2-hour) weekly group meetings</td>
<td>Quasi-Experimental</td>
<td>132 foster parents in Pennsylvania (75 treatment, 57 control)</td>
<td>Foster parent attitudes</td>
<td>Family information questionnaire, Porter Parental Acceptance Scale (PPAS), Sensitivity to Children (STC)</td>
<td>Trained foster parents showed more acceptance and reported more desirable and fewer undesirable responses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boyd &amp; Remy, 1978</td>
<td>Behavioral training</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>16-week training program and in-home visits for homes with high-risk placements</td>
<td>Quasi-Experimental</td>
<td>168 foster families in San Francisco Bay area (55 treatment, 113 control)</td>
<td>Placement stability; foster parent retention and satisfaction</td>
<td>Administrative data: length of placement, disruptions, foster parent decision to continue fostering</td>
<td>Training was associated with fewer placement disruptions and increased probability that foster parents remained licensed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penn, 1978</td>
<td>Behavior modification</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>11 (2-hour) weekly group sessions</td>
<td>Pre-post</td>
<td>7 foster parents (4 couples, 3 foster mothers)</td>
<td>Child behavior</td>
<td>Report of child behavior</td>
<td>131 behaviors changed in a positive direction, 27 in a negative direction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hampson &amp; Tavormina, 1980</td>
<td>Behavioral vs. reflective group training</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>9 weekly sessions in behavioral skills training or reflective counseling</td>
<td>Quasi-Experimental</td>
<td>42 foster mothers in a rural area (17 in behavioral groups, 17 in reflective groups, 9 control)</td>
<td>Foster parent skills and knowledge; foster parent attitudes; child behavior</td>
<td>Herefore Parent Attitude Survey, Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL), Observation</td>
<td>Reflectively trained foster parents gained in attitudes; behaviorally trained foster parents improved behavioral skills and children demonstrated reduced behavior problems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guerney &amp; Gavigan, 1981</td>
<td>Foster parent skills training program</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>10 (2-hour) weekly group meetings</td>
<td>Pre-Post treatment vs. control</td>
<td>302 foster parents who participated in the Foster Parent Skills Training Program (FPSTP)</td>
<td>Foster parent attitudes</td>
<td>PPAS: Acceptance of Feelings, Acceptance of Uniqueness, Recognition of the Child’s Need for Autonomy</td>
<td>Intervention resulted in significant gains in acceptance and recognition of need for autonomy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guerney &amp; Wolfgang, 1981</td>
<td>Foster parent skills training program</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>10 (2-hour) weekly group meetings</td>
<td>Quasi-Experimental</td>
<td>400 foster parents in Pennsylvania (321 treatment, 79 control)</td>
<td>Foster parent attitudes</td>
<td>PPAS; STC measures; Parenting Response Survey</td>
<td>Trained foster parents showed more acceptance and reported using desired parenting skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Runyan &amp; Fullerton, 1981</td>
<td>State foster parent training</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>10 (2.5-hour) weekly group sessions led by foster parent or professional trainer</td>
<td>Pre-Post</td>
<td>127 foster parents in Oregon who participated in training on child development and social-emotional health</td>
<td>Foster parent attitudes; child behavior</td>
<td>CBCL, attitude towards children’s freedom</td>
<td>Parenting attitudes and foster child behavior improved somewhat (evaluative study).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simon &amp; Nova</td>
<td></td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>7 (3-hour) weekly</td>
<td>Quasi-</td>
<td>65 foster parents in</td>
<td>Placement</td>
<td>Administrative placement and</td>
<td>Homes with trained foster parents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authors</td>
<td>Type of Training</td>
<td>Sessions</td>
<td>Design</td>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>Outcomes</td>
<td>Findings/Comments</td>
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<tr>
<td>Simon, 1982</td>
<td>University foster parent training</td>
<td>sessions</td>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>Florida (29 treatment, 36 control)</td>
<td>Foster parent skills and knowledge; foster parent attitudes; child behavior</td>
<td>Stability of licensing data; parents had lower rates of placement disruption (11% vs. 23%).</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Hampson, Schulte, &amp; Ricks, 1983</td>
<td>Individual vs. group training (behavioral and reflective)</td>
<td>N 11 (1-hour) weekly sessions</td>
<td>Quasi-Experimental</td>
<td>29 foster parents in Dallas making up 18 foster families (9 group training, 9 in-home training)</td>
<td>Foster parent skills and knowledge; foster parent attitudes; child behavior</td>
<td>Herefore Parent Attitude Survey, behavioral vignettes, CBCL, Alabama; Nearly all measured areas for both groups showed improvements. There was no significant difference between groups for foster parent attitudes or use of behavioral techniques. Home-trained group felt more positive about gains of training.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Lee &amp; Holland, 1991</td>
<td>MAPP</td>
<td>Y 10 weekly sessions: roles and processes within child welfare, children’s feelings, behavior management, birth family connections, transitions, assessing personal strengths/needs</td>
<td>Quasi-Experimental</td>
<td>29 foster parents in Georgia (17 treatment, 12 control)</td>
<td>Foster parent skills and knowledge</td>
<td>Adolescent/Adult Parenting Inventory (AAPI): knowledge of roles, child development, and empathic behaviors to use with children; No statistically significant findings.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fees et al., 1998</td>
<td>Nova foster parent preservice training</td>
<td>Y 12-hour training: introduction about welfare and foster parent responsibilities and about the impact of foster care</td>
<td>Pre-post</td>
<td>48 foster mothers in Iowa (selected during preservice training), 81% Caucasian</td>
<td>Foster parent retention and satisfaction</td>
<td>Foster parent satisfaction with role demands social service support; personal needs assessed through Foster Parent Preservice Training Inventory and Satisfaction with Foster Parenting Inventory; Foster parents who reported that the training was useful reported higher satisfaction with fostering one year later.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puddy &amp; Jackson, 2003</td>
<td>MAPP/ GPS*</td>
<td>Y 30-hour MAPP training program</td>
<td>Quasi-Experimental</td>
<td>82 foster parents (62 treatment, 20 control)</td>
<td>Foster parent skills and knowledge</td>
<td>Likert scale survey of parent knowledge of MAPP/GPS content; Parenting Skills Questionnaire; SOS Help for Parents questionnaire on responding to child behavior; MAPP-trained group showed improvement in 4 of 12 program goals and 3 of 22 basic parenting skills.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>MacDonald &amp; Turner, 2005</td>
<td>Cognitive behavioral parent training</td>
<td>N 5 (3-hour) weekly group sessions</td>
<td>Randomized Control Trial</td>
<td>117 (mostly single parent, Caucasian) foster parents in southwest England (67 treatment, 50 control)</td>
<td>Parent skills and knowledge; foster parent retention and satisfaction; placement stability</td>
<td>Knowledge of Behavioural Principles as Applied to Children (KBPAC), CBCL, Foster Carer Satisfaction Questionnaire; administrative data on placement disruptions; Limited effect shown on parenting behavior, behavioral knowledge, and self-report of behavioral skills. No effect shown on child behavior or placement disruption. Control group had fewer placement disruptions.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Study</td>
<td>Training/Program</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Sample Description</td>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>Outcomes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pacifi et al., 2005</td>
<td>Multimedia training on dealing with anger</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Foster Parent College (FPC), 60-minute DVD on Anger Outbursts Program that introduces ways in which children deal with anger</td>
<td>Randomized Control Trial 74 foster parents (37 treatment, 37 control)</td>
<td>Foster parent satisfaction with the training measured through a rating scale; foster parent knowledge about anger problems measured with 20 content-related multiple-choice items; 8-item questionnaire on foster parent perception of skills and comfort managing behavior</td>
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<tr>
<td>Buzhardt et al., 2006</td>
<td>Online foster parent training</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>2-week trial of an online training program with two modules (“Challenging Behaviors” and “Legal Issues”)</td>
<td>Pre-Post 22 foster parents and 7 social workers from Canada</td>
<td>Foster parent skills and knowledge; foster parent retention and satisfaction; knowledge increased and foster parents reported higher confidence about parenting skills for managing children’s anger. On post-test, foster parents reported satisfaction with training.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linares et al., 2006</td>
<td>Incredible Years (parent management training)</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>12 (2-hour) weekly group sessions of the Incredibly Years Program, additional co-parenting component</td>
<td>Randomized Control Trial 128 foster parent and biological parent pairs of 64 youth in New York City (80 treatment, 48 control)</td>
<td>Foster parent skills and knowledge; child behavior; foster parents showed significant improvements in knowledge of legal issues and managing challenging behaviors.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Timmer et al., 2006</td>
<td>Parent-child interaction therapy (parent management training)</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>14 (1-hour) individual sessions</td>
<td>Pre-post 163 foster parent dyads in California</td>
<td>Child behavior; foster parent skills and knowledge; foster parent attitudes; positive parenting and collaborative co-parenting increased. Children’s externalizing behaviors were reduced.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Christenson &amp; McMurtry, 2007</td>
<td>PRIDE</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>27-hour training on five areas: protecting and nurturing youth, developmental needs, birth family relationships, developing lifelong connections, foster parent professionalism</td>
<td>Pre-Post 228 prospective foster/adoptive parents in Idaho (69 kinship, 159 non-relative)</td>
<td>Foster parent skills and knowledge; knowledge and perceived competence increased. One area in which this increase did not occur was in perceived competence parenting a child with special needs.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Source</td>
<td>Designation</td>
<td>Sample</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Intervention</td>
<td>Measures</td>
<td>Outcomes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chamberlain, Price, Leve, et al., 2008</td>
<td>KEEP N</td>
<td>16 (90-minute) weekly group sessions on child behavior management</td>
<td>Randomized Control Trial</td>
<td>700 kinship and non-relative foster parents in San Diego (359 intervention, 341 control)</td>
<td>Foster parent skills and knowledge; child behavior</td>
<td>Foster parent report of child behavior; parent report of discipline (interviews)</td>
<td>Reported child behavior difficulties decreased and were mediated by parenting behaviors. Effect for high-risk youth was marked.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chamberlain, Price, Reid, et al., 2008</td>
<td>KEEP N</td>
<td>16 (90-minute) weekly group sessions on behavior management, peer relationships, school issues, and positive parenting skills</td>
<td>Randomized Control Trial</td>
<td>700 kinship and non-relative foster (359 intervention, 341 control)</td>
<td>Foster parent retention and satisfaction; child behavior</td>
<td>Parent Daily Report (PDR) checklist; treatment termination</td>
<td>Child behavior problems decreased. Training was successful for both developer- and paraprofessional-facilitated groups.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price et al., 2008</td>
<td>KEEP N</td>
<td>16-week training (including home practice sessions to transfer skills)</td>
<td>Randomized Control Trial</td>
<td>700 kinship and non-relative foster (359 intervention, 341 control)</td>
<td>Placement stability</td>
<td>Administrative placement data pre- and post-intervention</td>
<td>Intervention predicted positive placement outcomes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Van Camp, Montgomery, et al., 2008</td>
<td>Behavior Analysis Services Program (BASP) N</td>
<td>10 (3-hour) weekly sessions and 20 (1-hour) weekly in-home sessions, 24/7 access to an emergency hotline</td>
<td>Pre-Post; Repeated Measures</td>
<td>1. 247 foster, adoptive, and kin parents, residential care staff, biological parents (163 treatment, 84 control)</td>
<td>Foster parent skills and knowledge</td>
<td>Role-play assessments (9) for each behavior management skill taught in the class</td>
<td>Results from both analyses indicated gains in parenting skills, which were maintained in the home.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Van Camp, Vollmer, et al., 2008</td>
<td>Behavior Analysis Services Program (BASP) and booster N</td>
<td>2 (3-hour) weekly booster sessions</td>
<td>Pre-post (ABAB model—pre-post then pre-booster-post-booster)</td>
<td>Foster parents who had previously participated in a 30-hour BASP training</td>
<td>Foster parent skills and knowledge</td>
<td>Role-play assessments (2) per skill</td>
<td>Results were variable between participants. On average, foster parents had maintained skills and improved following the booster session.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christenson &amp; McMurtry, 2009</td>
<td>PRIDE Y</td>
<td>27-hour training on five areas: protecting and nurturing youth, developmental needs, birth family relationships, developing lifelong connections, foster parent professionalism</td>
<td>Pre, Post, Post</td>
<td>51 prospective foster parents</td>
<td>Foster parent skills and knowledge</td>
<td>PRIDE: Foster and Adoptive Family Training Survey (PFAFTS), 20 Likert-type items</td>
<td>Improvements from post-training to post-post-training shown for 4 of the 5 competencies.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author(s)</td>
<td>Program</td>
<td>Randomized</td>
<td>Sample Description</td>
<td>Measure/Outcome</td>
<td>Training Description</td>
<td>Results</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Nash &amp; Flynn, 2009</td>
<td>PRIDE and others</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>PRIDE and 2-day Looking After Children (LAC) training</td>
<td>Foster/kinship parents for 603 foster youth</td>
<td>Foster parent skills and knowledge; child behavior</td>
<td>There was no statistically significant relationship between training and outcomes except a negative relationship to foster parent reports of child functioning.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price et al., 2009</td>
<td>KEEP</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>16-week training (including home practice sessions to transfer skills)</td>
<td>Randomized Control Trial 700 kinship and non-relative foster parents in San Diego (359 intervention, 341 control)</td>
<td>Parent Daily Report (PDR) checklist; treatment termination; administrative placement data</td>
<td>Behavior problems reduced, especially among most challenging youth. Positive changes were shown in parenting practices and placement outcomes.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price et al., 2015</td>
<td>KEEP</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>16-week training (including home practice sessions to transfer skills)</td>
<td>Randomized Control Trial 335 foster and kinship families with children ages 5–12</td>
<td>PDR (scored for child behavior and parental stress associated with child behavior)</td>
<td>There was a significant reduction in children’s behavior problems for multiple children in the foster home and in parental stress associated with focal child.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* MAPP/GPS = Model Approaches to Partnerships in Parenting Group Preparation and Selection of Foster and/or Adoptive Families

Table 1.4 Summary of foster parent measures
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instrument</th>
<th>Author, Date</th>
<th>Measure Overview</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes Towards Foster Parenting Inventory (ATPFI)</td>
<td>Lekies, Yates, Stockdale, &amp; Crase, 1998</td>
<td>26 Likert items about prospective foster parents’ expectations about fostering, foster children, and agency support.</td>
<td>Evaluate pre- and post-training experiences of foster parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casey Foster Parent Inventory-Applicant Version (CFPAI)</td>
<td>Buehler et al., 2003</td>
<td>74 Likert items related to the 12 domains of foster parenting (Buehler et al., 2006)</td>
<td>Assess foster parent strengths and weaknesses prior to fostering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster Parent Attitudes Questionnaire (FPAQ)</td>
<td>Harden et al., 2008</td>
<td>40 Likert items related to 6 constructs informed by 12 domains (Buehler et al., 2006)</td>
<td>Measure foster parent attitudes in constructs identified as central to stable fostering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster Parent Potential Scale (FPPS)</td>
<td>Orme et al., 2007</td>
<td>8 Likert items related to home environment, family and marital functioning, parental mental health, and social support</td>
<td>Assess potential foster parents prior to licensing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster Parent Role Performance Scale (FPRP)</td>
<td>Le Prohn, 2004</td>
<td>40 Likert items to rate perceived responsibility of foster parents for tasks associated with caring for a foster child</td>
<td>Examine foster parent and social worker perceptions of responsibility for foster care tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction with Foster Parenting Inventory (SPFI)</td>
<td>Lekies, Yates, Crase, &amp; Stockdale 1998</td>
<td>22 Likert items on foster parents’ satisfaction related to demands of the role, child welfare agency support, and personal satisfaction</td>
<td>Evaluate experiences of foster parents one year post-training</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1. Logic model for the role of foster parent training in improving educational outcomes for foster youth.
CHAPTER 2

ANALYSIS OF THE MASSACHUSETTS APPROACHES TO PARTNERSHIPS IN PARENTING (MAPP) TRAINING FOR THE PRESENCE OF EDUCATIONAL PARENTING SKILLS

Introduction

This analysis of the Massachusetts Approaches to Partnerships in Parenting (MAPP; Massachusetts Department of Children and Families, 2001) foster parent training program is part of a multiphase instrument development study. This study is informed by my previous research (Bass, n.d.), which indicates that foster parent training can enhance foster parents’ preparedness in ways that lead to better outcomes for youth. As demonstrated in the logic model upon which this study was founded (Figure 1), certain parenting skills and attitudes can positively influence school engagement and, in turn, long-term functioning. The guiding logic behind this study is that if foster parents are effectively trained to support foster youth with school-related skills, foster parents will feel more successful and youth will experience improved educational outcomes. Ultimately, I intend to pilot a survey for preservice and in-service foster parents in Massachusetts to explore how school-related competencies affect foster parents’ perceptions of successful fostering. I will use the information from the present curriculum analysis to develop survey items that are aligned with the content presented in the Massachusetts MAPP training and with the skills, attitudes, and knowledge that contribute to educational parenting.

Model Approaches to Partnerships in Parenting (MAPP; Mayers-Paztor, 1987), upon which the Massachusetts MAPP training is based, involves in-person training and is intended to convey policy-based content as well as lessons that address how foster parents can meet the needs of youth in care (Festinger & Baker, 2013). The primary goal of MAPP training is to provide preservice foster parents with information about the demands of the role, the experiences
of foster youth, and the skills needed to foster successfully, so they can assess their readiness to foster (Dorsey et al., 2008). MAPP comprises ten modules that address 12 skill domains (see Table 2.2), which social service agencies in different states then use to tailor training curriculum to meet the needs of their unique child welfare systems. For example, the first module includes state-specific information about the child welfare system and the role of foster parents, so each state’s child welfare department must adjust that content to accurately reflect prescribed processes and procedures.

Only two empirical studies have examined the MAPP, and both found the training had minimal effects on foster parents’ skills and knowledge in areas that are relevant to parenting youth in foster care (Dorsey et al., 2008; Lee & Holland, 1991; Puddy & Jackson, 2003). Lee and Holland (1991) surveyed foster parents pre- and post-training and discovered no significant differences in skills or attitude. Despite the lack of evidence to support the efficacy of the MAPP training, 13 states have adopted the framework and use the model to prepare future foster parents (Gibson, 2014).

Although most states require preservice training, foster parents consistently report feeling unable to provide appropriate care for youth and many abdicate the role after short periods of service (Brown & Bednar, 2006; Grimm & Darwall, 2005). Foster parents describe behavioral challenges as one of the primary reasons for disrupting a placement and for discontinuing in the foster parent role (Brown & Bednar, 2006). Foster parent turnover leads to placement moves, which have been correlated with several negative effects on education such as school disruption, academic challenges, and behavioral issues (Bass, Shields, & Behrman, 2004). Although education has the potential to serve as an important protective factor for youth who experience foster care, outcomes for foster youth are quite bleak, with low rates of graduation and
employment and high rates of incarceration and social service dependence (Barrett, Katsiyannis, Zhang, & Zhang, 2013; Jones, Greenberg, & Crowley, 2015; Malmgren & Meisel, 2004; Smithgall, Gladden, Howard, Goerge, & Courtney, 2004). Research in this area indicates that training enhancements are key to ensuring that foster parents are sufficiently prepared with the skills and knowledge required to provide quality care (Bass et al., 2004; Pecora, 2012) and to encourage foster children’s school engagement.

The advantages of supportive parenting and educational involvement have been studied extensively (Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2005). Overall, parental engagement can lead to the development of important academic and socioemotional skills that result in higher educational attainment (Jeynes, 2005). Despite public awareness of the dismal trajectory for youth in foster care, a relatively small body of research (Buehler, Rhodes, Orme, & Cuddeback, 2006) has addressed the role of foster parental involvement in improving student outcomes. Foster parents often express feeling excluded from school affairs and feeling unclear about which learning-related responsibilities they should spearhead (Smithgall et al., 2004; Cuddeback & Orme, 2002). Research has consistently shown that parent training and engagement efforts can be utilized to successfully increase parents’ skills and attitudes in ways that correlate with student achievement gains (Mendez, Ogg, Loker, & Fefer, 2013) for comparable populations of at-risk youth.

Evidence from studies of other foster parent training approaches indicates that foster parents who receive comprehensive preservice training report greater parenting self-efficacy and that the youth in their care demonstrate reductions in behavioral challenges (Chamberlain, Price, Leve, et al., 2008; Pecora et al., 2006; Price, Chamberlain, Landsverk, & Reid, 2009). Perhaps the most promising findings on this topic come from studies on the Casey Family Programs (Graner & Emerson, 2002; Pecora et al., 2006), which found that children in Casey foster placements
graduated from high school at a higher rate than non-foster peers. The key components that distinguish the Casey Family Programs from state-run foster care are comprehensive foster parent screening, training, and ongoing in-home support.

The present study is founded on the notion that addressing educational attainment is vital to improving foster youth outcomes and that foster parents, if adequately trained and supported, could be the key to enhancing school engagement. Although this sentiment has been articulated in numerous articles (Altshuler, 2003; Buehler et al., 2006; Pecora, 2012), no researchers have explored how foster parent training outcomes correspond to the skills foster parents must develop in order to meet the educational needs of youth in care. Interestingly, the skills foster parents perceive to be necessary for successful fostering (Bass et al., 2004; Buehler, Cox, & Cuddeback, 2003; Cooley & Petren, 2011) are strikingly consistent with the characteristics that educational researchers have found to be correlated with educational attainment and long-term functioning (Barber, Stolz, & Olson, 2005; Fan & Chen, 2001; Gomby, Larner, & Stevenson, et al., 1995; Heller, Smyke, & Boris, 2002; Jeynes, 2005). These skills can be classified into three categories: authoritative parenting practices, creating a nurturing and developmentally appropriate home environment, and effective behavior management tools (Buehler et al., 2006; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). When foster parents possess these competencies, youth experience fewer placement disruptions that interfere with educational and socioemotional progress and they develop important social and emotional skills, such as self-regulation and social competence, which contribute to educational attainment and lifelong success (Farrington et al., 2012; Gomby et al., 1995; Shonk & Cicchetti, 2001).

Throughout this paper, I use the term “educational parenting” to label the skills, attitudes, and behaviors that foster parents can employ to support foster youths’ educational engagement.
According to findings from previous researchers, authoritative parenting practices, nurturing and developmentally appropriate home environments, and effective behavior management tools (Buehler et al., 2006; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998) can serve as important protective factors for at-risk youth. The four core elements of educational parenting for foster parents are (a) empathy and relationship-building, (b) knowledge and self-efficacy regarding the foster parent role in the educational process, (c) awareness of developmentally appropriate expectations for youth in schools and at home, and (d) behavior management and socioemotional development. In addition to these capabilities, foster parents need explicit clarification regarding their specific role in educational and school-related activities (Bass, n.d.; Smithgall Gladden, Yang, & Goerge, 2005).

In this study, I assess the content and pedagogy of the Massachusetts MAPP curriculum for its relevance to foster parent competencies in areas known to underlie academic achievement. In my previous literature analysis (Bass, n.d.) I found that 7 of the 12 MAPP skill areas correspond to parental competencies that can support educational attainment: know the children, build strengths/meet needs, be loss and attachment experts, manage behaviors, build connections, build self-esteem, and assure health and safety (Mayers-Pasztor, 1987). In the first study I analyzed, Lee and Holland (1991) evaluated foster parents’ understanding of child development and parent-child roles, as well as beliefs about physical punishment, and foster parents’ empathy towards children before and after the training. Using the Adolescent/Adult Parenting Inventory (AAPI; Bavolek & Keene, 1984; Cocoran & Fischer, 1987), Lee and Holland found no significant differences between those trained in MAPP and a control group. That study does not support the notion that MAPP training enhances the skills foster parents need (e.g., empathy, child development knowledge, parenting skills) in order to provide a home that fosters
development in areas known to underlie academic achievement. Similarly, Puddy and Jackson (2003) evaluated the changes in foster parents’ MAPP curriculum knowledge, parenting knowledge, and parenting behavior associated with the training. Although the researchers found significant differences between trained and untrained foster parents’ knowledge in four MAPP content areas, none of the improvements were in the seven domains related to educational attainment (Bass, n.d.).

Training content and pedagogy

In my previous literature synthesis (Bass, n.d.) I examined the relationships between foster parent training and (a) foster parents’ educational parenting skills and knowledge, (b) foster parents’ attitudes, (c) foster child behavior, (d) placement stability, and (e) foster parent retention and satisfaction. I chose the foster parenting skills and attitudes of interest based on findings from previous research on parental engagement (Jeynes, 2005; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998), the effects of parent education on behavioral and mental health (Barlow & Stewart-Brown, 2000), and federal child welfare policies that govern foster parent training (Buehler et al., 2006). I analyzed a total of 27 studies on foster parent training to determine whether and how the training corresponded to outcomes for foster parents and foster youth in domains that are known to underlie educational engagement. I explored the pedagogical approaches (e.g., training duration and frequency, teaching methods employed), the content areas addressed through each model, and the associated outcomes. Results from the reviewed studies provided valuable information about the content domains and instructional strategies that are most useful for supporting foster parents in their development of educational parenting skills.
Training content is not always directly related to daily child-rearing practices, so although some studies measured increases in foster parents’ knowledge after the training session (Christianson & McMurtry, 2007, 2009), there is no data to support that the measured improvement contributes to decreased placement disruption, enhanced positive parenting practices, or lower rates of child misbehavior. Most preservice training provides future foster parents with information about how the child welfare system works and about role expectations; there is limited focus on the skills foster parents can use to address the unique needs of the children in their care (Bass, n.d.). Studies that included evaluations of multiple outcomes to identify whether greater foster parent knowledge was related to better child behavior offer valuable insight about how particular training content correlates with stability for youth and families (Chamberlain, Price, Leve, et al., 2008; Hampson & Tavormina, 1980).

Although further study is needed to explore how training content and pedagogy correlate with foster parent satisfaction and placement success, some themes have emerged. Research on foster parent training has highlighted the benefits of behavior-based foster parent training on parenting skills, child behavior ratings, and placement stability (Chamberlain, Price, Leve, et al., 2008; Chamberlain, Price, Reid, & Landsverk, 2008; Guerney & Gavigan, 1981; Price et al., 2009). Parents demonstrated improvements in managing children’s behavior when they were provided with training that emphasized specific skills and offered opportunities for practice. For example, foster parents’ attitudes about children in their care and parent-child relationships improved when trainings addressed specific skills regarding empathy, relationship-building, and the emotional needs of youth in foster care (Price, Roesch, Walsh, & Landsverk, 2015; Timmer, Urquiza, & Zebell, 2006). When measured, gains in foster parents’ skills were correlated with better child behavior ratings and placement stability (Chamberlain, Price, Leve, et al., 2008;
Price et al., 2009). Conversely, when foster parents were merely given information about fostering and child welfare, limited benefits were observed (Lee & Holland, 1991; Nash & Flynn, 2009). Placement stability and foster parent retention were best achieved through behavior-based training programs, especially when participants were satisfied with the training and when they learned behavioral skills they believed would be useful in practice (Fees et al., 1998; Price et al., 2008, 2009).

Results from the literature review (Bass, n.d.) offer insights about how to facilitate the development of competencies that foster parents need in order to parent in ways that can improve children’s school functioning. Findings indicate that behavior-based programs can lead to positive outcomes in areas that are known to underlie academic achievement. When foster parents learned and practiced behavior management skills, they tended to report lower incidence of challenging behavior and, in some cases, reduced parental stress (Chamberlain, Price, Leve, et al., 2008, Price et al., 2015) and more positive parenting practices and attitudes (Linares, Montalto, Li, & Oza, 2006; Runyan & Fullerton, 1981). Additionally, when training content offered foster parents skills rather than information, foster parents reported the training to be more satisfactory and useful (Hampson, Schulte, & Ricks, 1983; Hampson & Tavormina, 1980). Behavior-oriented programs (Boyd & Remy, 1978; Chamberlain, Price, Reid, et al., 2008; Price et al., 2008, 2015) yielded reductions in placement disruptions.

Whiting, Hither, and Koech (2007) assessed the MAPP, examining the content objectives as well as the teaching approaches employed, for alignment with 11 domains of parenting that are addressed in preservice foster parent training programs and with best practices for adult education. The researchers suggested that an andragogical approach, one that uses a constructivist model emphasizing active learning (Davis, 1993), is well-suited to educating foster
parents (Whiting et al., 2007). Whiting et al. (2007) coded the instructional strategies (e.g., role play or activity, video, handout) implemented in different trainings and classified them as active or passive. The researchers identified that the MAPP employed more active learning components than other preservice training methods and purported that it was far better aligned with adult education best practices than other widely implemented models (Whiting et al., 2007). This suggests that favorable outcomes should be associated with this program, but the results reported by Puddy and Jackson (2003) and Lee and Holland (1991) indicate that the program did not affect foster child outcomes. In the present study I analyze the Massachusetts MAPP curriculum for emphasis on skills associated with educational parenting and further examine the teaching pedagogy.

Several pedagogical recommendations have emerged based on foster parent training literature. For example, outcome studies have demonstrated that some instructional approaches and training content were more useful than others for developing preservice foster parents’ skills and knowledge. Similarly, after performing a content analysis Whiting et al. (2007) suggested that training pedagogy should align with best practices for adult education. Pecora, Whittaker, Mellucio, and Barth (2000) purported that foster parent training should emphasize practice over theory. Evidence suggests that trainings that provide participants the opportunity to role-play behavioral skills contribute to better use of target techniques post-training (Chamberlain, Price, Leve, et al., 2008, Price et al., 2015). Similarly, the content presented in trainings should emphasize parenting youth who have experienced trauma and are in foster care and should include specific strategies foster parents can employ to manage behavior and build relationships. In essence, training modules should provide opportunities for foster parents to learn parenting
tactics that are suited to the specific needs of foster youth and opportunities to practice them through role-plays.

Curriculum analysis and instrument development

This paper outlines the first phase of an iterative process for developing an instrument to assess foster parents’ preparedness to support the developmental and educational needs of the youth in their care. Using the salient competency domains I identified through a comprehensive literature review on foster parent training outcomes, I evaluated the Massachusetts MAPP training materials (Massachusetts Department of Children and Families, 2001) for the presence of content and pedagogy that is consistent with the recommendations from the related literature. In particular, the literature review revealed that certain parenting competencies associated with increased educational attainment in at-risk youth—namely authoritative parenting, maintaining high expectations, knowledge of developmental needs, and empathy—could be applicable to parenting foster youth. My examination of the Massachusetts MAPP training content and pedagogy will be used to assess how the training objectives correspond to the skills and attitudes foster parents must have in order to meet the educational and developmental needs of the youth in their care. Ultimately, this information will be used to devise an instrument that accurately assesses the knowledge and skills needed for educational parenting and that aligns with the Massachusetts MAPP training content pertinent to developing such skills and knowledge.

In this study I focus on four core elements of educational parenting for foster parents: (a) empathy and relationship-building, (b) knowledge and self-efficacy regarding the foster parent role in the educational process, (c) awareness of developmentally appropriate expectations for
youth in schools and at home, and (d) behavior management and socioemotional development. Accordingly, the research questions I examine through this curriculum analysis are as follows:

1. Which educational parenting skills are presented in the Massachusetts MAPP training content?
2. What instructional strategies are used to teach educational parenting skills and do these strategies foster active or passive learning?

Method

I obtained the Massachusetts MAPP Trainer’s Manual (Massachusetts Department of Children and Families, 2001) and assessed materials and session topics for the presence of content pertaining to each of the four core areas of educational parenting: (a) empathy and relationship-building, (b) knowledge and self-efficacy regarding the foster parent role in the educational process, (c) awareness of developmentally appropriate expectations for school and at home, and (d) behavior management and socioemotional development. The Massachusetts MAPP manual comprises introductory materials, ten 3-hour modules, and resources that correspond to each of the ten sessions. The introduction includes information about the Department’s Core Practice Values and the Five Key Tenets of Adult Education upon which the training is based (see Table 2.2). The ten modules provide information related to the organizational structure of the Department of Children and Families, the roles and responsibilities of foster parents, reasons for placement in foster care, the impact of trauma on youth, strategies for managing various situations, and legal issues associated with the foster and adoption foster processes. In addition to identifying educational parenting content, I coded the
content in each module according to category of learning exercise to quantify the time spent on each topic and the time spent employing each type of teaching strategy (see Table 2.3).

Each module contains content and directives intended to ensure that important information is communicated through a combination of methods. The modules are composed of activities, speaking points, discussion questions, reflective questions, and role-plays or pair shares. These various learning activities, indicate that a combination of teaching approaches is used to convey the content in each module. Modules begin with a stated objective followed by a series of tasks that trainers are meant to follow in a prescribed order. Most of the modules include a sequence of activities and conversation prompts with time limits for each. In addition to these prescribed training components, the modules also contain text that summarizes particular issues related to an activity or provides related information. For example, there are several sections that prompt the trainers to explain child welfare practices or expectations. The introduction to the Massachusetts MAPP training manual states, “Content areas are designed to be an introduction and include all of the concepts and topics that will comprise the lesson…the manual is designed so that the content will NOT be read aloud to participants. The content is a guide not a script” (MAPP training manual, pg vii; Massachusetts Department of Children and Families). Therefore some of the instructional methods were not coded as part of this analysis due to the likelihood of variability in implementation. I describe these exclusions in detail below.

Through a content analysis, I examined the Massachusetts MAPP curriculum for content and teaching practices that contribute to the development of the four domains of parenting skills, knowledge, and attitudes that are known to improve school-related outcomes for youth. Content analysis is an empirically grounded methodology that can be used to systematically examine text
to understand whether and how it contributes to a desired outcome (Krippendorff, 2012). More specifically, this approach is often used to audit a “communication,” in this case a training program, against its objectives (Berelson, 1952). The analysis involves identifying themes or domains of interest and using grounded theory coding to sort content related to each domain (LaRossa, 2005). For this study, I coded tasks from each module of the Massachusetts MAPP training manual according to educational parenting theme to explore the instructional approaches prescribed for each and to align survey items to themes presented in training. This method allowed me to identify when and how educational parenting concepts were communicated and, in particular, the frequency and duration of active and passive instructional methods.

**Procedures**

The primary purpose of this study is to explore when and how educational parenting content is presented in the Massachusetts MAPP training and to use this data to develop survey items for an instrument for assessing foster parents’ educational parenting competence. To this end, I summarized the content across the 10-module curriculum by topic and instructional type, coded content related to educational parenting skills into appropriate skill domains, and quantified the learning components (e.g., activities and handouts) and pedagogical approaches (active vs. passive) used to teach educational parenting skills. By collecting this data, I was able to answer the research questions and to develop survey items that could be used to evaluate educational parenting competence post-training. The procedure for answering each research questions is provided below.

Which educational parenting skills are presented in the Massachusetts MAPP training content?
The curriculum content was examined using a rubric that included the areas of skill, knowledge, and beliefs that relate to the four domains of educational parenting. To enhance the specificity of the analysis, I expanded the original four domains into six discrete areas: building relationships with youth, empathy towards youth, educational process and role, developmentally appropriate expectations, behavior management, and socioemotional development (see Table 2.4). The purpose of this expansion was to ensure clarity about which aspect(s) of a given domain was being addressed. (For example, distinguishing socioemotional development from behavior management was important given the research basis for behavior-based foster parent training, which suggests that, in addition to learning to support emotional development in youth, foster parents must learn specific strategies for addressing challenging behavior.) All tasks involving content that corresponded to one of the six areas were included in the analysis. If a task or resource addressed skills in multiple domains, it was coded into all appropriate categories. If a learning activity did not specifically target educational parenting skills it was excluded from the analysis. Details on the coding criteria for each category and examples are provided below.

**Building relationships.** This category includes materials that explicitly describe strategies foster parents can use to build relationships with youth. For example, Resource 2.1 “Characteristics of the Family System” (p. 50-51) describes how boundaries, rules, roles, decision-making, and communication styles differ between families. The handout prompts the foster parent to consider unspoken household understandings about each of the aforementioned areas and how to communicate household norms to foster youth so they can feel included in the family.
**Empathy towards youth.** This category includes tasks and resources that illustrate the needs of youth in foster care and explicitly outline how foster parents can use knowledge of these needs to inform parenting practices. For example, Resource 2.6 “Maturational and Situational Loss” defines different types of loss so that foster parents can “develop an understanding of how they are experienced by children/youths in care (p. 61).” The resource emphasizes how parents can be sensitive to children who are grieving.

**Educational role and process.** This category includes activities and resources that explicitly describe foster parents’ role in supporting youth in schools. For example, Resource 4.5 “Foster/Pre-Adoptive Parent Agreement” contains two statements about this topic. One of these states that foster or pre-adoptive families have the right to “authorize appropriate school-related activities such as registration and field trips (p. 127).” The second such statement is “If the parent of a child/youth… will not be serving as the educational decision maker for her/his child, [the Department will] arrange for the foster/pre-adoptive parent to serve as the child/youth’s educational decision maker for special education or early intervention services (p. 128).”

**Developmentally appropriate expectations.** This category includes activities and resources that provide information about child development, factors that influence development, and strategies for incorporating this knowledge into practice. For example, Resource 5.1 “Developmental Expectations, Quirks, and Abnormalities—Younger Children” outlines the developmental needs, expectations, and warning signs for children from birth through age 18. The worksheet offers examples of what these needs and challenges look like at home and in relationships so foster parents know what to expect and how to establish appropriate routines.

**Behavior management.** This category includes materials that include specific strategies and tactics foster parents can use to address behavioral issues. For example, in the “Candy Bar
Activity” (Activity 6.2) foster parents play a game in which a candy bar is hidden somewhere in the training room and volunteers from the group take turns attempting to find it. While each volunteer looks for the candy bar the other members provide various types of feedback and encouragement, similar to that which an adult would offer a child who is learning a new skill. The activity is discussed and used to illustrate the benefits of positive reinforcement on behavior.

**Socioemotional development.** This category includes learning tasks associated with information about social and emotional development, variables that effect social and emotional functioning, and approaches foster parents can employ to support socioemotional development. For example, Resource 8.4 “Child/Youth Development and Care” explains the purpose of a developmental screening and describes coping styles of youth with illnesses and disabilities. This offers foster parents insight into the trajectory of social and emotional development specific to the challenges experienced by many of the youth in foster care.

The parenting strategies that improved school-related outcomes for youth (Barber et al., 2005; Fan & Chen, 2001; Gomby et al., 1995; Heller et al., 2002; Jeynes, 2005) are remarkably similar to the foster parenting skills identified in foster parent research as highly correlated with successful fostering (Bass et al., 2004; Buehler et al., 2003; Cooley & Petren, 2011). These foster parenting skills are authoritative parenting practices, creating a nurturing and developmentally appropriate home environment, and effective behavior management tools (Buehler et al., 2006; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). Foster parents’ attitudes and empathy towards children are characteristics that relate directly to authoritative parenting strategies and nurturing, which are correlated with positive educational outcomes (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). Further, foster parents who implemented consistent and developmentally appropriate routines reported greater levels of satisfaction with fostering (Buehler et al., 2003). Fostering relationships can be
enhanced when training addresses specific skills related to empathy, relationship-building, and the emotional needs of youth in foster care (Price et al., 2015; Timmer et al., 2006). These skills gains have been correlated with better child behavior ratings and placement stability (Chamberlain, Price, Leve, et al., 2008; Price et al., 2009).

Literature on the use of parent training to enhance academic outcomes for at-risk youth indicates that parents can be taught strategies for positively affecting socioemotional development in children (Gomby et al., 1995). Self-regulation and social competence have been found to contribute to educational attainment and lifelong success (Farrington et al., 2012; Gomby et al., 1995) and have been identified as leading to improved school performance among foster youth (Shonk & Cicchetti, 2001). Behavior-based foster parent training has been linked to better child behavior ratings and more placement stability (Chamberlain, Price, Leve, et al., 2008; Chamberlain, Price, Reid, et al., 2008; Guerney & Gavigan, 1981; Price et al., 2009). Finally, although the advantages of supportive parenting and educational involvement have been studied (Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2005), foster parents have consistently reported feeling unclear about their role in schooling (Smithgall et al., 2004). Therefore, in addition to gaining specific parenting skills, it is imperative that foster parents are trained for their role in the educational process and in how to effectively support youth in schools.

What instructional strategies are used to teach educational parenting skills and do these strategies foster active or passive learning?

The introduction section of the Massachusetts MAPP manual outlines a list of instructional practices and describes each of the activity types that are included in the various modules. These activity types are activities, speaking points, discussion questions, reflective
questions, and role-plays or pair shares. According to the manual, *activities* are exercises that reinforce learning using various formats, whereas *role plays* and *pair shares* are experiential in nature and allow participants to practice various skills necessary for foster parenting. *Discussion questions* are posed to the whole group, whereas *reflective questions* are for participants to ponder independently. Both are interspersed throughout the modules to provide participants the opportunity to process complex information alone or as a group. *Speaking points* appear in nearly all modules and are scripted messages that facilitators are expected to share with participants. The last section of each module comprises *resources*, which are, essentially, handouts that participants are intended to review before attending the next training session.

Whiting et al. (2007) assessed the Model Approaches to Partnerships in Parenting (MAPP) using a partial context, input, process, product (CIPP) content analysis and coded the teaching approaches according to three categories—role-play or activity, guided discussion, and handouts—to examine alignment with an andragogical framework. Specifically, an andragogically informed foster parent training approach would include consistency between activities and foster parent goals, an emphasis on practical skills, and a collaborative and interactive learning environment (Whiting et al., 2007). Each type of learning experience was then coded as *active* or *passive* to assess alignment with best practices for adult learning. To expand on the coding method offered by Whiting et al. (2007), I examined the teaching practices outlined in the training manual, and I determined which types of activities could be included in the three categories and whether any additional categories should be added. All role-plays prescribed in the Massachusetts MAPP (Massachusetts Department of Children and Families, 2001) are referred to as “activities,” but to be consistent with the coding utilized by Whiting et al. (2007) I designated the category “role-play or activity.” All of the activities involve some
type of active learning. I added one additional category of instructional practice, “speaking points,” and coded all other activities into the existing categories (see Table 2.1).

I analyzed each module for the presence of the different instructional approaches and recorded the length of time designated for each when it was specified. (For example, 15 minutes are allotted for Activity 2.3 “What a Child Brings” in Module 2.) This allowed me to calculate the percentage of time spent on learning exercises that foster active versus passive engagement. Additionally, by examining the format in which the information is presented, I could explore which types of exercises were used with content related to educational parenting. It is useful to know, for instance, how much information about behavior management is presented through active learning, as this teaching approach has been deemed an effective way to aid foster parents in developing such skills (Chamberlain, Price, Leve, et al., 2008; Price et al., 2015). I then used this data to determine which types of skills should be assessed through the survey items.

Table 2.1. Instructional practice domains, corresponding MAPP instructional practices, and participation types associated with each

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pedagogical approach</th>
<th>Learner participation</th>
<th>Specific MAPP activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Role-play or activity</td>
<td>Active</td>
<td>Activities, Role-plays/Pair shares</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guided discussion</td>
<td>Active</td>
<td>Discussion questions, Reflective questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handouts</td>
<td>Passive</td>
<td>Resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking Point</td>
<td>Passive</td>
<td>Speaking point</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Data Analysis

I quantified the data obtained through the analysis of content and pedagogy and used it to respond to the research questions. First, I documented the pedagogical approaches utilized in each of the ten modules. Next, I examined which materials (active and passive) addressed the six content domains of interest: building relationships with foster youth, empathy towards youth,
educational process and role, developmentally appropriate expectations, behavior management, and socioemotional development. This yielded information on the types of learning tasks used to address each domain, as well as the amount of time spent on each. Because the Massachusetts MAPP manual proposes time limits but also encourages facilitators to use time flexibly, the activity duration data reported in this analysis is based solely on the proposed time limits; the exact structure of each module session is inconsistent between training sessions. When the amount of time proposed for an activity is a range (e.g., 5–10 minutes), I presented it as such in the tables but calculated an average when determining the total amount of time spent on a particular type of learning across modules. Finally, I used this data to examine the Massachusetts MAPP’s consistency with recommendations from the literature regarding the content and pedagogy that most effectively improves educational parenting skills.

As noted above, the Massachusetts MAPP manual includes several optional or discussion-based learning exercises. Due to the likely variations in the content conveyed through certain instructional strategies, such as a guided discussion, I analyzed only explicit activities and resources (handouts) for the presence of educational parenting content. For the purposes of the present analysis, I included only tasks that were explicitly labeled (e.g., Activity 2.1) in the analysis. Because multiple trainers facilitate Massachusetts MAPP training statewide, this was necessary to eliminate the effect of variability in implementation. In other words, by focusing solely on the prescribed elements of each module, I had a better sense of the required content and instruction that trainers communicate consistently and uniformly. I coded the pedagogical approaches for all included learning exercises into categories and recorded the duration of each activity when it was specified.
Results

This study’s findings include the instructional practices utilized in each of the modules, the proposed amount of time to spend on each instructional practice in each module, the presence of content related to educational parenting in each module, and the ratio of active versus passive learning for each module and for each educational parenting skill domain. Summaries of the analyses are presented in Table 2.3 and Table 2.4. Table 2.3 includes a list of learning resources and activities for each module, and Table 4 displays the pedagogical practices from each module that target each educational parenting skill.

Seven of the ten modules addressed one or more of the six domains of educational parenting through a combination of activities and/or resources. Nearly every module included all possible teaching approaches (Table 2.3), and all but one of the skill domains (developmentally appropriate expectations) were targeted through a range of instructional practices (Table 2.4). Of the 30 total training hours, approximately 12 ½ were spent on active learning. The active learning time prescribed in each module ranged from 20 minutes in Module 9 (“Panel perspectives in adoptive and foster parenting”) to 140 minutes in Module 7 (“Helping children and youths transition” and “Adolescent youths”). A total of 3 hours and 12 minutes of class time was prescribed for practicing educational parenting skills through activities—approximately a quarter of the total time allocated for active learning tasks across all modules.

The data show that Massachusetts MAPP training included content associated with all aspects of educational parenting through a range of activities and resources. The extent to which each skill was addressed varied widely, and all skills were targeted through more passive than active techniques. Some teaching strategies, such as showing a video, were characterized in the
manual as “activities” but might otherwise be considered passive learning. Because activities and resources could be coded into multiple categories, the materials pertaining to educational parenting often addressed more than one domain. For example, an activity on structuring a home for traumatized youth (Activity 5.2) incorporated content related to building relationships with foster youth, developmentally appropriate expectations, behavior management, and socioemotional development (see Table 2.4). One of the domains (developmentally appropriate expectations) was presented exclusively through handouts that participants could review independently between sessions. Content related to the educational process and foster parents’ role in it was presented in one 10–15 minute video on the educational experiences of youth in care and three resources (Resources 8.10, 8.11, 8.12) on foster parents’ responsibilities related to schooling. Although participants may raise questions about these domains of foster parenting and some Massachusetts MAPP facilitators may share additional information on these topics during discussions or while debriefing various activities, none of the prescribed materials explicitly provided this content during class. Conversely, building relationships with youth, empathy towards youth, and socioemotional development are the three areas of educational parenting on which the greatest amount of in-class time was prescribed.

Research suggests that practice with behavior management skills is vital for preparing foster parents for the role (Bass, n.d.). Interestingly, only one 30-minute activity (Activity 5.2) provided parents with the opportunity to role-play these skills, yet 19 resources were devoted to this topic (more resources than any other educational parenting skill). Thus, foster parents are left to prepare largely independently and through a primarily passive modality for navigating challenging behavior. Over the course of the 30-hour training foster parents participate in only 7
activities related to educational parenting and yet receive 48 resources to review independently on these topics.

I used the data obtained through this curriculum assessment to address the two research questions in the study. Previous research (Bass, n.d.) has shown that foster parent training should teach practical skills and provide opportunities for participants to practice those skills, but foster parents spend approximately 60% of Massachusetts MAPP training time as passive learners. I found that content related to all six of the educational parenting skills was included in the Massachusetts MAPP training. In the 3 hours and 12 minutes prescribed for educational parenting skills, the greatest emphasis was on cultivating empathy for foster youths’ experiences and on teaching foster parents how to develop relationships. The least amount of instructional time was prescribed for teaching foster parents to navigate challenging behavior and for clarifying the foster parents’ role in education. These findings provide valuable information about how content and pedagogy align with the best practices identified in the relevant literature and how educational parenting competencies are supported through training.

These results also pertain to the development of an instrument that can be used to assess foster parents’ educational parenting competence. A modest amount of in-class training time and a substantial number of resources (nearly 50) were prescribed for content that corresponds to educational parenting. This suggests that the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families has deemed these six domains important for inclusion in foster parent training. The instrument under development should, therefore, include questions about these skills and should evaluate not only foster parents’ educational competence but also how these skills improve through training. Such an instrument could yield valuable information about foster parents’ preparedness to support educational engagement as well as measure the effectiveness of the
training in preparing foster parents on these issues in general. This could have implications for training reform and could be useful in identifying foster parents’ needs for ongoing support or additional in-service training.

**Discussion**

Through a content analysis I investigated how Massachusetts MAPP training content and pedagogy supports foster parents skills related to (a) empathy and relationship-building, (b) knowledge and self-efficacy regarding foster parents’ role in the educational process, (c) awareness of developmentally appropriate expectations for youth in schools and at home, and (d) behavior management and socioemotional development. I examined the training materials associated with each module, coded the various instructional practices according to six categories related to the four domains noted above, and included the amount of time designated for each when it was specified. This allowed me to explore the frequency and duration of each type of activity across all ten modules. I coded each instructional practice used in the program as active or passive in its learning approach. I based this coding system on the one employed by Whiting et al. (2007) in a previous analysis of the MAPP curriculum. I will use these results to explore the alignment of the Massachusetts MAPP model with best practices for foster parent training and to develop an instrument for assessing foster parent competence in skill areas that are known to underlie school engagement and educational attainment in at-risk youth.

Research has indicated that foster parents are more likely to retain and apply information and skills when they have access to active learning opportunities (Bass, n.d.; Pecora et al., 2000). Several pedagogical recommendations have emerged in foster parent training literature. Evidence suggests that providing participants the opportunity to role-play behavioral skills contributes to better use of target techniques post-training (Chamberlain, Price, Leve, et al., 2000).
2008; Price et al., 2015). Additionally, when training content offers foster parents information about skills rather than about the child welfare system in general, foster parents tend to report higher training satisfaction and usefulness (Hampson, Schulte, & Ricks, 1983; Hampson & Tavormina, 1980). Similarly, behavior-based programs that explicitly teach parenting practices have been correlated with lower rates of placement disruption (Boyd & Remy, 1978; Chamberlain, Price, Reid, et al., 2008; Price et al., 2008, 2015). Findings from a literature review on foster parent training outcomes (Bass, n.d.) indicate that foster parents’ attitudes about children and sensitivity to youths’ needs can be enhanced when training content teaches foster parents about developing empathy, building relationships, and understanding the complex experiences of foster children.

The data analysis performed in this study provides valuable information about the Massachusetts MAPP curriculum content and the instructional strategies employed to communicate the training objectives. All of the six identified domains of educational parenting (building relationships with youth, empathy towards youth, educational process and role, developmentally appropriate expectations, behavior management, and socioemotional development) were addressed through the training content and most were taught using more than one instructional strategy (see Table 2.4). Approximately 7 of the 34 Massachusetts MAPP activities, amounting to just over 3 hours of in-class time, are devoted to explicitly teaching educational parenting skills, whereas over two thirds of the Massachusetts MAPP resources (48 out of 94) address these topics. In total, the active learning exercises used to teach foster parents about educational parenting skills constituted about one fourth of the total active learning time.

Seven of the ten Massachusetts MAPP modules (“Know the Children,” “Build Strengths/Meet Needs,” “Be Loss and Attachment Experts,” “Manage Behaviors,” “Build
Connections,” “Build Self-Esteem,” and “Assure Health and Safety”) appeared to correspond to skills foster parents need in order to improve educational attainment. However, the active learning time devoted to educational parenting skills within each of these modules varied tremendously. This suggests that foster parents spend far more active learning time on other content areas than they do on educational parenting tactics. Generally speaking, training content is not always directly related to daily child-rearing practices, so although non-educational-parenting knowledge can increase between sessions, there is no indication that this improvement contributes to decreased placement disruption, enhanced positive parenting practices, or lower rates of child misbehavior. Like the Massachusetts MAPP, many preservice training programs provide future foster parents with information about how the child welfare system works and about role expectations, but the programs do not focus on the skills foster parents can use to address the needs of the children in their care (Bass, n.d.). Research has shown that foster parents need (and want) explicit practice with behavioral skills and that acquiring such skills is associated with better outcomes (Bass, n.d.; Pecora et al., 2000).

The present study focuses on the training content and pedagogical practices that have been correlated with positive educational outcomes for foster youth. In addition to certain parenting skills, this training content includes information about the role of foster parents in supporting foster youth in schools. Whiting et al. (2007) noted that the MAPP emphasized active learning to a greater extent than other preservice training models did. Interestingly, a majority of the content that had to do with schooling and the role of foster parents in the educational process was optional and, therefore, the extent to which it was addressed probably varied widely between training groups. In other words, although the MAPP included some andragogical best practices for teaching, the active learning exercises may not be related to the
types of skills that research has indicated foster parents need in order to feel successful and to affect meaningful long-term outcomes. Therefore, the content that foster parents are most likely to retain may not be well aligned with the skills they need to support the child who will be placed in their home.

For this study, I coded only activities with prescribed time limits and scripts because the rest of the training manual includes optional content to be presented at the discretion of the facilitator. This allows the facilitators a certain amount of flexibility in their teaching approach and provides the opportunity to follow a given group’s particular interest. Although there are benefits associated with this freedom, it is difficult to ensure that the training is implemented consistently and with fidelity. It is possible that Massachusetts MAPP groups do not receive the same information, which could have an effect on foster parent knowledge, skills, and outcomes, as well as on the reliability of research on this program. Specifically, most of the information related to educational issues for foster youth is presented in the form of handouts that participants are meant to review independently between sessions and through optional statements that facilitators may or may not make. Only a portion of each module is scripted and timed, so it is likely that the facilitators or participants in some groups cover educational parenting content thoroughly. Meanwhile, the facilitators in other groups may skip over content that prepares foster parents for their role in the educational process, which is important for preparing foster youth for school success.

The information about the Massachusetts MAPP curriculum and pedagogy that I derived from the present analysis has several implications for the development of an instrument that can be used to assess foster parents’ preparedness to parent in ways that support educational engagement. First, all of the six domains associated with educational parenting are addressed in
the training, with varying levels of depth and in-class time. This means that it is particularly important to evaluate foster parents’ educational parenting skills (e.g., behavior management practices, maintaining developmentally appropriate routines in the home). Such skills are not only presented in the training but are identified as vital according to research on foster parent training (Buehler et al., 2006). More specifically, child welfare agencies should be able to use screening to determine foster parents’ knowledge of their role in the educational life of foster children. If foster parents are inconsistently informed about their responsibilities and rights related to educational decision-making and advocacy, the instrument under development could be used to identify areas of confusion that can be addressed through additional training or ongoing support from the Department. Without additional assessment, this could remain an area of uncertainty, wherein some foster parents intuit appropriate support methods based on their experiences or skills, whereas others find themselves frustrated or insecure about the expectations placed on them.

Aligning MAPP curriculum with educational parenting survey items has several potential benefits. First, while the instrument is intended to assess skills and knowledge, child welfare workers could also use data collected at the pre-test stage to respond to deficits by targeting particular skills and knowledge through the training. Educational parenting skills are believed to have tremendous practical value and, therefore, represent key competencies that would enhance foster care in general. Accordingly, post-test administration of this instrument has the potential to be used to assess the quality of the MAPP training program which, to date, has not demonstrated benefits to foster parents (Lee & Holland, 1991; Puddy & Jackson, 2003). Finally, the post-post assessment of foster parents, could yield valuable data about the characteristics of foster parents who are satisfied with the role as well as needs for in-service foster parent training.
Findings from this curriculum analysis explicate how the MAPP content and pedagogy align with the concepts needed to enhance educational parenting competence.

**Limitations**

The present study has several limitations. First, the curriculum was analyzed by a single researcher rather than by a team, so determinations about categorizing learning exercises into the six domains could not be reliably verified. Future research on this topic should involve multiple researchers to enhance the reliability of the coding and to ensure the replicability of the method. Additionally, I coded only activities and resources because they were the two types of instruction that I estimated to be most consistent across trainings. However, an in-class discussion inspired by an activity or resource could result in additional active learning time on a given educational parenting concept, but there is no way to consistently assess this training content without conducting observations of multiple trainings. Additional research is needed to examine what exactly foster parents learn through Massachusetts MAPP training, and whether and how this varies across training cohorts. I attempted to control for this by evaluating only the scripted components, but there is no way to fully address this variability.

**Next steps**

Foster parent outcomes post-training have been evaluated using a combination of informal assessments of training content knowledge (Puddy & Jackson, 2003) and parenting scales that were developed for non-foster parents (see Table 1.3 Foster parent training type, outcomes by category, and measures in Bass, n.d.). No studies have demonstrated that training resulted in benefits that directly relate to authoritative parenting skills or to foster parents’ ability
to foster the socioemotional skill development of youth in their care. This suggests that the MAPP training does not comprehensively provide foster parents with the skills necessary for supporting foster youth in schools. It is difficult to discern whether these findings indicate a measurement error—because the instrument used, the Adolescent/Adult Parenting Inventory (AAPI; Bavolek & Keene, 1984; Cocoran & Fischer, 1987), may not adequately assess the gains made by foster parents through MAPP—or whether the skills were already in an acceptable range at the pre-test stage. Future research on the effects of training on foster parenting outcomes should consider the use of other instruments to address limitations in the validity of the current measurement methods. The curriculum analysis in the current study was conducted to collect the data needed to develop a new instrument to assess post-training outcomes for foster parents.

The results of this study will be used to develop the first iteration of a Likert-type instrument that can be efficiently completed by preservice foster parents to assess their educational parenting competence. The survey under development is intended for administration prior to MAPP training and again upon completion of the program, and it will be piloted in Massachusetts to explore post-training changes in educational parenting skills. More specifically, the results from this curriculum analysis suggest that the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families places an importance on educational parenting skills and, therefore, the categories of competence established in this study appear to be consistent with Department goals for foster parent training. Therefore, the survey items should include questions about knowledge and perceived competence in each of six identified domains. Following the first phase of instrument development, a focus group composed of expert foster parents will be held to further explore the alignment of these skills with the practical knowledge needed to support foster youth in schools.
Table 2.1. Instructional practice domains, corresponding MAPP instructional practices, and participation types associated with each

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pedagogical approach</th>
<th>Learner participation</th>
<th>Specific MAPP activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Role-play or activity</td>
<td>Active</td>
<td>Activities, Role-plays/Pair shares</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guided discussion</td>
<td>Active</td>
<td>Discussion questions, Reflective questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handouts</td>
<td>Passive</td>
<td>Resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking Point</td>
<td>Passive</td>
<td>Speaking point</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.2. MAPP Principles, Modules, Core Values, and Tenets of Adult Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MAPP skills</th>
<th>Modules</th>
<th>Core practice values</th>
<th>Adult education tenets</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Assess and build on individual and family strengths and needs; build on strengths and meet needs.</td>
<td>I. Introduction—welcome and group preparation</td>
<td>Child-driven</td>
<td>Andragogy (adult learning)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>II. Working with the Department of Children and Families</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Communicate effectively with child welfare.</td>
<td>I. Understanding the impact of fostering and adopting</td>
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<td></td>
<td>II. Understanding the role of loss in the lives of children and youth</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Identify strengths and needs of youth in care; recognize the impact of abuse and neglect.</td>
<td>I. Understanding behaviors associated with loss in children’s/youths’ lives</td>
<td>Family-centered</td>
<td>Self-directed learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>II. Helping children and youths with attachment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Build strengths; meet needs.</td>
<td>I. Adoptive and foster family communication and connections</td>
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<td>5. Work in partnership with youth, birth families, and child welfare to help youth achieve permanency.</td>
<td>II. Cultural competence</td>
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<td></td>
<td>III. Domestic violence</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Help children and youth develop skills to manage loss and attachment and minimize the risk of future</td>
<td>I. Understanding how trauma impacts children’s/youths’ lives</td>
<td>Community-focused</td>
<td>Experiential learning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
II. Sexual abuse

I. Substance use, misuse, and dependence

II. Helping children and youths learn to manage their behaviors

Discipline and children/youths in care
Behavior management

7. Teach healthy behaviors and safe choices by helping youth identify their emotions and through parenting practices.

II. Helping children and youths learn to manage their behaviors

8. Help youth develop/maintain relationships that keep them connected to their pasts.

II. Adolescent youths

Adolescent development and needs
Needs of youths who are GLBTQ

9. Help youth develop a positive self-concept and positive family, cultural, and racial identity.

I. Mental health

II. Physical health

10. Assure health and safety.

I. Panel perspectives in adoptive and foster parenting

11. Assess impact: Assess the ways fostering and/or adopting will affect your family.

II. Graduation and next steps

12. Make an informed decision

Strength-based

Multiple learning styles and situations

Table 2.3. Curriculum overview, activity types, and summaries

Committed to cultural diversity and cultural competence

Critical thinking

Committed to continuous learning
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Module title</th>
<th>Role-play or activity</th>
<th>Guided discussion</th>
<th>Speaking point</th>
<th>Handout</th>
<th>Time prescribed for role-play/activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. Introduction—welcome and group preparation</td>
<td>1.1 Icebreakers (15 mins)</td>
<td>DQ*: Why are foster and pre-adoptive parents in the same training? (5 mins)</td>
<td>DCF mission statement</td>
<td>1.1 Departmental foster care and adoption</td>
<td>75 mins + 15 mins guided discussion</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1.2 Strengths and needs (20 mins)</td>
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<td>1.2 Criteria for mutual selection</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1.3 What’s it all about (20 mins)</td>
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<td>1.3 Mutual selection and assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td>II. Working with the Department of Children and Families</td>
<td>1.4 Birth, foster, and adoptive families activity (20 mins)</td>
<td>RQ*: What would you need to know if a child or youth you care about needed to be placed into foster care? (10 mins)</td>
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<td>1.4 Sample service plan</td>
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<td>1.5 Sample foster care review findings</td>
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<td>1.6 Child protective process</td>
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<tr>
<td>I. Understanding the impact of fostering and adopting</td>
<td>2.1 Pair share/role-play: Introducing child to various community members (10 mins)</td>
<td>DQ: Why do you think that families have changed [defining family]? (5 mins)</td>
<td>Different kinds of families are involved with DCF.</td>
<td>2.1 Characteristics of a family system</td>
<td>35 mins + 10 mins guided discussion</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2.2 Effects of adoption on marriage: Case study (10 mins)</td>
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<td>2.2 Hopes and fears</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>II. Understanding the role of loss in the lives of children and youth</td>
<td>2.3 What a child brings (15 mins)</td>
<td>DQ: Who loses when a child/youth is no longer able to live at home? What do they lose? (5 mins)</td>
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<td>2.3 Effects of foster care</td>
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<td>2.4 First day</td>
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<td>2.5 Appropriate adoption and foster care language choices</td>
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<td>2.6 Maturational and situational loss</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| I. Understanding behaviors associated with loss in children’s/youths’ lives | 3.1 Loss pairs: How to assist youth who are grieving (30 mins)  
3.2 Yarn activity: Understanding how attachments affect youth (35 minutes)  
3.3 Role-play “Theresa”: Case example of DCF process (45 minutes) | Awareness of individual responses to grief  
Foster parents will be exposed to emotional situations that may be triggering.  
Children who are DCF involved may have experienced disrupted attachment. | 3.1 Stages of grieving  
3.2 Behaviors of children/youths in each of the stages of grief  
3.3 How to help children and youths who are grieving  
3.4 The role of culture in helping children/youths recover from trauma or loss  
3.5 Merilee’s case  
3.6 Impact of children’s/youths’ losses on foster and adoptive parents  
3.7 Understand Laurie/Understand Carlos  
3.8 Easing the transition into a new home  
3.9 Special projects | 110 mins |
| II. Helping children and youths with attachment |  |  |  |  |
| III. Adoptive and foster family communication and connections | 4.1 Audio message: Birth parent (10 mins)  
4.2 Audio message: Foster parent (10 mins)  
4.3 “Vanessa’s Hair” role-play: Cultural competence | Ongoing communication with birth families helps youth.  
Maintain a connection to a child’s culture to enhance his/her self- | 4.1 The importance of birth parents  
4.2 Providing support before and after visits  
4.3 Locations for visitation: Advantages and disadvantages  
4.4 Bill of rights: Children/youths in | 90 mins + 15 mins guided discussion |
| 4.1 violence | DQ: What are some things that may negatively affect a visit? How would you navigate these situations? (5 mins) | Foster care and building resiliency in children/youths who witness violence | 4.4 Audio message: Adoptive parent (10 mins)  
4.5 Bead activity: Understanding diversity (20 mins)  
4.6 Family shapes: How a family system changes with the addition of a member of a different race or culture (15 mins)  
4.7 What to do: Situational experience, How would you react to various situations (10 mins) | 4.5 Foster/pre-adoptive parent agreements  
4.6 Dealing with diversity adversity  
4.7 Learning about a child/youth’s culture  
4.8 Incorporating a child/youth’s culture and traditions into daily life  
4.9 Community supports for cultural identity  
4.10 The life book  
4.11 Symptoms in children/youths who witness a parent’s abuse  
4.12 Domestic violence: Effects, survival skills, and interventions  
4.13 Principles of support for children/youths who witness violence  
4.14 Protective factors and building resiliency in children/youths  
4.15 The impact of placement on self-concept |  
4.8 Foster families are responsible for surrounding youth with a community of supportive people.  
Maintain good communication with the child’s social worker. |  |  |  |
| I. Understanding how trauma impacts children’s/youths’ lives | 5.1 Vignettes of traumatized children/youths and what they need: Structuring the home to help traumatized youth (20 mins) | DQ: How many infants or youths who come into care have not had basic needs met? (5 mins) |
| II. Sexual abuse | 5.2 The healing home: Structuring a home to help traumatized youth (30 mins) | Neglect, abuse, domestic violence, substance abuse, and sexual abuse impact development of trust. |
| | 5.1 Developmental expectations, quirks, and abnormalities (younger children) | Trauma often leads to fear for safety and feelings of powerlessness. |
| | 5.2 Developmental expectations, quirks, and abnormalities (older children) | Youth who experienced sexual abuse have special needs that must be met so they can feel a sense of safety. |
| | 5.3 Typical stages of development | Youth who experience sexual abuse cope in different ways. |
| | 5.4 Expected child development | It can be difficult to determine youths needs related to sexual development, but they should have opportunities to talk about it. |
| | 5.5 Early warning signs of abuse and neglect | 5.10 Behavioral issues of children/youths who have been sexually abused |
| | 5.6 Working with traumatized children/youths | 5.11 Healthy sexuality: Common sexual behaviors in children |
| | 5.7 Situational and behavioral checklist | 5.9 Keeping children/youths safe from physical and sexual aggression |
| | 5.8 Indicators of child sexual abuse | 5.10 Behavioral issues of children/youths who have been sexually abused |
| | 5.12 Keeping children/youths safe from physical and sexual aggression | 5.11 Healthy sexuality: Common sexual behaviors in children |

Total Time: 50 mins + 15 mins guided discussion
I. Substance use, misuse, and dependence

II. Helping children and youths learn to manage their behaviors
   - Discipline and children/youths in care
   - Behavior management

6.1 This weekend on TV: Exposing negative stereotypes about substance abusers (15 mins)
6.2 Candy bar: Positive reinforcement (15 mins)
6.3 Behaviors have you up a wall? Practice applying “16 Behavior Management Techniques” (15 mins)

DQ: What are some possible reasons that children and youths come into care? How do these circumstances affect emotional and behavioral responses? (10 mins)

DQ: Why is it not appropriate to utilize two different forms of punishment in one home? (5 mins)

Caring for children/youths who are in DCF custody and have been mistreated by adults. Foster parents can help restore self-esteem through appropriate discipline.

Discipline, self-esteem, and behavior management are interrelated. When youth learn discipline, they experience improved self-esteem and can better manage their own behavior.

6.1 Guidelines: When it is substance abuse and when it isn’t
6.2 Signs of substance use, misuse, or dependence in children/youths
6.3 Tips for caretakers of substance-exposed infants
6.4 Safety planning activity
6.5 The roles of children/youths in dysfunctional homes
6.6 Beliefs about discipline and rules
6.7 Side effects of physical punishment
6.8 De-escalation skills and strategies
6.9 Approaching discipline with children/youths who have been abused or neglected
6.10 Social reinforcements
6.11 Time-in
6.12 Natural and logical consequences
6.14 Ignoring behaviors

45 mins + 15 mins guided discussion
### I. Helping children and youths transition

#### II. Adolescent youths
- **Adolescent development and needs**
- **Needs of youths who are GLBTQ**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7.1 Guided Imagery: To better understand the experiences of youth in care (30 mins)</td>
<td>7.2 Digital stories, Project Youth Connect: Stories of youth who have experienced foster care (30 mins)</td>
<td>DQ: What do you think is the most difficult aspect of fostering or adopting an older youth? (5 mins)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3 Identity/expression activity: Learning what it feels like to hide who you are (30 mins)</td>
<td>7.4 Risk and resiliency factors (15 mins)</td>
<td>Unless deemed inappropriate, DCF encourages contact between foster parents and the children they have fostered. During times of transition to a new home, foster parents should be aware of their own feelings and access appropriate supports. To develop independence, youth need to practice separating from adults and seeking support beyond the family. Everyone has multiple identities, we are going to explore different</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.5 Back to basics: The LBGTTSSQQIA alphabet soup exercise (15 mins)</td>
<td>7.6 How do we help and support LGBTQ youth? (15 mins)</td>
<td>7.1 Planning a move: Family reunification 7.2 Planning a move: Adoption 7.3 Planning a move: From foster family to foster family 7.4 Developmental tasks of youth and the impact of maltreatment 7.5 Top reasons to foster and/or adopt a youth 7.6 Ten things youths in care want you to know about them 7.7 Five things to help youths who identify as GLBTQ</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

135 mins + 5 mins guided discussion
types of identities and how they are expressed.

[after reading stat about GLB youth being 3 times more likely to get pregnant or impregnate someone than heterosexual youth] This often surprises me. Perhaps this happens as youth try to overcompensate. We need more comprehensive sexual health education for all youth.

Let’s step back and make sure we have working definitions for common terms. The acronym LGBTTTSQQIA is from a youth organization.

Here’s a bonus question! If you
know someone who is transgender, what do you know about who they want to date? The correct answer is “nothing!” A person’s sexual orientation and gender identity are completely separate.

Each one of us has a biological sex, gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation. People identify at all points along the continuum. Also, these identities operate independently of each other.

DCF does not tolerate homophobia or transphobia in the same way it does not tolerate racism. If youth share their identity as LGBTQ, it is important that you have knowledge
of how to be supportive. It is important that all social service affiliates are sensitive to their needs and assure them that they are safe.

If you are interested in fostering an LGBTQ youth or becoming involved in trainings about this topic, please let your family resource worker know.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I. Mental health</th>
<th>II. Physical health</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| 8.1 Buckets activity: To help illustrate the different symptoms and the overlap between diagnoses (30 mins)  
8.2 Digital stories, Perspectives in education from youth who experience foster care: Discuss beliefs, fears, and questions participants have | 8.1 Important information to bring to a doctor’s appointment  
8.2 Questions to ask when interviewing a pediatrician  
8.3 Medical examinations for children/youths entering DCF placement or custody  
8.4 Child/youth development and care  
8.5 Sample medical passport |
| DQ: What do you think the most common diagnoses are for children/youths in care? (10 mins)  
DQ: What do you think you need to consider when identifying a physician to care for the child or youth in your | 50–60 mins + 20 mins guided discussion |
<p>| Children/youths who are in DCF care may have a history of poor health care, drug exposure, poor nutrition, and environmental issues. They often experience more frequent and severe health problems and foster/pre-adoptive parents should seek medical care accordingly. | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I. Panel perspectives in adoptive and foster parenting</th>
<th>9.1 Welcome game: Introducing panelists to participants (20 mins)</th>
<th>9.1 Legal case vignettes</th>
<th>20 mins</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. Legal aspects</td>
<td>10.1 Constructing an eco-map: A means of illustrating history and relationships (30 mins)</td>
<td>10.1 Important definitions for foster and pre-adoptive parents</td>
<td>60 mins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Graduation and next steps</td>
<td></td>
<td>10.2 Being an effective team member in</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 8.3 Responsible for this child, pair share: Handling a parentified child (10-15 mins) | care? (5 mins) | Regardless of the various relationship dynamics that may be present…your role is that of “parent” …in that moment of this child/youth’s life, in that school principal’s office, in that therapist’s lobby…you are this child/youth’s parent….in terms of confidential information, you should also assume the role of advocate. | | 8.6 Sample encounter form | 8.7 MassHealth fact sheet | 8.8 Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) fact sheet | 8.9 Physical health: General information | 8.10 Parents helping teachers and schools | 8.11 Improving educational outcomes for children/youths involved with DCF | 8.12 Information on special education decision-making for foster parents | 8.13 For additional information |
| 10.2 Self-care pair share: Identify needs and supports (30 mins) | court. Ultimately, the Court makes the final decision in the best interest of the child/youth. Under the law all adults working with children/youths are mandated to report any suspicion of abuse/neglect. Mandated reporters are protected from civil action under this same law. | decision-making 10.3 Reimbursement stipend for foster parents 10.4 Adoption subsidies 10.5 Guardianship subsidies 10.6 Creating an eco-map 10.7 Taking care of the caretaker 10.8 Tips for self-care for foster and pre-adoptive parents |

*“Reflective Questions” are denoted as “RQ” and “Discussion Questions” are denoted as “DQ.”
*Speaking points are summarized to reflect the content
Table 2.4. Presence and type of content related to six skills associated with the domains of educational parenting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Module title</th>
<th>Building relationships with foster youth</th>
<th>Empathy towards youth</th>
<th>Educational process and role</th>
<th>Developmentally appropriate expectations</th>
<th>Behavior management</th>
<th>Socioemotional development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. Introduction—welcome and group preparation</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>II. Working with the Department of Children and Families</td>
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<tr>
<td>I. Understanding the impact of fostering and adopting</td>
<td>Resource 2.1</td>
<td>Resource 2.6</td>
<td>Resource 2.1, 2.4</td>
<td>Resource 2.1</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Understanding the role of loss in the lives of children and youth</td>
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<tr>
<td>I. Adoptive and foster family communication and connections</td>
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<tr>
<td>II. Cultural competence</td>
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<tr>
<td>III. Domestic violence</td>
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<tr>
<td>I. Understanding how trauma impacts children’s/youths’ lives</td>
<td>Activity 5.2, Resource 5.1, 5.2</td>
<td>Resource 5.6</td>
<td>Resource 5.1, 5.2, 5.4, 5.11</td>
<td>Activity 5.2, Resource 5.1, 5.2, 5.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Activities/Resources</td>
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<tr>
<td>II. Sexual abuse</td>
<td>Resource 6.3, 6.9, Activity 6.2, 6.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>I. Substance use, misuse, and dependence</td>
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<tr>
<td>II. Helping children and youths learn to manage their behaviors</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discipline and children/youths in care</td>
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<tr>
<td>Behavior management</td>
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<tr>
<td>I. Helping children and youths transition</td>
<td>Activity 7.1, Resource 7.7</td>
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<td>II. Adolescent youths</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adolescent development and needs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Needs of youths who are GLBTQ</td>
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<tr>
<td>I. Mental health</td>
<td>Activity 8.2, Resource 8.10, 8.11, 8.12</td>
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<tr>
<td>II. Physical health</td>
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<tr>
<td>I. Panel perspectives in adoptive and foster parenting</td>
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<tr>
<td>I. Legal aspects</td>
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<td>II. Graduation and next</td>
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<tr>
<td>steps</td>
<td>3 activities</td>
<td>3 activities</td>
<td>1 activity</td>
<td>0 activity</td>
<td>1 activity</td>
<td>3 activities</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOTALS</td>
<td>14 resources</td>
<td>6 resources</td>
<td>4 resources</td>
<td>7 resources</td>
<td>19 resources</td>
<td>14 resources</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Participants are instructed to review the resources between classes and the first 15 minutes of class is supposed to be devoted to answering questions about the resources.
CHAPTER 3

THE REFINEMENT OF AN INSTRUMENT FOR ASSESSING FOSTER PARENTS’ EDUCATIONAL PARENTING SKILLS USING FOCUS GROUPS AND COGNITIVE INTERVIEWS

Introduction

The present study concerns the development of a scale to assess foster parents’ skills, knowledge, and attitudes related to promoting successful educational engagement among foster youth. The benefit of this instrument is twofold. First, educational attainment is a predictor of lifelong success (Jones, Greenberg, & Crowley, 2015), and foster parents have the potential to play a pivotal role in promoting academic engagement among foster youth. Second, the assessment of foster parent competence in addressing the educational needs of youth in foster care can provide valuable insight regarding foster parent training and the adequacy of extant models, such as the Model Approaches to Partnerships in Parenting (MAPP; Mayers-Pasztor, 1987), in cultivating specific aptitudes required for foster parenting. This instrument is also intended to improve alignment between training content and pedagogy and the desired skills foster parents should possess to improve outcomes for youth. Ultimately, the resultant measure could be used to reform foster parent training content and/or pedagogy, to ensure foster parents’ preparedness to parent in ways that set the stage for educational attainment and success into adulthood, or to inform future research on long-term outcomes for youth in foster care.

Socioemotional skills (e.g., self-regulation, social competence, motivation) have been positively correlated with educational attainment, and the relevant literature has suggested that foster parents can help foster children develop socioemotional skills by demonstrating authoritative parenting skills (Farrington et al., 2012; Shonk & Cicchetti, 2001). When parents balance clear rules and high expectations with empathic encouragement (Buehler, Rhodes, Orme,
& Cuddeback, 2006; Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2005; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998), children can experience enhanced educational outcomes (Barber, Stolz, & Olsen, 2005) as well as improved self-regulatory skills and social competence (Gomby et al., 1995). In turn, when foster youth demonstrate strong social and behavioral skills they tend to perform better in school (Shonk & Cicchetti, 2001), experience fewer placement disruptions (Trout, Hagaman, Casey, Reid, & Epstein, 2008), and transition more smoothly to adulthood (Farrington et al., 2012). The “educational parenting” skills that initially emerged from a review of the relevant literature (Bass, n.d) are (a) empathy and relationship-building, (b) knowledge and self-efficacy regarding the foster parent role in the educational process, (c) awareness of developmentally appropriate expectations for youth in schools and at home, and (d) behavior management and socioemotional development. Research on foster parenting has suggested that these competencies are the most important for successful fostering and the most effective for improving school-related outcomes. In other words, if foster parents are trained to develop skills in each of these areas, foster youth are likely to experience more positive outcomes in terms of placement stability and school engagement.

A few measures have been developed to evaluate foster parent skills, attitudes, knowledge, and characteristics as a means of assessing competence and preparedness to foster (Buehler, Cox, & Cuddeback, 2003; Le Prohn, 1993; Orme, Cuddeback, Buehler, Cox, & Le Prohn, 2007; Stockdale, Crase, Lekies, Yates, & Gillis-Arnold, 1997; Stone & Stone, 1983). Most of these instruments evaluate very specific aspects of foster parenting and have a range of applications, from assessing foster parent applicants’ characteristics (Buehler et al., 2003; Stone & Stone, 1983) to examining particular foster parenting practices and attitudes (Harden, Meisch, Vick & Pandohie-Johnson, 2008; Le Prohn, 1993). Table 1 lists foster-parent-specific
instruments. Most of these measures have been piloted and validated using factor analyses but are not consistently used in the assessment of foster parent training programs (Touliatos, Perlmutter, & Strauss, 2001). Although a handful of the measures noted in this table assess various aspects of foster parent fitness, none focus specifically on the parenting behaviors and attitudes that promote positive educational outcomes. Interestingly, none of these measures were implemented in any of the foster parent training outcome studies noted in the literature review associated with the present study.

Foster parent measures have not been widely implemented in the research on foster parent training, which further highlights potential inconsistencies between training evaluations and the practical skills foster parents need to be successful. Meanwhile, education can be a protective factor for foster youth and is a suitable measure of wellbeing. Because so many foster youth are identified as having special needs of some kind (Trout et al., 2008), and because youth in foster care experience chronic school failure, it is vital that foster parents are equipped with the skills and characteristics necessary to support these youth in schools.

Foster parents are an underutilized resource for educational support and advocacy for foster youth, and few interventions have targeted them in efforts to improve academic outcomes for youth in foster care (Emerson & Lovitt, 2003), nor are foster parents afforded training in this area (Bass, Shields, & Behrman, 2004; Cooley & Petren, 2011). Furthermore, existing measures of foster parents’ fitness and attitudes do not specifically assess knowledge and competence in the parenting skills that proactively support academic achievement (which is, again, an important indicator of stability in adulthood). There is a need to create foster parent measures that integrate (a) the assessment of foster-parent-specific competencies with (b) parenting practices that are shown in the relevant literature to promote educational engagement. The present study addresses
this gap by creating an instrument that can be used to evaluate foster parents’ competence in areas of parenting that facilitate improved educational outcomes for youth in care.

Table 3.1 Summary of foster parent measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instrument</th>
<th>Author, Date</th>
<th>Measure Overview</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes Towards Foster Parenting Inventory</td>
<td>Lekies, Yates, Stockdale, &amp; Crase, 1998</td>
<td>26 Likert items about prospective foster parents’ expectations about fostering, foster children, and agency support.</td>
<td>Evaluate pre- and post-training experiences of foster parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casey Foster Parent Inventory-Applicant Version</td>
<td>Buehler et al., 2003</td>
<td>74 Likert items related to the 12 domains of foster parenting (Buehler et al., 2006)</td>
<td>Assess foster parent strengths and weaknesses prior to fostering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster Parent Attitudes Questionnaire (FPAQ)</td>
<td>Harden et al., 2008</td>
<td>40 Likert items related to 6 constructs informed by 12 domains (Buehler et al., 2006)</td>
<td>Measure foster parent attitudes in constructs identified as central to stable fostering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster Parent Potential Scale (FPPS)</td>
<td>Orme et al., 2007</td>
<td>8 Likert items related to home environment, family and marital functioning, parental mental health, and social support</td>
<td>Assess potential foster parents prior to licensing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster Parent Role Performance Scale (FPRP)</td>
<td>Le Prohn, 2004</td>
<td>40 Likert items to rate perceived responsibility of foster parents for tasks associated with caring for a foster child</td>
<td>Examine foster parent and social worker perceptions of responsibility for foster care tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction with Foster Parenting Inventory</td>
<td>Lekies, Yates, Crase, &amp; Stockdale 1998</td>
<td>22 Likert items on foster parents’ satisfaction related to demands of the role, child welfare agency support, and personal satisfaction</td>
<td>Evaluate experiences of foster parents one year post-training</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Methods

The current iteration of the instrument (Appendix B) was developed over the course of three phases. The first phase of instrument development was informed primarily by findings obtained through a comprehensive literature and curriculum analyses (G. Bass, n.d.), so it was important to determine whether the competencies identified in the literature review were consistent with the beliefs and experiences of foster parents themselves. The second and third phases of instrument development involved a focus group and cognitive interviewing, respectively, which were used to assess the accuracy of the proposed instrument by soliciting feedback from foster parents (Willis, 2004). The focus group provided useful insight into whether the constructs that underlie the instrument are valid in practice and into foster parents’ recommended inclusion of additional competencies in the measure. Information from the focus group was used to make revisions to the instrument (Willis, 2004). After developing the second iteration of the instrument, I conducted cognitive interviews to collect data that I used to improve the quality and legibility of the instrument and to refine a third iteration.

This study focuses on the second and third phases of instrument development: the focus group and cognitive interviews used to identify the parenting characteristics that are most important in practice and to further refine the construction of specific survey items.

First Phase: Literature Review, MAPP Curriculum Analysis, and First Iteration of Survey Instrument

The first phase of the multistep procedure used to develop this instrument was the identification of the appropriate constructs around which to develop survey items. Salient skills and characteristics associated with educational parenting were derived from relevant literature on school engagement and foster parent education. These constructs were then examined further by
exploring their alignment with the Massachusetts MAPP curriculum (Massachusetts Department of Children and Families; 2001).

Four primary educational parenting constructs were uncovered through the literature analysis (Bass, n.d.): (a) empathy and relationship-building, (b) knowledge and self-efficacy regarding the foster parent role in the educational process, (c) awareness of developmentally appropriate expectations for youth in schools and at home, and (d) behavior management and socioemotional development. For the purposes of the MAPP curriculum analysis, these four domains were expanded into six parenting skill areas: (a) building relationships with youth, (b) empathy towards youth, (c) educational process and role, (d) developmentally appropriate expectations, (e) behavior management, and (f) social-emotional development. The curriculum analysis revealed that foster parents are trained in these areas to some extent but that the training methods used to teach such skills are not consistently aligned with pedagogical best practices (Bass, n.d.). Results from the literature and curriculum analyses were used to develop the first iteration of a survey that could be administered before and after MAPP training to assess foster parents’ perceptions of educational parenting competence.

This initial iteration of the instrument included 150 items about foster parents’ perceived preparedness to exhibit certain characteristics and utilize educational parenting skills in the six aforementioned domains: building relationships with youth (27 items), empathy towards youth (21 items), educational process and role (23 items), developmentally appropriate expectations (25 items), behavior management (32 items), and social-emotional development (22 items). I selected an ordinal closed-ended format, which is conducive to efficient analysis and comparison of pre- and post-training results (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2014). To be consistent with survey development best practice, items used plain language and vocabulary that is
communicated through MAPP, and all items are comprehensible to those with a 6th-grade reading level (Dillman et al., 2014). The items were categorized to correspond to each of the six educational parenting domains identified through the literature and curriculum analyses, and items were aimed at assessing latent variables related to these domains through questions about behaviors and self-perception of skills. This method is similar to the method applied by the researchers who created the Casey Foster Parent Inventory (Orme et al., 2007). Extant measures, such as the Foster Parent Attitudes Questionnaire (FPAQ; Harden et al., 2008) and the Casey Family Applicant Inventory-Applicant version (Orme et al., 2007), were also developed with input from foster parents as a means of confirming that the constructs upon which the instruments were based are, in fact, salient among the populations for whom the instrument would ultimately be used.

**Second Phase: Focus Group**

The purpose of the focus group was to examine whether experienced foster parents believe that the aforementioned topic domains have practical validity and are consistent with the skills they find to be necessary for supporting the educational development of foster youth. Identifying experts involved recruiting a sample of foster parents who had demonstrated skill navigating school-related issues with children in the foster care. This particular sample was chosen because they had long-term experience as foster parents and were expected to possess the characteristics needed to engage in educational parenting. They had all completed the Massachusetts MAPP training program and were aware of how the content covered related to the actual skills they needed to be successful in the foster parenting role. Data provided by this
expert group was particularly valuable in examining constructs, refining items, and considering applications for the instrument.

Verifying question constructs with experts is an important step in evaluating draft questionnaires (DeVellis, 2003; Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2014), and focus groups are useful for investigating the topics around which a questionnaire has been created (Krueger, 1994; Snijkers, 2002 in Willis 2004). When implemented in the survey development process, it can be particularly helpful to conduct a focus group as a means of informing item construction and refinement before initiating a cognitive interviewing protocol (Fowler, 1995 in Willis 2004). This focus group offered an important opportunity for foster parents to vet the content and allowed me to investigate the adequacy of the topics covered on the instrument under development.

In this study, the focus group explored how the educational parenting characteristics targeted in the first iteration of the instrument compared to the practical skills they have found most beneficial for improving school-related skills. This focus group comprised five foster parents who were recognized by social workers and fellow foster parents as particularly skilled in navigating the child welfare and education systems in ways that positively affected foster youth. In addition to participating in the focus group, participants were asked to fill out a brief demographic survey and to complete a cognitive interview process. Participant recruitment, the format of the focus group, and procedures for analyzing data and refining the instrument are described in detail below.

Results from the focus group were used to develop the second iteration of the survey, which was further refined in the third phase of development.
Third Phase: Cognitive Interviews

The third phase involved the use of cognitive interviews to address the reliability and validity of the second iteration of the instrument. Cognitive interviewing is a means of enhancing the reliability and validity of a measure by addressing the clarity of items and the extent to which they are addressing the desired content (Willis, 2004). The goal of this study’s cognitive interviews was to examine (a) how respondents understand the survey items, (b) what kinds of information respondents draw from to answer survey items and their strategies for retrieving such information, (c) how respondents make decisions about selecting an answer, and (d) whether respondents can fit their generated responses into the specific items posed on the survey (Willis, 2004). Because the wording of specific survey items is addressed with this method, the reliability of a questionnaire can also be enhanced through cognitive interviews. Data obtained through cognitive interviews can indicate whether survey items address the desired aspects of the respondents’ perceptions of the items, which improves content validity (Willis, 2004). In the present study, cognitive interviewing was used to improve the validity of the instrument by providing an opportunity for active foster parents to examine the items and offer feedback on their construction and appropriateness.

I implemented the think-aloud approach, as well as specific and general probes that corresponded with items on the second iteration of the instrument, to identify issues related to the clarity, content validity, and structure of each item (Willis, 2004). According to Willis (2004), subjects who participate in cognitive interviews should be representative of the individuals to whom the measure will ultimately be administered. Cognitive interviewing can be effective even when implemented outside a formal cognitive laboratory and with small samples, as the method has the potential to alert the researcher to issues with the instrument prior to field-testing. For the
present study, five participants completed the second iteration of the survey instrument and provided feedback through the cognitive interview process. A benefit of engaging foster parents in this phase of instrument development through cognitive interviewing is that it enabled me to identify particular areas of competence that did not arise through the previous phases of the research and were, therefore, absent from the questionnaire. Although it is preferable to control for internal validity by employing multiple interviewers, that was not feasible in the present study.

Participants engaged in face-to-face cognitive interviews to assess the usefulness of the second iteration of the proposed survey tool in assessing the competencies foster parents need to support the education and development of youth in foster care. Following the interviews, I summarized each participants’ comments and generated a cognitive interview outcome report comprising the following: the rationale and purpose of the testing, demographic data about the participants, procedures and probes, a summary of the findings that includes specific responses associated with each question, and recommended refinements (Willis, 2004).

These interviews yielded data regarding how foster parents interpreted and responded to the items on the survey (Strack & Martin, 1987; Tourangeau, 1987; Tourangeau & Rasinski, 1988). The cognitive interviewing methods I used were verbal probing and think-aloud, which can be very effective in combination (Jobe & Mingay, 1991). Verbal probing invites respondents to share how they interpret the items and to offer comments on the phrasing of particular items, which can help researchers improve the items (Davison, Vogel, & Coffman, 1997). I asked general and/or specific questions about the respondents’ comprehension of the items, their confidence in their responses, and the strategies they used to recall information (Willis, 2004). Some probing was concurrent (after each item on the survey) and some retrospective (at the
conclusion of each section and during a debriefing session after the interview). Most probes were scripted, but some were spontaneous to ensure that I comprehended interviewees’ insights. Verbal probing enables the researcher to guide the interview to ensure that the desired data is obtained and off-topic conversation is minimized, but there is the opportunity for researcher bias because respondents may be unintentionally led to respond in a particular way (Willis, 2004).

In the think aloud-approach (Ericsson & Simon, 1980) participants simply verbalize their thought processes about the questions as they answer. Think-aloud interviewing involves minimal prompting from the interviewer and is, therefore, relatively free from interviewer bias, requires very little training, and is an efficient approach for eliciting open-ended feedback. As interviewees shared their reactions and thoughts while responding to items on the instrument, I was able to understand how future respondents will answer the questions. There are notable disadvantages of collecting information by having participants think aloud; it places a burden on the respondents, and most subjects likely lack experience with the approach (Willis, 2004). The purpose of employing a combination method in this study was to address the limitations of each approach.

The results from cognitive interviews were valuable in revising the draft measure. Data from the think-aloud and verbal prompting approaches, combined, enabled me to reconceive items that required an overly complicated recall process and to refine the tool to improve overall validity and reliability. This phase of the study concludes with a cognitive interview report (Appendix A) and a revised measure (Appendix B), which will be shared with a panel of multidisciplinary educational researchers (my dissertation committee) and revised as needed, so that it can be piloted with preservice foster parents.
Procedures

Recruitment

I recruited participants from foster parent support groups and foster parent community email groups in western Massachusetts through a recommendation process in which social workers and foster parents recommended outstanding foster parents for involvement in the study. Recruitment flyers were shared electronically and included information about the purposes and procedures associated with the study. I corresponded with all potential participants by phone or email to provide additional information and to answer questions. To be eligible for participation, foster parents had to have fostered school-aged children. Interested foster parents were asked to devote approximately 2 hours to the focus group and 3 hours to the cognitive interviews. They were not compensated, though reimbursements for childcare were offered. After they consented to participation, they completed a Google form survey comprising basic demographic information (e.g., socioeconomic status, level of education, race, gender, length of time fostering, number of youth fostered, age range of youth fostered). The focus group was scheduled via an anonymous Doodle poll; the researcher could identify who had responded, but respondents could not view one another’s contact information. Of the seven interested respondents, five were able to attend and participate in the focus group. One of the five focus group participants discontinued her involvement in the study for personal reasons and did not participate in the cognitive interview.

Participants

All five focus group participants had extensive fostering experience and were known by fellow foster parents and social workers in the region for effectively addressing the educational and/or developmental needs of youth in foster care. Results from the 25-item background survey
yielded information about their demographic characteristics and foster care experience. All of the participants were women ranging in age from 34 to 64. Four of the five were married and all had engaged in postsecondary education, ranging from some college to a graduate degree. Their household incomes ranged from $40,000 to $120,000 per year. All but one family had adopted at least one child out of the foster system, two families had adopted three or more children, and two families expected to adopt one or more of the foster children currently in their care. Participants had been in the role for varying lengths of time, ranging from 3 years to 27 years. It total these parents had fostered hundreds of youth (age birth to 20), including a range of 6 to over one hundred school aged children.

Focus Group

The focus group was held in the meeting room of a community center that was centrally located for all participants. All of the foster parents knew one another through various local support groups and some indicated that they were old friends. Before beginning the focus group, I reiterated the purpose of the study and recommended that participants share general parenting tactics and perspectives that guide their approach to supporting educational development rather than share specific anecdotes. I also reminded participants not to use the names of specific children when describing their experiences. To minimize the potential for interpreter bias and to enhance the accuracy of the analysis, a research assistant was present to take notes, keep time, manage the digital audio recording of the session, and assist with data analysis.

During the focus group, participants were asked open-ended questions about the types of skills and attitudes that have enabled them to successfully support the educational and developmental needs of youth in their care. I had prepared a set of eight guiding questions and
eight possible follow-up questions, but if the conversation led naturally to a discussion about a question that had yet to be asked, I did not formally pose it as originally planned. For example, one item on the list of possible questions was about improvements to foster parent training, but several participants offered ideas on this topic as they described what they wish they had known going into the role. When new topics emerged, I probed informally as needed to clarify statements and recommendations (Kreuger, 1994).

Focus Group Data Analysis

The focus group data was analyzed through a systematic process, such that the resultant data could be used to (a) refine the educational parenting competencies generated through the literature and curriculum analyses (Bass, n.d.) and (b) revise survey items to correspond to appropriate skills. The focus group was not transcribed but was audio-recorded using a program that allowed for time-stamped annotation, which permitted efficient analysis. The research assistant and I both recorded written notes and insights and conferred throughout the thematic analysis of the data. Because the purpose of the focus group was to obtain feedback from the target population (Willis, 2004) on the conceptual domains that informed survey items, a complex coding scheme was not implemented. The guiding framework for the analysis was informed by the six questions for focus group analysis recommended by Berkowitz (1997). I followed a modified version of this approach by examining the data with respect to three central questions:

1. What common themes emerged with respect to educational parenting tactics?
2. Which patterns that emerged are consistent with findings from previous analyses?
3. Did any patterns suggest that the educational parenting domains should be revisited?
We used notes to document key ideas that emerged through the focus group and to identify themes that could be compared to the educational parenting competencies suggested through the previous curriculum and literature analyses. Findings are presented below by question.

Following the data analysis I revised the initial 150-item survey to improve alignment with foster parents’ recommendations. I specifically used the resultant data to eliminate items that contradicted ideas presented in the focus group and to develop and/or modify items to reflect the skills that foster parents deemed most valuable. The amended instrument is presented in the Cognitive Interview Report and is included in Appendix A of this document.

Focus Group Results

The five participants were actively engaged throughout the focus group and offered several ideas about how to systematically improve the experiences of foster parents and foster youth through creative programming, improved training, and ongoing collaboration between all stakeholders. The foster parents shared practices they use in their homes to support foster youth in developing behaviors that contribute to school success and also strategies for communicating with schools. Over the course of the 120-minute focus group, I asked approximately 12 questions, including a combination of questions that invited feedback on particular topics and follow-up questions on issues raised organically through dialogue. A central purpose of this analysis was to explore how the four educational parenting domains identified through the literature analysis (empathy and relationship-building, knowledge and self-efficacy regarding the foster parent role in the educational process, awareness of developmentally appropriate expectations for youth in schools and at home, and behavior management and socioemotional
development) compared to the practical recommendations of highly successful foster parents.
The findings that correspond to each of the analytical questions are summarized below.

*What common themes emerged with respect to educational parenting tactics?* The analysis of the focus group data revealed a few key themes related to the foster parents’ perspectives on educational parenting, which can be loosely classified as corresponding to in-home parenting tactics, parental school involvement, and recommendations for systemic changes. Each parent offered very specific strategies they use in the home to support the development of socioemotional, academic, and executive functioning skills in youth in their care. Additionally, they unanimously agreed that foster parents must play a central role in facilitating communication with schools to ensure consistency of expectations, implement trauma-informed practices, solve problems collaboratively, and navigate academic issues when they arise. These parents identified issues within the social services and school systems that impede progress for foster youth while noting some possible solutions. They also made recommendations for improving the MAPP training (e.g., increasing focus on practical skills, networking with other foster parents, offering more explicit clarification of the role) and identified some ways that foster parents might be able to develop their skills in response to issues as they arise (e.g., online in-service trainings, requirements for ongoing professional development, foster parent mentors for new foster parents). These suggestions were useful in explicating the practicalities of foster parenting as it relates to meeting a range of needs, but the suggestions tended to be more policy-oriented rather than focused on specific content and parenting skills.

Parents described how they managed daily activities and routines, supported children who were having trouble self-regulating, and created cultures in their homes that attempted to
normalize their children’s experiences and encourage healthy development. One strategy noted by all of the parents was the need for clear and predictable routines in their homes. One parent referred to her daily expectations for children as the “morning and evening five,” or the five tasks children do to get ready to leave for school in the morning and the five tasks they do before bedtime. She and other parents explained that they post pictures or written reminders so children have a nonverbal cuing system for following routines. One parent hosts a weekly family meeting in which the children set goals, share positive feedback, and discuss upcoming plans. During the meeting one child takes notes and another keeps time. Another foster parent explained that a rule in her home is that older children help younger ones safely traverse the stairs in the morning. These types of predictable structures and expectations help traumatized children feel safe and practice following routines, which is a central expectation in a classroom setting. The foster parents highlighted another purpose of the structures, which is that they offer the opportunity for children to take on responsibilities that allow them to feel empowered and to expand their self-definition beyond that of victim.

The foster parents shared their experiences of the educational benefits of a foster home setting in which youth learn to feel valued and competent. They further described how a safe culture established at home provides many opportunities to embed social and academic learning experiences that reinforce school-based goals. Each parent had her own approach to this reinforcement system. Examples included discussing academic topics in the car, reading together each night, processing challenging peer dynamics, planning for upcoming events at school, minimizing exposure to television, and doing family projects. More specifically, participants noted the extreme challenges that foster youth experience in school settings and stressed the importance of the foster parent as an advocate and leader in coordinating with the
school community. A foster parent bluntly stated, “This is not like when you went to school. This is different.”

When asked about managing challenging behaviors, most participants communicated that they had well-established systems in their homes that incorporated clear expectations and consequences. Many of the parenting strategies the foster parents described initiating instinctively are known to be incredibly effective for minimizing opportunities for power struggles (Whitlock & Purington, 2013) and for building relationships with children as a means of preventing and responding to behavioral outbursts (Dishion et al., 2008). These strategies included making time to “move beyond carrots and sticks,” which one foster parent pointed out tend to serve only a short-term benefit. She recommended a model more aligned with “Ross Green’s approach” or with “restorative justice,” such that children are involved in problem-solving around their own behaviors. Another parent shared that she tells the children in her home “It’s not your mistake; it’s the power of the repair” as a way to help them learn to take responsibility in problem-solving so they do not feel defined by their mistakes. Several parents explained routines that allow them to spend a bit of time with each child every day. They described how they anticipated challenging behaviors and shared some of the strategies they employ for self-care during times when children are acting out in their homes.

Through their discussion, participants raised examples of the need for sometimes daily communication between home and school about important life events and daily struggles, so that foster youth have continuity between home and school. One foster parent explained the need for fluid consistency as “wraparound parenting.” When teachers know children well and parents are involved, children tend to be more successful in school (Barnard, 2004). Many of the parents reported dealing with some school personnel who were well-educated on the foster care system
and trauma-informed practices and other school personnel whom they had to educate on these issues. Participants noted that when schools are trauma-sensitive foster youth tend to do much better, and the daily issues that tend to interfere with learning for these children can be eliminated. For example, children in foster care may be “triggered” when a police officer comes to school or when there is a fire drill. Similarly, they may have difficulty functioning academically during times of significant transition or trauma at home. Participants unanimously agreed that children are more successful in school when their teachers understand these challenges and can help the family plan accordingly.

Foster parents reported that most of the children in their homes demonstrated some kind of “special need” that affected them in school and for which they required additional support. All of the participants raised concerns about the disparity between the preparation offered through the MAPP training and the on-the-ground skills required to care for foster youth, namely with respect to supporting educational and developmental needs. Nevertheless, the foster parents all discussed examples of their successes advocating for children in their care and implementing best practices for parent engagement in school. Several recommendations for improving school experiences for youth were dependent on the foster parents’ active involvement as a “squeaky wheel” or “team-leader” for educational issues. When probed about what enabled them to find the support and information they needed to be successful, participants reported a level of confidence and comfort navigating the education and social services systems. A few participants went on to suggest that “more sophisticated” and “better educated” foster parents are more successful in supporting children in general and in navigating complex school systems. These comments led to a conversation about the need for better preservice and ongoing foster parent
training, during which participants noted the limitations of the MAPP training and the need for quality in-service training to help foster parents with educational issues.

What patterns that emerged are consistent with findings from previous analyses? Several of the themes that emerged from the focus group data are consistent with findings from previous analyses: parent role in the educational process, awareness of developmentally appropriate expectations for youth in schools and at home, behavior management and socioemotional development. The participating foster parents all self-proclaimed that they were advocates, educational and otherwise, for the youth in their homes and reported that they felt empowered in that role and capable of creating change. Every participant described daily routines that fostered trust and helped children feel safe and secure in their homes. Many of the parents used parallel strategies to avoid power-struggles, to encourage prosocial skills, to build relationships, and to convey empathy and care to youth in their homes. Although they did not specifically connect their efforts to broader developmental goals, it was clear to the researchers that their parenting styles were conducive to the fostering of skills that will serve youth in schools and at home. Participants also provided examples of how they established routines at home that allowed the children to practice school skills and to feel supported in doing so. Furthermore, by engaging in this type of parenting, participants had witnessed direct benefits for children in school. Essentially, these participants discussed how they embodied the educational parenting skills proposed through this research and described how necessary these skills are for successful fostering.

Did any patterns suggest that the educational parenting domains need to be revisited? Although the focus group data appeared to support the themes identified through the literature
and curriculum analyses, a few additional salient traits emerged. First, foster parents need training on trauma-informed tactics for establishing trusting relationships with youth and enhancing success at home and school. The effects of trauma on development are covered in the MAPP training, as are some strategies for supporting traumatized youth, so it would be appropriate for the survey instrument to include items about foster parent knowledge of trauma-informed schooling practices. Second, foster parents described how their ability to successfully advocate for children hinged on their capacity to navigate complex systems and to find and secure resources to educate themselves. Although it is possible that foster parents could be more explicitly empowered to take on school-related responsibilities, the “sophisticated” savvy required for collaborating with social workers and school personnel around intense challenges may be more of a character trait. Therefore, although it may be useful to add items to the measure that target this adeptness, it may be a less malleable parenting factor and therefore less suitable for training.

Focus Group Summary Findings.

The present study involved a focus group as a means of exploring the practical applicability of the conceptual underpinnings of an instrument prior to cognitive testing (Willis, 2005). The educational parenting competencies derived through the literature and curriculum analyses are (a) empathy and relationship-building, (b) knowledge and self-efficacy regarding the foster parent role in the educational process, (c) awareness of developmentally appropriate expectations for youth in schools and at home, and (d) behavior management and socioemotional development. Participants spoke to each of these issues and shared several nuanced perspectives. During the 2-hour focus group, I encouraged all participants to respond to each
question, but the format was flexible and, as often happens, conversations frequently led to new ideas and recommendations (Kreuger, 1994). I asked participants a series of open-ended questions about how foster parents can best support foster youth in schools. Although I did not ask specifically about the educational parenting competencies of interest in this study, the foster parent responses were aligned with the four skill domains noted above. For example, when probed about the structures they enforce at home to support youth at school, participants spoke about having clear routines, informally reinforcing academic skills, communicating with teachers, and giving children opportunities to take responsibility for themselves and others. They also discussed the necessity of establishing positive relationships with youth and helping them develop self-control.

The data obtained through this focus group had implications for survey refinement and the results were used to improve the content and to reduce the length of the survey by eliminating questions that do not directly correspond to skills and perceived competence associated with educational parenting. Based on the participants’ contributions, attention was also paid to ensuring that trauma-sensitivity was targeted through the revision, as this issue was emphasized by foster parents in the focus group as an important component of educational parenting for foster youth. The topic of trauma-sensitivity is presented in the MAPP training but was not coded in my analysis of the MAPP curriculum as pertinent to educational parenting competence. Finally, participants noted a lack of training in how to address educational and developmental issues and foster parents’ role in doing so. Though all of the participants described how they felt empowered to advocate for youth with developmental and educational challenges, the identified limitations of the training suggest that this skill area should also be prominent in the survey instrument.
Survey Refinement Based on Focus Group Results

The focus group results were used to modify survey items and to remove survey items that did not specifically target the skills and parenting practices identified by the expert foster parents. Items that did not specifically relate to parenting strategies and perceived competence in the six domains were eliminated. Twenty-two items that could be considered indicators of a skill but did not directly target a specific competency were removed. Many of the items referenced specific situations or applications of a skill rather than the construct, for example, “My home can be a place for a foster child and his/her friends to hang out after school and on weekends.” A foster parent may welcome foster youth and their friends in their home, and this could be an indicator of relationship building, but it is not directly related to educational parenting.

Similarly, 29 items were eliminated because they corresponded with skills or perceptions that do not directly apply to educational parenting and might not be possible to assess, for example, “I can teach a child to protect him/herself from bullying.” Although a foster parent might be able to implement strategies to support a particular aptitude in a child, it is not possible to know whether that skill would be useful to the child in practice—being able to prevent bullying is not requisite to educational parenting, and it is not always applicable to the educational context.

During the focus group it was clear that, although the foster parents were confident that they could support children’s development and schooling and had been successful in doing so, they did not all share the same philosophical values. Therefore, an additional 11 items that pertained specifically to beliefs about children (e.g., “Every child is capable of learning to get along with others”) were removed because such beliefs are not necessarily associated with parenting skills of importance. To address issues of redundancy, 11 items were deemed
unnecessary. For example, “I know how to help children recovering from loss and trauma” was excluded, and a similar but more specific item, “I can find a child the services and supports he/she needs in the community and at school to help him/her process trauma,” was selected to remain. Three items on the survey were modified, one for clarity and another because it was double-barreled and needed to be divided into two questions. In the third case, the words “in school” were added to specify the application of the skill in practice. No items were added because the survey items were generally aligned with the recommendations of the participants. In total, 73 items were eliminated, leaving 77 that were included in the second iteration of the survey instrument, which was used for the cognitive interviewing protocol.

Focus Group Strengths and Limitations.

The purpose of the focus group was to collect data regarding the skills that expert foster parents believe contribute to positive school engagement for youth in care. The procedure used for developing this survey informally follows the questionnaire development sequence recommended by Willis (2004). Through this process, surveys are based on salient themes and objectives and are then refined based on feedback from focus groups and cognitive interviews. During the focus group, participants offered several ideas about the parenting skills, knowledge, and characteristics that foster parents need to successfully support educational development among foster youth. Although the focus group participants were chosen intentionally, to make suggestions about the content and application of the instrument, there are some limitations to the current study’s use of focus groups. First, expert foster parents were drawn from the local community, which limits variety in the sample. All of the foster parents were from suburban/rural western Massachusetts, and this may have influenced the types of skills they
identified as important for foster youth in schools. The participants were heterogeneous in some variables (income, age, marital status, education), but a more geographically diverse group of participants may have raised different issues that come up in other parts of the state. For example, the challenges that are most relevant to foster children’s education may differ based on school system or other community-specific factors. Moreover, the preexisting relationships that the foster parents had with one another may have influenced their comfort raising questions, proposing new ideas, or expressing disagreement.

Additionally, focus group data is often challenging to analyze (Kreuger, 1994). The goal of the focus group was to understand potentially overlooked or unnecessary topics rather than to execute a detailed thematic coding strategy. In this case, an attempt was made to control for bias by including a second researcher in the analysis and to identify very specific objectives for the focus group (Fowler, 1995). To this end, I asked questions that corresponded very specifically to the constructs upon which the survey was developed to explore how the participants thought about and used related skills. Then, both researchers reviewed the focus group recording for comments that were associated with the established constructs and for constructs the participants identified as important that had not been included in the first iteration of the instrument. Although I took care to implement a well-defined analytical approach, it is possible that some valuable questions may have been inadvertently eliminated because they were not directly supported by focus group data. The cognitive interviews provided another opportunity to assess the validity of the instrument and to identify any missing or inappropriate content.

Cognitive Interview
To explore the appropriateness and quality of the survey items in the second iteration of
the educational parenting inventory for foster parents, I conducted cognitive interviews with four
of the five foster parents who participated in the focus group. I developed a cognitive interview
protocol that included a combination of specific and general probes to be asked as needed
throughout the interview. Participants were also asked to think aloud as they responded to the
survey items. The protocol included an introduction to the cognitive interview method to be
shared with interviewees, as well as a reporting form that listed the probes and survey items. I
recorded two types of notes about survey items—feedback from the respondent and my summary
comments as interviewer—most of which were observations and implications for survey
refinement that arose in the interview. Not all probes were asked after each question, as
sometimes the think-aloud process illuminated the variables of interest for a given question. I
asked general questions about the survey at the end of the interview; that data was documented
on the Cognitive Interview Report (see Appendix A) form as well.

Cognitive Interview Data Analysis
The data from the cognitive interviews was compiled and analyzed using procedures
recommended by Willis (2005). The respondent and interviewer comments were recorded for
each interview and results were compiled for all interviews (see Appendix A). The Cognitive
Interview Report includes a summary of the instrument’s purpose, demographic characteristics
of the respondents, and an item-by-item summary of respondents’ comments. I examined the
respondents’ comments on each item across the interviews to identify any themes that suggested
a particular item should be modified or eliminated. More specifically, if one or more participants
recommended revising, eliminating, or adding an item, I noted these comments. Interviewees
were asked to comment on any items they thought should be added to assess educational
parenting skills, and these comments were used to develop new items. If there was disagreement among the respondents about a particular question or topic area, I documented all of the comments and made a recommendation for how to address them. Based on concerns and suggestions from the participants, I proposed modifications to the measure that take into consideration the collective feedback. The findings presented on the report were interpreted and implications for survey refinement are discussed below.

Cognitive Interview Results

During the cognitive interviews participants were asked to provide feedback on a 77-item survey for foster parents about educational parenting skills. Three of the four cognitive interviews took place in the participant’s home and one took place in a private room at a coffee shop. The interviews ranged in duration from 70 to 93 minutes and were all very casual in nature. Participants appeared to be at ease, willingly offered suggestions and ideas, and requested breaks as needed. Based on the respondents’ comments during the think-aloud portion of the interview, the interviewer posed a combination of scripted and spontaneous probes about the appropriateness of a particular item or topic and about the survey in general. If a respondent raised specific concerns, the interviewer probed subsequent interviewees on the same issues to explore whether the comments were interviewee-specific or represented themes that participants believed should be addressed. For example, during the first interview, the respondent commented that she did not like the use of the word “love” on an item that reads, “I know how to communicate love and care to a child who I do not know well.” She noted that although foster parents have to care for a child, they do not always have to love a child they have just met. In response to this feedback, the researcher probed all subsequent respondents about the
appropriateness of the word “love” and found that some agreed it should be replaced and others did not. All interviewees answered the various types of probes without hesitation, often citing examples from their experience to support their responses.

Overall, the respondents offered several suggestions for revision, and many items were modified to address the respondents’ comments. For the purpose of the present instrument development phase, item responses were not analyzed statistically but have been recorded on the Cognitive Interview Report (Appendix A). There were five items that one participant did not answer due to confusion about the items. Participants provided comments that resulted in suggested revisions of some kind on 46 of the 77 items. Revisions were recommended when multiple respondents shared similar comments and/or if the edit clarified the wording of an item in a way that did not interfere with the meaning of the item. For example, the item “I can implement parenting practices that help youth in my home follow rules and feel loved” was changed to read “I can implement parenting practices that help youth in my home follow rules and feel cared for.” This rewording did not significantly alter the meaning of the question or contradict the feedback provided by other respondents.

Proposed revisions to the survey were grouped into two categories: modifications to existing items and additions of new items based on responses to probes at the end of the interviews. The suggested revisions to the current survey questions included eliminating items (2 items), splitting an existing item into multiple items (14 items), relocating an item within the survey (1 item), or rewording an item (29 items). The items that the respondents recommended be divided into multiple items resulted in a total of 32 new items. More specific implications for survey development are discussed below. In addition, the respondents identified 19 possible item topics in the conclusion section of the interview, and I added 16 items to address these
comments. The respondents’ suggestions varied. Many suggestions involved adding items that went into greater depth on an issue that was raised on the survey; others related to adding content that had not been included. For example, two of the participants proposed including an item about in-home literacy or the number of books in the home, which they believed would indicate a foster parent’s commitment to school and preparedness to support academics. Three other respondents recommended adding items that addressed the savvy and resourcefulness that foster parents must exhibit to successfully advocate for children in schools and within the child welfare system.

The final probes were about the potential usefulness and legibility of the survey for assessing foster parents’ readiness to implement educational parenting skills. The respondents all offered that the survey would be useful if administered before MAPP training so that preservice foster parents would have a sense of the skills they might need to perform the role. They discussed how difficult it can be for a new foster parent to be prepared for their first placement, despite how ready they perceive themselves to be. One participant cited this as a possible limitation of the survey under development. Multiple participants commented that administering the survey before MAPP training could improve foster parents’ attention to relevant content during the training. Two respondents believed that preservice foster parents are likely to rate themselves highly in skills prior to taking a placement and knowing the complex reality of the role. Another added that, although foster parents often have the best intentions, some children are not a good fit in the home and/or are less responsive to care and interventions. This can lead foster parents to feel inadequate and incapable. All four interviewees described the de facto challenges of the role and stated at some point during the interview that they wanted the measure to be used to support foster parents rather than to shame them for not being able to
effectively parent every child who entered their home. Importantly, they noted that one aspect of being a “good” foster parent is knowing when you can no longer support a given child and what to do when that happens.

Cognitive Interview Summary Findings

In the present study, cognitive interviewing was employed to improve the validity of the instrument by providing an opportunity for active foster parents to examine the items and offer feedback on their construction and appropriateness. I used the think-aloud approach and specific and general probes to explore the clarity and content validity of each item and to identify structural limitations (Willis, 2004). Subjects in this study were expert foster parents and, therefore, possessed many of the skills being assessed on the measure. All four of the participants were eager to offer feedback and appeared to be at ease with the cognitive interviewing process despite the unfamiliar format. They offered opinions that were useful in revising the measure to improve clarity and ensure the appropriateness of the underlying constructs. Based on the interviewees’ comments on the existing items, I recommended altering (rewording, relocating within the survey, eliminating, or dividing into multiple questions) a total of 46 questions. Moreover, responses on the final probes pointed to the need for 16 new items about skills and knowledge that the foster parent respondents believed were missing from the survey in its second iteration.

In addition, several respondents shared general perspectives about the need for improvements to MAPP training and for ongoing mentoring and support for new foster parents. Their recommendations included providing ongoing foster parent training, pairing new foster parents with experienced ones, and spending more MAPP training time on school-based issues.
Another theme that emerged through the interviews was the necessity of informing parents about trauma-sensitive practices so they can implement responsive parenting practices at home and can advocate for youth appropriately in schools. All of the respondents also described the challenges of the role and identified times when they felt they could not manage a particular child while maintaining the safety of other children in the home. For example, some individuals responded “agree” regarding a skill they knew they possessed but also knew they would not always choose to display. For example, for the item “I can parent a child who is aggressive, lies, or steals,” all of the foster parents indicated that they could do it, provided that the other children in their homes were not in danger, but that they might choose not to if a child posed an imminent threat to others. They were resoundingly clear that although it is necessary to structure a foster home so it is accessible and supportive to a range of youth, foster parents must consider placement disruption to be a viable option if a placement is not working.

Survey Refinement Based on Cognitive Interviews

Cognitive interviewing can be effective for alerting a researcher to issues with an instrument prior to field-testing. In this case, expert foster parents were interviewed in their homes using the second iteration of an educational parenting inventory for foster parents. Responses from the think-aloud and verbal prompting approaches, combined, were used to reconceive the inventory items that participants found to be overly complicated, as well as to refine the tool for improved validity and reliability. The measure includes 77 items grouped into six categories: building relationships with youth, empathy towards youth, educational process and role, developmentally appropriate expectations, behavior management, and social-emotional development. Because the question categories have been organized around the skill domains that
the relevant literature has shown to underlie academic engagement, I did not pose probes about the overall format and retained the survey structure.

I analyzed responses from participants and recommended several changes, all of which have been incorporated into a third iteration of the instrument (Appendix B). The process of modifying, adding, and eliminating items involved documenting respondents’ comments on each, and making a determination about how to use the feedback to improve the instrument. In some instances, participants offered specific ideas about re-wording questions and I generally adjusted such items if rephrasing did not significantly change the content and clarity. In most cases, I was able to address each interviewee’s recommendations by probing in subsequent interviews about proposed additions, deletions, and modifications. When two participants identified conflicting modifications, I probed other interviewees and drew on verbal and non-verbal feedback from all participants on the item to make a judgement about alterations.

In total, 2 items were eliminated, 29 items were reworded, 2 items were relocated within the survey, and 14 items were separated into a total of 32 items. Based on suggestions from participants about content they believed was missing from the measure, an additional 16 questions were added. New and revised items are situated in the section of the instrument that corresponds with the content addressed in the item. For example, the new item “I know the kinds of classroom accommodations a child might need and how to advocate for them” was entered in the educational process and role portion of the survey. During future phases of piloting and factor analysis, I will further evaluate the adequacy of the item categories and will reorganize them if needed.

Cognitive Interview Strengths and Limitations
The cognitive interviewing methods employed in this research offer several potential benefits. First, I interviewed expert foster parents who have considerable knowledge about the role and about the daily responsibilities and challenges that arise. By using a cognitive interview, I was able to discern issues related to specific survey items as well as general skills and knowledge that were not addressed or not clearly targeted in the measure. Furthermore, because the participants also participated in the focus group, they were knowledgeable about the perspectives of other foster parents and could assess the effectiveness with which the items addressed these issues. More generally, all of the participants communicated that the survey had tremendous potential for raising preservice foster parents’ awareness, prior to MAPP training, of the educational parenting skills that are most important in fostering. They articulated that if foster parents completed this inventory before training, they might be better prepared to ask questions and identify resources that could be useful to them in the future. Also, because the survey was developed with input from foster parents, who know best what the role requires, the instrument could also improve the alignment of training content with the practical skills required for fostering.

This study also has limitations. First, although I followed procedures outlined by cognitive interviewing experts and solicited feedback from experienced researchers, but the data collection and analysis processes might differ some if implemented by another researcher in the future. Additionally, the interviews were informal in nature and the participants were aware that I had developed the draft instrument. Although I assured them that I desired their honest feedback, it is possible that some participants may have been hesitant to criticize the survey items. Finally, the cognitive interviewing process is lengthy and tedious, so interviewees may have lost focus or interest periodically throughout the interview.
Discussion

The purpose of this study is to refine an instrument that can be used to assess foster parents’ preparedness to provide care that promotes educational engagement, which is a strong predictor of lifelong outcomes (Jones et al., 2015). This evaluation of foster parent educational parenting competence could yield useful information about the effectiveness of currently adopted preservice training models (such as MAPP; Mayers-Pasztor, 1987) in teaching the skills required for high-quality foster parenting. The present study integrates research-based strategies for supporting foster youth in school, training objectives from the Massachusetts MAPP training (Massachusetts Department of Children and Families, 2001), and perspectives from expert foster parents on parenting strategies that encourage school engagement and socioemotional development. This instrument is intended for piloting with preservice foster parents as a means of examining their preparedness to care for youth in ways that set the stage for educational attainment and success in adulthood.

Current efforts to support foster youth in school involve social workers and school personnel (Emerson & Lovitt, 2003; Zetlin, Weinberg, & Luderer, 2004), and the effectiveness of such interventions often falls short when youth move between foster homes and transfer schools (Weinberg, Zetlin, & Shea, 2001). School mobility poses one of the greatest risks to the educational success of foster youth, as it impedes academic progress (Conger & Rebeck, 2001; Zetlin et al., 2004), opportunities for relationship building (Dozier, 2005), and school engagement (Choice et al., 2001). Though researchers have noted the value of training foster parents to meet the educational and socioemotional needs of children in the child welfare system (Altschuler, 2003; Buehler et al., 2006), foster parents consistently report feeling underprepared to meet the demands of the role (Brown & Bednar, 2006), undervalued as members of a child’s
support team (Brown & Rodger, 2009), and ill-equipped to support the behavioral needs of youth (Cooley & Petren, 2011). However, as evidenced in the relevant literature and the data collected through the current study’s focus group, when foster parents have the skills to encourage healthy development, youth experience improvements in academic engagement as well as the socioemotional skills that underlie achievement. Foster parents have the potential to play a vital role in facilitating healthy development in youth.

To date, no preservice or in-service foster parent assessments have evaluated educational parenting competencies. Literature review data (Bass, n.d.) has suggested that foster parents’ educational parenting competency surrounds four key constructs: empathy and relationship-building, knowledge and self-efficacy regarding the foster parent role in the educational process, awareness of developmentally appropriate expectations for youth in schools and at home, and behavior management and socioemotional development. For the purposes of an analysis of the Massachusetts MAPP curriculum, these four domains were expanded into six parenting skill areas: building relationships with youth, empathy towards youth, educational process and role, developmentally appropriate expectations, behavior management, and social-emotional development. This inventory of educational parenting skills is intended to measure foster parents’ knowledge and perceived preparedness to implement the types of parenting practices that contribute to more successful outcomes for youth in schools.

More specifically, this survey was developed for administration with foster parents at three intervals: prior to the beginning of the Massachusetts MAPP training, immediately post-MAPP training, and then once they have taken the placement of a child. This method was chosen to assess changes in competence pre- and post-MAPP training and to explore how the skills and knowledge targeted in MAPP align with practical realities of fostering. When it was
conceived, the goals were to evaluate the Massachusetts MAPP training and to explore how any gains achieved through the training corresponded with long-term competence. However, through the focus group and interviews, foster parents suggested several additional uses for the instrument. First, by administering the instrument before future participants take MAPP, respondents in this study proposed that pre-service foster parents might be primed to listen for key skills and could then bring questions arising from the survey to their MAPP trainers. Additionally, data collected at the post-MAPP wave could be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the training, as well as to identify areas for training reform. During the cognitive interviews, foster parents also noted that child welfare workers could use the survey results to target specific training needs and ongoing supports for individual families. Finally, several of the foster parents described the necessity of mandatory and accessible ongoing training for foster parents and they articulated that the post-post administration might inform these training needs. Overall, in addition to using survey results to direct training reform, there is a potential benefit to pre-service foster parents to take the instrument as a way to communicate their needs to social service workers.

This instrument was developed over three phases. First, I conducted a synthesis of relevant literature to identify parenting skills that could improve outcomes for youth and analyzed the Massachusetts MAPP training curriculum for the presence of content and pedagogy that teaches such skills. Based on these analyses, I created the first iteration of the instrument. The first iteration included a total of 150 items about foster parents’ perceived preparedness to exhibit certain characteristics and utilize educational parenting skills in six domains: building relationships with youth (27 items), empathy towards youth (21 items), educational process and role (23 items), developmentally appropriate expectations (25 items), behavior management (32
items), and social-emotional development (22 items). These items were informed by the concept domains identified in relevant literature, content presented in the Massachusetts MAPP training, and related foster parent measures.

The second phase involved a focus group with five expert foster parents, who commented on the appropriateness of the skill domains I had identified and offered ideas about additional areas of skill that foster parents need in order to support healthy youth development and educational engagement. Focus groups are useful in the instrument development process for examining the appropriateness of topic domains prior to implementing a cognitive interviewing method for evaluating specific items (Kreuger, 1994). I analyzed the focus group data to (a) refine the educational parenting competencies generated through the literature and curriculum analyses (Bass, n.d.) and (b) revise survey items to correspond to appropriate skills. Although participants’ comments about successful educational parenting were largely consistent with findings from previous research, it was clear that not all foster parents addressed each skill in the same way. Accordingly, items about how foster parents’ general perspectives and parenting approaches align with the educational parenting competencies of interest were retained in the survey and items that related to specific examples were eliminated. Additionally, foster parents underscored the necessity of trauma-informed parenting in supporting healthy development and educational engagement. This feedback was incorporated into the second iteration of the instrument, which included 77 items organized into the six aforementioned skill domains.

Third, I conducted cognitive interviews with four of the foster parents who had participated in the focus group to explore the appropriateness of the second iteration of the instrument. During the cognitive interviews, participants were asked to think aloud while completing the survey items and to respond to a combination of scripted and spontaneous probes.
In addition to offering feedback on the construction of specific items, respondents suggested skill areas of importance that had been omitted from the survey. New themes also emerged, such as the necessity for foster parents to take initiative in building relationships and finding resources within child welfare and educational systems. Nearly all of the respondents commented on the challenge of using children’s behavior to measure foster parents’ effectiveness. Using the data provided by respondents during cognitive interviews, I developed a third iteration of the instrument, which consists of 116 items related to the educational parenting domains of interest: building relationships with youth (17 items), empathy towards youth (25 items), educational process and role (25 items), developmentally appropriate expectations (17 items), behavior management (14 items), and social-emotional development (18 items).

Many valuable insights emerged throughout the data collection process. Foster parents noted the importance of trauma-informed parenting and the necessity of understanding the impact that trauma has on behavior and on learning. They all shared anecdotes that underscored the need for foster parents to feel confident advocating on a child’s behalf, which often involves figuring out how to navigate bureaucracies (e.g. child welfare and school systems) to secure appropriate resources. During the focus group and the cognitive interviews, they also explained that although a foster parent may not always be prepared for each new challenge, foster parents must know how to collaborate with others to gather information and supports for youth. Interestingly, although behavior management emerged in the relevant literature as a key theme, these foster parents described their approaches to challenging behavior as preventative, focused on building self-esteem, and informed more by empathy and structure than by traditional consequences and rewards. This appears to have affected the survey construction as the behavior management domain includes the fewest items.
Foster parents also raised concerns about the unreasonable expectations placed on foster parents and the importance of protecting oneself and one’s family by being clear about limits to the types of needs that can be met in a given home. This often came up as foster parents described their responses to challenging behavior and explained that, for example, they could work with children who were aggressive, but that they would disrupt a placement if a child was sexually aggressive, harmed another child in the home, or was too physically large to manage. I attempted to be responsive to this feedback by rewording items that asked foster parents to evaluate their skills based on a child’s responsiveness and by adding items about knowing one’s own boundaries.

Limitations

Although the instrument developed through this study has the potential to be quite useful in assessing foster parents’ educational parenting competence and exposing areas for ongoing training and training reform, there are some limitations. First, participants were drawn from a limited geographic area and were not diverse in race, socioeconomic status, or gender. While this sample was chosen with the intention of ensuring an experienced group of foster parent experts, it is possible that the homogeneity of the group could have influenced the findings.
Next Steps

The next steps for instrument development are to pilot the instrument and to conduct a factor analysis on the results for the purpose of exploring the appropriateness of the underlying constructs. Ideally, potential foster parents will complete the assessment before MAPP training, at the end of the training, and one year after accepting a placement into their homes. Results from each wave of data collection could be used to reform MAPP training, tailor supports to individual families, examine alignment between training and the daily skills required for the role, and examine correlations between youth outcomes and foster parent competence in this area. Data compiled through future field-testing could improve instrument validity and has the potential to further our understanding of correlations between foster parents’ competence and outcomes for foster youth.
Conclusion

Foster youth exhibit chronically poor outcomes in school (Trout et al., 2006), which is one of the best predictors of long-term success (Jones et al., 2015), yet current efforts to intervene do not include foster parents as advocates or leaders. Interventions tend to fall short, in large part due to the fact that children experience high rates of mobility and placement disruptions (Bass et al., 2004; Trout et al., 2008; Zetlin et al., 2006). However, when foster youth demonstrate strong social and behavioral skills they tend to perform better in school (Shonk & Cicchetti, 2001), experience fewer moves (Trout, Hagaman, Casey, Reid, & Epstein, 2008), and transition more smoothly to adulthood (Farrington et al., 2012).

While foster parent training is federally mandated, there is a dearth of evidence to demonstrate that the most commonly adopted models, such as the Model Approaches to Partnerships in Parenting (MAPP; Mayers-Pasztor, 1987) effectively teach parents how to address the educational and behavioral needs of youth in care (Dorsey et al., 2008). Preservice training should prepare foster parents for the role, with particular focus on authoritative parenting skills (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998), fostering social and emotional skills (e.g., social competence, self-regulation) (Farrington et al., 2012; Shonk and Cicchetti, 2001), and developmentally appropriate parenting (Buehler et al., 2006), as a means of reducing placement disruptions, improving foster parent retention, and enhancing outcomes for foster youth. Training programs have the potential to teach skills that foster parents need to help youth develop characteristics that could offer protective effects that lead to more positive outcomes in school and in life. The guiding logic behind the present study is that if foster parent training could improve competence in areas that (a) inform parenting practices associated with educational engagement and (b) help parents to foster the socioemotional skills in youth that lead to high
educational attainment and school engagement, then foster parent retention and youth educational outcomes would also improve.

The purpose of this study was to create and refine an instrument that can be used to assess foster parents’ preparedness to provide care that promotes educational engagement, which is a strong predictor of lifelong outcomes (Jones et al., 2015). Massachusetts has adopted a form of MAPP training (Massachusetts Approaches to Partnerships in Parenting; Massachusetts Department of Children and Families, 2001) and this survey is intended for piloting in Massachusetts to explore post-training changes in educational parenting skills. This evaluation of foster parent educational parenting competence could yield useful information about the effectiveness of MAPP in teaching the skills required for high-quality foster parenting. The present study integrates research-based strategies for supporting foster youth in school, training objectives from the Massachusetts MAPP training (Massachusetts Department of Children and Families, 2001), and perspectives from expert foster parents on parenting strategies that encourage school engagement and socioemotional development. This instrument is intended for piloting with preservice foster parents as a means of examining their preparedness to care for youth in ways that set the stage for educational attainment and success in adulthood.

Current efforts to support foster youth in school involve social workers and school personnel (Emerson & Lovitt, 2003; Zetlin, Weinberg, & Luderer, 2004), and the effectiveness of such interventions often falls short when youth move between foster homes and transfer schools (Weinberg, Zetlin, & Shea, 2001). School mobility poses one of the greatest risks to the educational success of foster youth, as it impedes academic progress (Conger & Rebeck, 2001; Zetlin et al., 2004), opportunities for relationship building (Dozier, 2005), and school engagement (Choice et al., 2001). Though researchers have noted the value of training foster
parents to meet the educational and socioemotional needs of children in the child welfare system (Altschuler, 2003; Buehler et al., 2006), foster parents consistently report feeling underprepared to meet the demands of the role (Brown & Bednar, 2006), undervalued as members of a child’s support team (Brown & Rodger, 2009), and ill-equipped to support the behavioral needs of youth (Cooley & Petren, 2011). However, as evidenced in the relevant literature and the data collected through the current study’s focus group, when foster parents have the skills to encourage healthy development, youth experience improvements in academic engagement as well as the socioemotional skills that underlie achievement. Foster parents have the potential to play a vital role in facilitating healthy development in youth.

To date, no preservice or in-service foster parent assessments have evaluated educational parenting competencies. Literature review data (Bass, n.d.) has suggested that foster parents’ educational parenting competency surrounds four key constructs: empathy and relationship-building, knowledge and self-efficacy regarding the foster parent role in the educational process, awareness of developmentally appropriate expectations for youth in schools and at home, and behavior management and socioemotional development. For the purposes of an analysis of the Massachusetts MAPP curriculum, these four domains were expanded into six parenting skill areas: building relationships with youth, empathy towards youth, educational process and role, developmentally appropriate expectations, behavior management, and social-emotional development. This inventory of educational parenting skills is intended to measure foster parents’ knowledge and perceived preparedness to implement the types of parenting practices that contribute to more successful outcomes for youth in schools.

This instrument was developed over three phases. First, I conducted a synthesis of relevant literature to identify parenting skills that could improve outcomes for youth and
analyzed the Massachusetts MAPP training curriculum for the presence of content and pedagogy that teaches such skills. Based on these analyses, I created the first iteration of the instrument. The first iteration included a total of 150 items about foster parents’ perceived preparedness to exhibit certain characteristics and utilize educational parenting skills in six domains: building relationships with youth, empathy towards youth, educational process and role, developmentally appropriate expectations, behavior management, and social-emotional development. These items were informed by the concept domains identified in relevant literature, content presented in the Massachusetts MAPP training, and related foster parent measures.

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More specifically, this survey was created for administration with foster parents at three intervals: prior to the beginning of the Massachusetts MAPP training, immediately post-MAPP training, and then once they have taken the placement of a child. This method was chosen to assess changes in competence pre- and post-MAPP training and to explore how the skills and knowledge targeted in MAPP align with practical realities of fostering. When it was conceived, the goals were to evaluate the Massachusetts MAPP training and to explore how any gains achieved through the training corresponded with long-term foster parent competence and,
eventually, youth outcomes. However, through the focus group and interviews, foster parents suggested several additional uses for the instrument. First, by administering the instrument before future participants take MAPP, respondents in this study proposed that pre-service foster parents might be primed to listen for key skills and could then bring questions arising from the survey to their MAPP trainers. Additionally, data collected at the post-MAPP wave could be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the training, as well as to identify areas for training reform. During the cognitive interviews, foster parents also noted that child welfare workers could use the survey results to target specific training needs and ongoing supports for individual families. Finally, several of the foster parents described the necessity of mandatory and accessible ongoing training for foster parents and they articulated that the post-post administration might inform these training needs. Overall, in addition to using survey results to direct training reform, there is a potential benefit to pre-service foster parents to take the instrument as a way to communicate their needs to social service workers.

While the MAPP training program is widely adopted and includes content that appears relevant to the requirements of the role, no evaluations to date have proven any benefit. This survey was developed with the goal of more adequately measuring training outcomes as well as how the skills taught through MAPP correspond to the practical demands of foster parenting. This could also provide very specific data that could be applied to reform foster parent training and pedagogy. If administered as a formative assessment tool, results could be used by social workers and foster parents to identify and respond to pre-service and in-service training and support needs. The findings of all three phases of this research suggest that there is both a demand for this type of survey and a likely benefit to foster parents, youth, social workers, and policy reform efforts. Once implemented and piloted, the concept domains that underlie the
survey will be assessed through a factor analysis to examine the adequacy of the proposed constructs. Results could have implications for improving training, implementing foster parent support programming, and, in turn, enhancing educational outcomes for youth in foster care.
Cognitive Interview Report

The purpose of the instrument under development is to assess foster parents’ preparedness to implement educational parenting skills that can help to improve youth engagement in school. The first iteration of the Likert format survey was based on a literature and curriculum syntheses and was refined based on data collected through a focus group in which five expert foster parents shared their perspectives on the skills most important for supporting children’s educational and developmental needs. The second iteration of the survey was then tested through a cognitive interviewing process. Four of the five foster parents who participated in the focus group were interviewed using a combined think-aloud and probing approach to cognitive interviewing. The purpose of the cognitive interviews was to obtain data on the clarity of the survey items and to draw feedback from expert foster parents on the utility of the measure for assessing foster parents’ competence in skill areas that are correlated in the relevant literature with educational engagement. Findings from the interviews have been compiled in this cognitive interview report. This type of report often also details the interviewer characteristics (Willis, 2004). The interviewer in this study was the researcher, who has not been formally trained but followed procedures outlined by field experts.

The cognitive interviews ranged in length from 70 to 93 minutes, three of which were conducted in the participants’ homes and one in a coffee shop, approximately 4 weeks after the focus group. Cognitive interviewees were all Caucasian women foster parents, ranging in age from 34 to 55, who had between 3 and 19 years of foster parenting experience. Their
experiences as foster parents involved fostering youth from birth through 19 years of age, and they had collectively been responsible for overseeing the schooling of hundreds of children (ranging by participant from 4 to more than 60 children). All of the respondents completed postsecondary education, with one holding an associate’s degree, two holding bachelor’s degrees, and one holding a master’s degree. Three of the four participants had adopted children through foster care. Participants were informed that they could take breaks whenever they wished and could stop the interview at any point. The interviews began with an explanation of the cognitive interview procedure and the goals of the cognitive interview process, followed by a sample survey item so the interviewee could practice thinking aloud (Willis, 2004). In addition to thinking aloud, the interviewer posed probes throughout the interview. The following probes were created before the interviews and were asked informally for some of the survey items, depending on interviewee comments during the think-aloud segment:

1. Does this question make sense?
2. Does anything need to be added to this question?
3. Is the wording of this question clear?
4. How did you arrive at your answer?
5. Does this question target a skill that foster parents need to support children’s development and education?

The probes were not implemented in a standardized way: Some were reactive, following the interviewer’s assessment of verbal or nonverbal communication, and others were proactive (e.g., “Is there anything else that you think should be included here?”). The researcher primarily used spontaneous and emergent probing, in which many of the probes were devised in the moment based on respondents’ comments. This can be a very effective strategy for obtaining relevant information and is conducive to interviewing contexts that are more informal (Willis, 2004), such as in this study.
The form below outlines the cognitive interview data item-by-item. Participants’ responses to each question are noted, as is a brief summary of the feedback provided by respondents for each question and a summary of the recommended revisions based on the comments offered through the think-aloud and probing. Five items include responses from only three of the four participants, as one participant did not provide ratings due to confusion about the items. In these cases, the interviewer noted the comments and suggested changes to the item in the “Recommendations for revision” column. Following the administration of the survey, the researcher asked the interviewees three open-ended questions about the survey. A summary of responses to these questions is noted at the bottom of this form, along with the corresponding recommendations for revision.
### Cognitive Interview Report Form

#### Building relationships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey item</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Summary of respondents’ Comments</th>
<th>Recommendations for revision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>I am able to form a parental relationship with children from different cultural backgrounds.</strong></td>
<td>Strongly disagree: 3, Disagree: 1</td>
<td>Respondents noted the importance of this and that it can be challenging.</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I have the skills I need to develop trusting relationships with youth who have experienced abuse and/or neglect.</strong></td>
<td>Strongly disagree: 1, Disagree: 3</td>
<td>All respondents commented that they acquired skills through experience not training.</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I can build relationships with children who have mental health issues.</strong></td>
<td>Strongly disagree: 2, Disagree: 2</td>
<td>Two respondents said they believed they could do this but, to ensure the safety of others, not all types of mental health issues could be tolerated in their homes.</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I am able to recover quickly from upsets in my relationships with foster children (such as when a child pushes my buttons and/or behaves in ways that hurt my feelings).</strong></td>
<td>Strongly disagree: 1, Disagree: 1</td>
<td>Two respondents noted that when they understand a child’s behavior, they take it less personally. Another commented that foster children often know which buttons to push that will trigger a foster parent. One suggested rewording the item to emphasize the button-pushing behavior.</td>
<td>Reword: 1. “I am able to recover quickly after a child pushes my buttons and/or behaves in ways that hurt my feelings.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I can model for a child how to build and maintain healthy relationships with others.</strong></td>
<td>Strongly disagree: 1, Disagree: 3</td>
<td>All respondents described this as vital.</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **I could parent a child who is aggressive, steals, or lies.**              | Strongly disagree: 4               | Three respondents indicated that they could parent a child who steals and lies, but that they could not always parent a child who is aggressive. Two participants suggested rewording the item and two | Revise: 1. “I have the tools I need to parent a child who lies or steals.” 2. “I have the tools I need to
suggested splitting it into multiple items. All four also described how in some situations they could parent an aggressive child and in others they could not.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If/when I make a mistake with my foster child, I know how to apologize and find a way to move on.</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>All respondents described this skill as vital.</th>
<th>None</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have tools for developing a relationship with a child who has special needs.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>One respondent suggested using words other than “special needs” to clarify whether the item refers to disabilities or trauma-based emotional issues. All others described this as important because so many kids do have special needs.</td>
<td>Revise: “I have tools for developing relationships with children who have disabilities.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know how to help a child develop age-appropriate social skills and friendships.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>The following issues arose: friendships are not always the most important issue to address; differences between age-appropriate and developmentally appropriate skills; rewording to de-emphasize friendships.</td>
<td>Revise: 1. “I know how to help a child form same-age peer relationships.” 2. “I can help a child form developmentally appropriate friendships.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can implement parenting practices that help youth in my home follow rules and feel loved.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>All respondents stated that this is important. The first participant took issue with the word “loved,” stating that one cannot always show love. Subsequent respondents were probed about the appropriateness of the word. Two thought the item was fine as is and one suggested replacing “loved” with “cared for” or “safe.”</td>
<td>Reword: “I can implement parenting practices that help youth in my home follow rules and feel cared for.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am confident in my ability to establish clear rules and to enforce</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>All respondents described the challenges of following through with this in the</td>
<td>Reword: “I can establish clear rules and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey item</td>
<td>Responses</td>
<td>Summary of respondents’ comments</td>
<td>Recommendations for revision</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>limits even when a child argues about consequences.</td>
<td>I 3</td>
<td>All respondents described this as important and also challenging.</td>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am confident in my ability to see the best in people.</td>
<td>I 3</td>
<td>Participants tended to interpret the item as asking whether they used the same routine each time. Although they each identified several strategies, they struggled with the item before arriving at an answer.</td>
<td>Revise: “I have several strategies for showing children that my home is a safe place.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have specific strategies for showing a child that my home is a safe place.</td>
<td>1 3</td>
<td>Participants described this as a crucially important part of the process.</td>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know how to support a child who acts out following a visit with his/her birth family.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Participants described this as a crucially important part of the process.</td>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Empathy towards youth**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey item</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Summary of respondents’ comments</th>
<th>Recommendations for revision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I understand the impact of abuse and neglect on attachment.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Participants commented on the importance of this knowledge.</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know how to communicate love and care to a child who I do not know well.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Respondents suggested changing the word “love” and generally felt like “empathy,” “care,” and “safety” are more important.</td>
<td>Revise: “I know how to demonstrate empathy and show care to a child I do not know well.” (Safety is addressed in a previous item.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am confident in my ability to help a child develop a healthy self-concept so he/she can feel loveable and capable.</td>
<td>2 2</td>
<td>Respondents talked about the difference between trying to help and actually making a difference.</td>
<td>Revise: “I have ideas about how to support a child in developing a healthy self-concept so s/he can feel loveable and capable.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know the symptoms of trauma and</td>
<td>3 1</td>
<td>Participants stated that this item should be</td>
<td>Revise:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>what to do to help a child who is showing that he/she is triggered or</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>traumatized.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can find a child the services and supports he/she needs in the</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>community and at school to help him/her process trauma.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No matter what a child has been through, he/she should be expected</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to treat others with respect.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can foster a child who harms people or animals.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have the parenting skills I need to help a child develop a healthy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attachment.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am confident in my ability to teach a child to recognize other people’s</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feelings.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am able to show love to a child</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
|甚至当他们口头上对我挑衅时。
|“爱”这里。建议将其替换为“爱的回应”，“清晰的界限”，或“善良。”
|1. “我可以在孩子对我爱和关怀没有回应时表现出善良。”

|我能保持冷静，当孩子语言或身体上对我挑衅。
||3 |1 |
|寄养父母认为这很具有挑战性但重要。
|None

|我知道如何教授孩子为自己倡导，以便他们能够得到他们需要。
|受访者指出此项目的三个问题。首先，他们建议寄养儿童不应总是被期望自我倡导。其次，他们建议即使他们被教导去倡导，他们也不常被倾听，因此需要持续的支持。第三，项目用词需要澄清，以便澄清倡导的语境（家庭/学校）。
|Revise:
1. “我知道如何倾听孩子，并帮助他/她识别他们自己的需求。”
2. “我知道如何帮助孩子学习他们在学校使用的策略。”
3. “我知道如果他们在学校感到自己的需求未被满足时，我该如何帮助他们。”

|我舒适地改变我的育儿策略，基于孩子过去的创伤经历。
|一些受访者描述了他们如何尝试创伤敏感，同时指出他们不会更改某些期望和方法。
|Reword:
“我舒适地使用育儿策略的范围，以支持那些经历过创伤的儿童。”

|教育角色与过程
|Response
|Strongly agree
|Disagree
|Agree
|Strongly disagree
|Summary of respondents’ comments
|Recommended revisions

<p>|167 |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey item</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Interviewees</th>
<th>Add</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I can help a child settle into a new school.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondents struggled with the word “school” and whether it referred to their local school or a different school. They suggested splitting this into two items: one about collaboration with administration and the other about helping the child adjust.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reword:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. “I am comfortable forging relationships with school staff and sharing information about a child.”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. “I have strategies for helping children adjust to a new school setting.”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know which information a school will need to educate my foster child and I know how to obtain that information.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants described the challenge of obtaining necessary information. Three people suggested that the item be split into two, one item about knowing the necessary information and the other about obtaining it.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revise:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. “I know what information a school will need in order to educate my foster child.”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. “I know how to request the information a child will need when he/she enrolls in a new school.”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand when I need to take the responsibility for attending school meetings about my foster child’s progress.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewees found the wording of this item too long and suggested revising it by eliminating the word “responsibility.”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revise:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I know when I need to attend school meetings about a child’s progress.”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can read and understand an Individualized Education Program (IEP).</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All respondents indicated that this skill is important and that they learned it through experience not training.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is likely that a youth in my care will need specific supports at school due to a disability or special need.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three respondents noted that all foster youth have special needs. One suggested rewording disability to “emotional disability due to trauma.”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know my responsibilities in making school-based decisions.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One respondent commented that this can be difficult when an educational advocate or educational surrogate is involved. Another suggested that “school-based decisions” may be too broad.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Add:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“…about a child’s IEP or in-school programming.”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Revise</td>
<td>Notes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am comfortable approaching school personnel if I think a child in my care needs an educational evaluation or a new IEP.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Respondents answered this item without questions and were clear on the wording.</td>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can identify the difference between a behavior disorder and a trauma response.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Respondents described how difficult it is to know the difference and how important it is to be aware that the responses to each should be different.</td>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know which educational decisions are my responsibility and which are made by birth parents and/or social workers.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Three of the respondents described how murky this can get, as not all child welfare workers respond consistently. They also noted that these roles should be made clear during training.</td>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I am not the educational decision-maker for a child in my care, I am confident that I can find and communicate with that person about issues that are relevant to the child’s education.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Respondents suggested modifying this item because it is not always possible to communicate consistently with the educational decision-maker and/or to feel like your opinion matters. They recommended splitting this into two items to address this issue.</td>
<td>Revise: 1. “If I am not the educational decision-maker for a child in my care, I’m confident that I can find out who is.” 2. “I am comfortable communicating with the educational decision-maker and advocating on a child’s behalf.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know how to implement activities and routines in my home that can help a child do better in school.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Respondents raised two concerns. First, they suggested that the item be reworded given that sometimes academic skills are not the priority. Second, they noted that communicating with teachers/staff about school-related issues was necessary to do this well.</td>
<td>Revise: 1. “I am comfortable talking with teachers about a child’s academic, social, and behavioral progress at school.” 2. “I know how to implement activities and routines in my home that can help a child do better in school.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am confident in my ability to talk with school personnel about the</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Participants indicated that this item was clear.</td>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. I understand the challenges that children in foster care tend to experience in school and I know how to help.  
   
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Summary of respondents’ comments</th>
<th>Recommended revisions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Respondents indicated this item was clear and could answer it without trouble.</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. I have many ideas about activities and routines I can use in my home to teach a child academic skills.  
   
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Summary of respondents’ comments</th>
<th>Recommended revisions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Respondents noted that sometimes the most helpful approach is to reduce academic expectations, especially around homework.</td>
<td>Add item: “I know how to help a child with academics and when to advocate for reduced homework expectations”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. I am clear on children’s legal rights at school.  
   
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Summary of respondents’ comments</th>
<th>Recommended revisions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Most of the respondents indicated that they knew how to find legal information as needed.</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. I know how to teach children to self-advocate at school.  
   
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Summary of respondents’ comments</th>
<th>Recommended revisions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
   | 4                 |          |      |               | Three of the respondents stated that teaching children to self-advocate is important but that they often need help following up with teachers. One respondent indicated that she did not believe children should have to self-advocate, rather that the foster parents should take that on. Another talked about the importance of supporting youth to develop self-awareness and then collaborating with them to identify the best strategy for problem-solving. | Revise:  
   
   1. “I know how help children identify their own needs so they can self-advocate at school.”  
   
   2. “I know when and how to support a child in getting his/her needs met at school.” |

---

**Developmentally appropriate expectations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey items</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Summary of respondents’ comments</th>
<th>Recommended revisions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I know how abuse and neglect can</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>All respondents identified this item as</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement</td>
<td>Score</td>
<td>Comments</td>
<td>Revised Statement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have specific ideas about how to structure my home to help children</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Two respondents suggested replacing “I have specific ideas” with simpler language. Three respondents noted that children may never “overcome” past abuse and recommended changing that word.</td>
<td>Reword: “I can structure my home to help children learn to cope with the effects of past trauma.”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>over come past abuse and neglect.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know the difference between a developmental delay and a disability</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>One respondent stated that the item was not important and should be eliminated. Three respondents thought this item was important because delays have different treatment and long-term implications than disorders/disabilities. Participants suggested rephrasing the item to target foster parents’ skills at noticing developmental progress and knowing when/how to seek out resources for help.</td>
<td>Reword: “I know how to find providers who can help me determine whether a child is experiencing a delay or a disability/disorder.” *The item about milestones should come before this item.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or disorder.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have ideas about which chores in my home could be appropriate for</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>All of the respondents talked about the importance of giving children a sense of responsibility that is appropriate for their developmental level. They recommended changing the word “ages” to “developmental levels” and the word “chores” to “responsibilities.”</td>
<td>Revise: 1. “I think it is important for children to have responsibilities at home.” 2. “I have ideas about responsibilities in my home that could be appropriate for children of various developmental levels.”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>children of different ages.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am clear about milestones across development and I know what to do</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Respondents all stated that this item is important, though one was confused by the phrase “I know what to do” and recommended a clarification. One recommended moving it up in the survey. Another suggested adding an item about finding specialists.</td>
<td>Revise: “I am clear about age-appropriate developmental milestones across childhood.” *Move item up in the survey.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>if I think I child is behind.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am confident that I could find activities in my home to help a child who struggles in school.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>One respondent thought this item was redundant with previous item about routines and expectations. Another suggested replacing the word “activities.”</td>
<td>Revise: “I’m confident that my home is a place where a child can learn skills to support his/her success in school.”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know how to parent a child who acts young for his/her age.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>No respondents indicated any difficulty understanding or responding to this item.</td>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know how to parent a child who acts old for his/her age.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>One respondent thought it might be useful to add the word “parentified” to this item. None of the other respondents noted this and, when probed, two recommended keeping it as is.</td>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have specific strategies in mind that I could use to help a child who is developmentally delayed.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Respondents described the benefits of calling on local resources and specialists to develop strategies and increase repertoire.</td>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My parenting approach has the potential to help a child overcome developmental delays.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Three of the respondents commented that the word “overcome” should be replaced, as children cannot always overcome a delay.</td>
<td>Revise: “My parenting approach has the potential to help a child make developmental progress in areas of delay.”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am confident in my ability to create opportunities for children in my home to develop socially and emotionally.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>Some respondents found this item confusing and suggested rewording for clarity. One respondent commented on the value of community service.</td>
<td>Revise: “My home is a place where children can develop socially and emotionally.”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Behavior management**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey item</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I expect that from time to time a</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All respondents suggested rewording this</td>
<td>Revise:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item</td>
<td>Likert Scale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A child in foster care will exhibit challenging behavior.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know what to do if a child throws a temper tantrum in public.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have strategies for teaching children to calm themselves down when they are agitated.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When a child is acting out, I know how to help them settle down.</td>
<td>1 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have ideas about how I could teach a child to be safe with others.</td>
<td>1 1 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am comfortable using different strategies to help children manage their behavior when they are acting out.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know how to avoid getting into a power struggle with a child.</td>
<td>3 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I establish a consequence, I know how to follow through.</td>
<td>3 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am confident in my ability to help a child repair a relationship that he/she has damaged through unsafe behavior.</td>
<td>2 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
or unkind behavior.

I know how to show care to a child after he/she has hurt my feelings in some way.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey item</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Summary of Respondents’ Comments</th>
<th>Recommended Revisions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I know how to show care to a child after he/she has hurt my feelings in some way.</td>
<td>1 2</td>
<td>Respondents commented that this item was straightforward and answered it without issue.</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have ideas about routines, structures, and expectations in my house that will help children learn appropriate behavior.</td>
<td>1 3</td>
<td>Respondents indicated that this item is clearly worded. One suggested adding a statement about implementing the ideas. One suggested it might be redundant with previous items.</td>
<td>Revise: “I can implement routines, structures, and expectations in my home that will help children learn appropriate behavior.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am confident adapting my parenting approach for a child with special needs.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>All respondents indicated that this skill is important. One stated that the item was redundant, and another commented on the likelihood that a foster child’s developmental age differs from his/her chronological age.</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand how my responses to a child’s acting out behavior affect his/her self-concept.</td>
<td>2 2</td>
<td>Two respondents recommended replacing “self-concept” with “self-esteem.”</td>
<td>Revise: “I understand how my responses to a child’s acting-out behavior can affect his/her self-esteem.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am unclear on how to appropriately reward a child who is showing improvements in his/her behavior.</td>
<td>2 2</td>
<td>Respondents suggested changing the direction of this item (wording positively) and replacing the word “reward” because it implies sticker charts, which not all parents would use.</td>
<td>Revise: “I can appropriately reinforce a child’s improvements in his/her behavior.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Social-emotional development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey item</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Summary of Respondents’ Comments</th>
<th>Recommended Revisions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am confident that my parenting skills will help children learn to get</td>
<td>1 1 2</td>
<td>Respondents noted challenges associated with answering this item. First, foster</td>
<td>Revise: “I am confident that my</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
along well with others.  

children are often social targets.  Second, foster parents do not have control over the child’s response to teaching.  

parenting skills can support a child in developing interpersonal skills.”

| I am aware of the tactics I use to calm down when I’m upset. | 1 | 3 | All respondents recommended rephrasing this item to emphasize the importance of modeling these strategies. | Revise: “I have strategies for calming down when I’m upset and I can model these for youth.” |

| I have skills that I can use to help a child develop self-awareness. | 3 | | Respondents did not understand what was meant by the words “self-awareness” and recommended splitting this item into different items about various skills. | Revise: 1. “I have the skills to help a child develop self-regulation.”  
2. “I can help a child learn physical self-awareness and appropriate boundaries.”  
3. “I have strategies for helping a child identify his/her emotions.”  
4. “I can support a child in developing and understanding his/her sense of identity.” |

| I can teach a child to follow directions and communicate respectfully. | 2 | 2 | Respondents commented on the importance of modeling effective communication. | Revise: “I can model respectful communication to support a child’s development of this skill.” |

| I know how to talk with a child about their cultural heritage and sociocultural norms. | 1 | 3 | Respondents indicated that this is important but that the wording of the item was confusing. Specifically, they suggested that the term “sociocultural norms” be replaced. | Revise: 1. “I know how to support a child in developing his/her sense of cultural identity.”  
2. “I can talk to a child about his/her cultural identity and I can help him/her navigate questions, social issues, and expectations at school.” |
There are specific steps I can take to help a child demonstrate his/her emotions in a safe and productive way.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>2</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>Respondents provided differing feedback about the wording on this item. Some felt that “specific steps” implied that you would teach all children in the same way.</th>
<th>Revise: “I have a repertoire of strategies for teaching a child to demonstrate emotions in a safe and productive way.”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have ideas about what to do if I notice that a child in my care is withdrawn and/or noncommunicative.</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Respondents indicated that this item is clear and valuable.</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can teach a child about appropriate social boundaries.</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Respondents indicated that this item is clear and valuable. Two respondents suggested adding a second item about sexual boundaries.</td>
<td>Revise: 1. “I can teach a child about appropriate social boundaries.” 2. “I can teach a child about sexual health and appropriate sexual boundaries.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Probes to be asked at the end of the interview:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Probe</th>
<th>Summary of respondents’ comments</th>
<th>Interviewer recommendations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Are there other questions that should be included in this survey?</td>
<td>One respondent did not recommend any additional items. Others recommended items related to the following:  • Biological family relationships and sibling visitation (e.g., “I think it’s important to maintain frequent visits with siblings in care.”)</td>
<td>Add the following items: 1. I can connect with other foster families to find resources to support my foster child’s development. 2. I can create a community for a foster</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• Helping youth identify a normalizing community so they know people who share aspects of their identity (foster experience, race, class, etc.)
• Knowledge of attachment, awareness that foster youth will likely act out as they become more comfortable, and the skills foster parents need to address this issue
• Understanding school systems and where to find good educational information
• Comfort and skill navigating complex systems
• Finding resources to pursue developmental issues (e.g., medical professionals and specialists)
• How to help all children in a home feel safe when one child is acting out
• Acknowledging a child’s small successes, expanding foster parents’ measures of success beyond typical definitions and being patient with slow progress
• Understanding the impact of media on development
• The importance of having a print-rich home and/or reading to a child regularly
• Awareness of how to maintain a non-chaotic home for traumatized youth
• Skills to support a child’s development of a sense of self and empowerment
• Comfort with youth being distractible in school and the impact of trauma on brain development
• The role of nutrition in promoting development and supporting learning
• Knowledge of how to advocate for classroom accommodations
• Comfort building relationships with school personnel
• Preparedness to teach others in the family or community how to be consistent with home-based interventions and child that includes people who have similar experiences and identities to him/her.

3. I expect that youth may act out as they become more comfortable in my home and I understand how this relates to the development of healthy attachment.
4. I have ideas about how I can respond if a child begins to act out as s/he becomes more comfortable in my home.
5. I am confident working with a school system, and I know how to research educational questions as they arise.
6. When I am dealing with a complex system, such as school or child welfare, and I know I can find the information I need to support my child.
7. I have ideas about how I can create a home environment in which a child can feel safe, even when others are acting out.
8. I notice when a child is making small steps towards improvement and I am patient with slow progress.
9. I have strategies for maintaining a sense of calm in my home.
10. Children in my home have consistent access to books and printed materials.
11. I know the limits I would set around technology and media exposure for children of different ages.
12. I am aware of the impact of trauma on learning and how this might present for my child in a classroom setting.
13. I know the kinds of classroom accommodations a child might need and how to advocate for them.
14. I know where to find information about nutrition and can offer a child nutrition that promotes healthy development.
15. I believe that children in my care need consistent expectations and supports across settings.
16. I know how to help other caregivers provide the care and structure that a child in my home needs to be successful.

Do not add the following:
- Only one foster parent noted the issue with sibling visitation, due to a personal experience. Although it is important to the fostering overall, it does not relate directly to school or development.
- There is an item about supporting the development of self-esteem, so the item about empowerment will not be added.
- Recommendations from interviewees in the education section of the survey sufficiently address the issue of relationship-building, so no additional items needed.

2. Do you think this survey would be useful for foster parents, though they articulated different reasons for this.

All respondents suggested that this survey would be useful for foster parents, though they articulated different reasons for this. This information is helpful for the piloting process and suggests that Department of
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>useful in determining a foster parent’s preparedness to support foster youth educationally and developmentally?</td>
<td>Two participants noted that by administering this pre-MAPP, foster parents could be more aware of what to pay attention to. Another commented that this could be useful for foster parents to set goals around these skills, but that it would be important for them to know they could not master all of these without experience. All believed this tool could be beneficial for improving MAPP and providing foster parents with ongoing support post-placement. One interviewee commented that she anticipated foster parents would start out rating themselves highly for all of these skills and then confidence would diminish over time, once they were in the role.</td>
<td>Children and Families social workers and supervisors should be involved in strategizing appropriate uses for the data.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Would it be reasonable for a foster parent to fill out this form independently?</td>
<td>Respondents stated that foster parents could complete this independently, but a few noted that it could also be beneficial for this measure to be used as part of an interview process with social workers or a roundtable discussion during training.</td>
<td>See above.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Iteration 3: Educational Parenting Inventory for Foster Parents

### Building relationships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am able to form a parental relationship with children from different cultural backgrounds.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I have the skills I need to develop trusting relationships with youth who have experienced abuse and/or neglect.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I can build relationships with children who have mental health issues.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I am able to recover quickly after a child pushes my buttons and/or behaves in ways that hurt my feelings.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I can model for a child how to build and maintain healthy relationships with others.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I have the tools I need to parent a child who lies or steals.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I have the tools I need to parent a child who is aggressive towards others.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I know my threshold for managing aggressive behavior in my home.</td>
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<tr>
<td>If/when I make a mistake with my foster child, I know how to apologize and find a way to move on.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I have tools for developing relationships with children who have disabilities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I know how to help a child form same-age peer relationships.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I can help a child form developmentally appropriate friendships.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I can implement parenting practices that help youth in my home follow rules and feel cared for.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I can establish clear rules and can usually enforce limits even when a child argues about consequences.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am confident in my ability to see the best in people.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I have several strategies for showing children that my home is a safe place.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I know how to support a child who acts out following a visit with their birth family.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Empathy towards youth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I understand the impact of abuse and neglect on attachment.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I know how to demonstrate empathy and show care to a child I do not know well.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I have ideas about how to support a child in developing a healthy self-concept so they can feel loveable and capable.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
I know the symptoms of trauma to look for and how to help a child who has experienced trauma.

| I know how to identify signs that a child might be triggered and I have ideas about how I would seek help. |
| I can find a child the services and supports they need in the community and at school to help them process trauma. |
| I can foster a child who harms people. |
| I can foster a child who harms animals. |
| I have parenting skills that can support a child in developing a healthy attachment. |
| I expect that youth may act out as they become more comfortable in my home and I understand how this relates to the development of healthy attachment. |
| I have ideas about how I can respond if a child begins to act out as they become more comfortable in my home. |
| I have tools for helping a child learn to recognize other people’s feelings. |
| I can show kindness to a child even after they have been verbally aggressive towards me. |
| I am able to remain calm when a child is acting out verbally or physically towards me. |
| I am able to keep from being personally offended when a foster child does not respond to my love and care. |
| I know how to listen to a child and to help them identify their own needs. |
| I know how to help children learn strategies that they can use to self-advocate at school. |
| I know how to help a child if they feel their needs are not being met at school. |
| I am comfortable using a range of parenting tactics to support children who have experienced trauma. |

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### Educational role and process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational role and process</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am comfortable forging relationships with school staff and sharing information about a child.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have strategies for helping a child adjust to a new school setting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know what information a school will need in order to educate a foster child.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know how to request the information a child will need when they enroll in a new school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know when I need to attend school meetings about a child’s progress.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can read and understand an Individualized Education Program (IEP).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is likely that a youth in my care will need specific supports at school due to a disability or special need.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When I am dealing with a complex system, such as a school or child welfare agency, I know I can find the information I need to support a child.

I know the kinds of classroom accommodations a child might need and how to advocate for them.

I am confident working with a school system and I know how to research educational questions as they arise.

I know my responsibilities in making decisions about a child’s IEP or school program.

I am comfortable approaching school personnel if I think a child in my care needs an educational evaluation or a new IEP.

I can identify the difference between a behavior disorder and a trauma response.

I am aware of the impact of trauma on learning and I know how this might present for a child in a classroom setting.

I know which educational decisions are my responsibility and which are made by birth parents and/or social workers.

If I am not the educational decision-maker for a child in my care, I’m confident that I can find out who is.

I am comfortable communicating with the educational decision-maker (if it is not me) and advocating on a child’s behalf.

I am comfortable talking with teachers about a child’s academic, social, and behavioral progress at school.

I know how to implement activities and routines in my home that can help a child do better in school.

I am confident in my ability to talk with school personnel about the services and supports a child in my care might need.

I understand the challenges that children in foster care tend to experience in school and I know how to help.

I know how to help a child with academics and when to advocate for reduced homework expectations.

I am clear on children’s legal rights at school.

I know how to help children identify their own needs so they can self-advocate at school.

I know when and how to support a child in getting their needs met at school.

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**Developmentally appropriate expectations**

I am clear about age-appropriate developmental milestones throughout childhood.

I know how abuse and neglect can impact development.

I can structure my home to help children learn to cope with the effects of past trauma.
I notice when a child is making small steps towards improvement and I am patient with slow progress.

I have strategies for maintaining a sense of calm in my home.

I know how to find providers who can help me determine if a child is experiencing a delay or a disability/disorder.

I think it is important for children to have responsibilities at home.

I have ideas about responsibilities in my home that could be appropriate for children of various developmental levels.

I am confident that my home is a place where a child could learn skills to support their success in school.

I know how to parent a child who acts young for their age.

I know how to parent a child who acts old for their age.

I have specific strategies in mind that I could use to help a child who is developmentally delayed.

My parenting approach has the potential to help a child make developmental progress in areas of delay.

Children in my home have consistent access to books and printed materials.

I know the limits I would set around technology and media exposure for children of different ages.

My home is a place where children can develop socially and emotionally.

I know where to find information about nutrition and can offer a child nutrition that promotes healthy development.

Behavior management

Strongly disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly agree

I expect a child in foster care to exhibit challenging behavior.

I know what to do if a child throws a temper tantrum in public.

I have strategies for teaching children to calm themselves down when they are agitated.

I know what to do when a child is extremely agitated and cannot calm down.

I have strategies that can help a child learn to be safe with others.

I am comfortable using different strategies to help children manage their behavior when they are acting out.

I know how to avoid getting into a power struggle with a child.

If I establish a consequence, I know how to follow through.

I am confident in my ability to help a child repair a relationship that they have damaged through unsafe or unkind behavior.

I know how to show care to a child after they have hurt my feelings in some way.

I can implement routines, structures, and expectations in my home that will help children learn appropriate behavior.

I am confident adapting my parenting approach for a child with special
needs.
I understand how my responses to a child’s acting-out behavior can affect their self-esteem.
I can appropriately reinforce a child’s improvements in their behavior.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social-emotional development</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am confident that my parenting approach can support a child in developing interpersonal skills.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I can connect with other foster families to find resources to support a foster child’s development.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I have strategies for calming down when I’m upset and I can model these for youth.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I have the skills to help a child develop self-regulation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I can help a child develop physical self-awareness and appropriate boundaries.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I have strategies for helping a child identify their emotions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I believe that children in my care need consistent expectations and supports across settings.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I know how to help other caregivers provide the care and structure that a child in my home needs to be successful.</td>
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<td>I can support a child in developing and understanding their sense of identity.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I can model respectful communication to support a child’s development of this skill.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I know how to support a child in developing their sense of cultural identity.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I can talk to my child about their cultural identity and I can help them navigate questions, social issues, and expectations at school.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I can create a community for a foster child that includes people who have similar experiences and identities to them.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I have ideas about how I could create a home environment in which a child can feel safe, even when others are acting out.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I have a repertoire of strategies for teaching a child to demonstrate emotions in a safe and productive way.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I have ideas about what to do if I notice that a child in my care is withdrawn and/or noncommunicative.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I can teach a child about appropriate social boundaries.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I can teach a child about sexual health and appropriate sexual boundaries.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
REFERENCES


Bass, G. (n.d.). Analysis of the Massachusetts Approaches to Partnerships in Parenting (MAPP) training for the presence of educational parenting skills. Unpublished manuscript.


Berelson, B. (1952). Content analysis in communication research.


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