

**A POPULATION IGNORED: FOSTER PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF
GIFTEDNESS AND ITS ROLE IN THE EXPERIENCES OF YOUTH IN
FOSTER CARE**

by

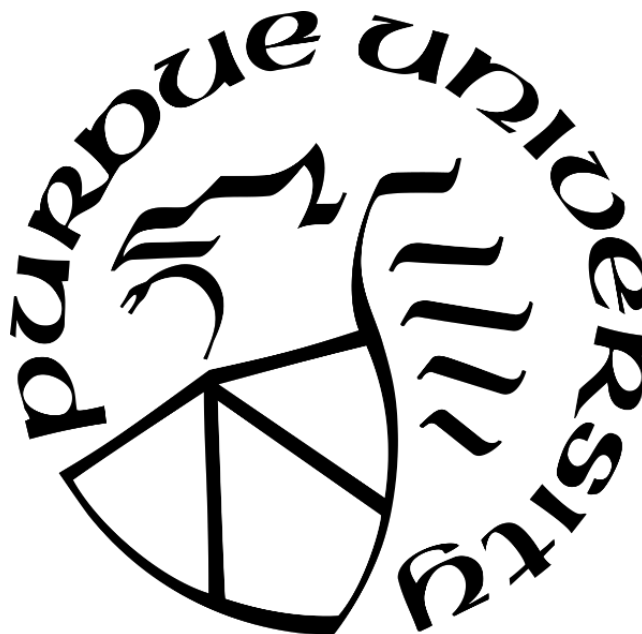
Alissa Cress

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THE PURDUE UNIVERSITY GRADUATE SCHOOL
STATEMENT OF COMMITTEE APPROVAL

Dr. Marcia Gentry, Chair

Department of Educational Studies

Dr. Nielsen Pereira

Department of Educational Studies

Dr. Kristen Seward

Department of Educational Studies

Dr. Brenda Morton

University of Mary Hardin-Baylor

Approved by:

Dr. Ayse Çiftçi

“One child, one teacher, one book, one pen, can change the world.” – Malala Yousafzai

“There needs to be a lot more emphasis on what a child can do instead of what they cannot do.”

– Temple Grandin

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ABSTRACT

In this dissertation, I sought to understand foster parents' perceptions of giftedness, how foster children's strengths, gifts, and talents affect their experiences and those of their foster parents, and what resources and information foster parents have for supporting their foster children's education and gifts. To understand these beliefs, I analyzed quantitative and qualitative survey data from 53 foster parents throughout the United States and analyzed interviews from 14 of those foster parents. Most foster parents surveyed perceived their foster children as a little or very different academically and in other ways than their peers not in foster care, and perceived they had different educational experiences than their peers, largely attributed to their lived experiences prior to entering and during foster care. Most participants felt their foster children's abilities, strengths, and talents affected foster parents a little or very much. Interviewed and surveyed foster parents defined giftedness as including the following attributes: academic achievement, natural ability or innate talent, intelligence, domain-specific capabilities, performance or skills above average for their age or above their peers, unique approaches to learning, and motivation for learning. Interviewees also addressed non-academic forms of giftedness, socioemotional characteristics of children with gifts and talents, and noted that these students may have some difficulties in school. Foster parents explained the adaptations they have made to their parenting because of their foster children's strengths, talents, and abilities, and highlighted the unique life experiences of foster children, which were not only hinderances but also could help them succeed academically and in life. Participants also expressed why they think foster children are not identified for gifted education programming. Foster parents had many needs related to their foster children's education and strengths, talents, and abilities. They made recommendations to those who train new foster parents and provide ongoing training to

current foster parents; to schools and teachers of foster children; and to new foster parents about how to best meet the needs of foster children and encourage their gifts and talents.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

With the number of youth currently in the foster care system hovering around 500,000 (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2019), it is becoming increasingly important to recognize the academic needs of youth in foster care from a positive, strengths-focused approach. Youth in foster care experience many challenges not faced by their peers outside of the foster care system, including, but not limited to, increased school mobility, frequent periods of re-adjustment to new circumstances, and prior instances of maltreatment (Calix, 2009; Emerson & Lovitt, 2003; Sparks, 2016). These challenges are seen as risk factors that can lead to dramatic academic, behavioral, and social deficiencies throughout children's lives (Dworsky, 2018; Finkelstein et al., 2002; Franco & Durdella, 2018; Pecora, 2012; Piel, 2018; Skilbred et al., 2017; Yi & Wildeman, 2018). Some youth in foster care have high academic achievement, but these students are treated as the exception, rather than the rule (Martin & Jackson, 2002; Newell, 2018; Skilbred et al., 2017).

Part of the issue in the lack of identification of students in foster care as having gifts and talents may be in the way that giftedness is defined. For students to be identified, 13 states require the use of IQ scores, and 14 require some form of achievement test data (National Association for Gifted Children, NAGC, 2015). Students in foster care who do not achieve at the same level as their same-age peers on these assessments are likely to be overlooked. These students experience frequent transitions and school changes, which often leaves them performing at a lower level than their peers (Barrat & Berliner, 2013; Clemens et al., 2018). Children in foster care are capable, so it is important they have a support system in place to advocate for them.

A key component of the success of youth in foster care is access to a positive support system, including involvement of foster parent(s) in the child's care. Foster parents' beliefs about their foster child's academic skills, educational experiences, and the effects of their child's abilities and talents on their experiences could change the ways in which they interact with their child about academics. In the field of gifted education, the importance of parent engagement and their perceptions of giftedness has been emphasized (Cornell, 1983, 1989; Davis, 2014; Koshy et al., 2013; Louis & Lewis, 1992; Matthews et al., 2014; Renati et al., 2017). These perceptions of giftedness have not been studied with foster parents in mind.

Purpose

In this study, I sought to identify the perceptions of giftedness that foster parents hold. Definitions of giftedness vary across contexts, and parents may have different definitions based on their experiences and awareness of giftedness (Cornell, 1983; Keirouz, 1990; Louis & Lewis, 1992; Reis et al., 2014). Identifying foster parents' perceptions can help to inform trainings for foster parents on the characteristics and needs of the youth in their care, hopefully increasing their academic advocacy in the process.

To guide my study, I pursued answers to the following research questions:

- 1) What do foster parents view as defining characteristics of giftedness?
- 2) What role, if any, do foster parents perceive ability, gifts, and talents have in their child's daily life in and out of an educational context?
- 3) What resources are available for foster parents related to their child's abilities, gifts, and talents?
 - a. What training or curriculum is available for foster parents related to their child's abilities, gifts, and talents?

- b. What recommendations for schools and foster care facilities do foster parents have related to their child's education?

Significance

Given the lack of research addressing foster youth and the beliefs of foster parents, I intend for this study to bring a voice to a population that has been omitted from the field of gifted education. There are about 500,000 youth in foster care in the United States (Children's Bureau, 2018; Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2019). Despite these staggering numbers, these children are often overlooked for high ability education services, and they are rarely addressed in the gifted education literature. By addressing foster parents' perceptions of giftedness and discussing the resources they need to meet the academic needs of the youth in their care, this study will bring an important issue to the attention of scholars and practitioners in the field of gifted education and start a discussion for policymakers at the state and national levels. I will also be working with various foster parent organizations and educators to connect this information directly to the organizations that provide trainings so these findings can be used by foster parents and facilitators in the field.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Youth in Foster Care

Children's welfare and fostering programs vary by country, and sometimes by state or region. In the United States, the Children's Bureau within the Department of Health and Human Services is primarily responsible for overseeing the national foster care system. They define foster care a State-run service for those children who, for whatever reason, cannot be in the primary care of their parents or families (Child Welfare Information Gateway, n.d.). Although the federal government oversees the national foster care system, each state has unique regulations and systems in place for providing for these children. Therefore, the experiences of children in foster care, their biological parents, and those caring for them as foster parents vary by state (Casey Family Programs, 2019). Children in foster care have been removed from their home "because they or their families are going through a crisis" (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2020a). Often this is due to evidence of parental neglect, maltreatment, or abuse (Children and Family Services, n.d.; Child and Family Services Reviews, n.d.). According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation (2020b), in 2018, Child Protective Services (CPS) confirmed 673,620 children were victims of maltreatment in the United States. Of those children, 362,826 children received some form of services following a CPS investigation.

Adverse Experiences and Trauma

Although children's experiences in foster care differ, as a whole, children in the foster care system "face significant challenges and are at risk for a myriad of vulnerabilities that create barriers to their success in school" (Palmieri & La Salle, 2017, p. 117). Children in foster care have, on average, lower educational achievement and postsecondary degree attainment, and an

increased risk of academic and behavioral challenges (Beard & Gates, 2019; Palmieri & La Salle, 2017). They also have been shown to display more frequent behavioral and social issues, which could be related to the multitude of challenges they have faced prior to or during their placement in the foster system (Finkelstein et al., 2002).

Transitioning to multiple foster placements can be a form of trauma for children in foster care. According to the U.S. Government Accountability Office ([U.S. GAO], 2019), about nine percent of children in foster care in Colorado and California attended three or more schools within one academic year. In one study of 159 children in foster care, children had an average of 7.35 changes in their foster placement, and more than eight transfers to different schools within their time in foster care (Sullivan et al., 2010). In their study of 415 children in U.S. foster care, Newton et al. (2000) found “volatile placement histories contribute negatively to both internalizing and externalizing behavior of foster children, and that children who experience numerous changes in placement may be at particularly high risk for these deleterious effects” (p. 1363). Frequent mobility, which often comes with changes in foster care placements, has been shown to negatively affect a child’s school performance and reported negative behaviors (Day et al., 2013; Ross, 2016; Sullivan et al., 2010; U.S. GAO, 2010). Changing schools repeatedly forces children to leave behind existing friendships and bonds with teachers, to attempt to fit in and make new friends, and to adjust to new educational settings and expectations, all of which create additional challenges for the child in foster care (Newell, 2018; Rumberger, 2015). Foster children must also deal with teachers and peers who stigmatize those in foster care (Finkelstein et al., 2002; Townsend, 2011).

There is an educational concern for children in foster care who have faced trauma, abuse, neglect, and maltreatment, because of the effects trauma has been shown to have on the brain,

specifically related to outcomes in learning and emotional regulation. Stressful situations are processed by certain areas of the brain, such as the hippocampus and the amygdala. Adverse childhood experiences, or ACEs, “are associated with enduring effects on the structure and function of neural stress-regulatory circuits...and promote alterations in stress sensitivity and emotional regulation later in life” (Herzog & Schmahl, 2018, p. 2). Chronic stress caused by ACEs can cause difficulties in managing social interactions, organizational skills, memory, anxiety, and emotions (Berardi & Morton, 2019; Morton & Berardi, 2018; Siegel, 2012). These effects extend to academics as well, when children with chronic stress or ACEs could experience delays in learning and language development, and difficulty thinking abstractly or using reasoning skills (Vandervort et al., 2012). Victims of abuse or those who experienced trauma as children reported lower self-esteem and self-perceptions, and difficulties in relationships, sometimes into adulthood (Cahill et al., 1991; Reiland & Lauterbach, 2008; Salami, 2010; Suzuki & Tomoda, 2015).

In response to the trauma faced by children and adults, many schools, organizations, and states have adopted a “trauma-informed approach”, enacting trainings and practices to reduce the stressors in the lives of those who have experienced trauma. The United States Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, or SAMHSA created a guide for the groups who are learning to engage in these practices. SAMHSA (2014) explains the goals of the approach.

A program, organization, or system that is trauma-informed realizes the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery; recognizes the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff, and others involved with the system, and responds by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices, and seeks to actively resist re-traumatization.

Some schools and foster parent training organizations are beginning to incorporate a trauma-informed mindset into their training and curriculum.

Focusing on Foster Children's Strengths

Despite the challenges faced by children in foster care, they still have the capacity to be successful, and to achieve and accomplish their goals. Limited studies addressing the academic achievement of foster youth have been conducted, as literature on the topic often focuses on negative educational outcomes. The research that does exist often highlights former foster youth who “succeed” in the traditional sense (e.g., going to college and becoming employed), and characterizes them as exceptionalities (Martin & Jackson, 2002; Newell, 2018). This deficit-based perspective “can serve to amplify negative stereotypes that have lasting impacts on former foster youth” (Fox, 2016, p. 4). Instead, “research that recognizes resilience and other strengths demonstrated by foster youth and [former foster youth] can be used to engineer changes necessary to steward [former foster youth] into and through postsecondary education” (Fox, 2016, p. 4). Skilbred et al. (2017) explained that despite the challenges foster children face, their gifts and strengths should still be exemplified.

In one study focused on the educational achievement of 15 former foster youth in college, Hines et al. (2005) found that five participants were in gifted education classes in elementary school, eleven attended Advanced Placement or other classes in high school to prepare them for college, and ten had goals to obtain a Master's degree or higher. Although many of the more than 4000 foster children studied by Iversen et al. (2010) exhibited learning challenges, researchers found about 15% of the children had high teacher-rated academic competence, and that the group could potentially succeed academically.

Studies that do exist on positive outcomes for children in foster care often cite resilience and support received from foster parents and teachers as factors in their achievement (e.g., Batsche et al., 2012; DeCesare, 2004; Hass & Graydon, 2009; Newell, 2018; Vandervort et al., 2012). Salami (2010) found greater resilience and a higher self-esteem helped to lower

symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder for people who had been exposed to violence.

Batsche et al. (2012) noted former foster youth's ability to be resourceful, maintain positive attitudes, and set goals for their futures. They also said former foster youth were skillful in adapting following mistakes and showed persistence.

Foster Parents

Youth in foster care face many challenges during and after their placement. However, these students are not lost causes. One key protective factor addressed in many aspects of the literature on youth in foster care is the role of the foster parent (Beard & Gates, 2019; Pecora, 2012). The Annie E. Casey Foundation (2020a) defined foster parents as “relatives or nonrelative adults who step up to care for children who have experienced abuse or neglect or whose parents are unable to care for them.” This definition is fairly broad and covers a variety of situational placements. Just as children do not enter foster care for the same reason or stay for the same length of time, foster parents also serve many different roles depending on their training and the needs of the children they serve. Adopt US Kids (n.d.), part of the Children's Bureau, identified six different kinds of foster parenting roles individuals may fill (see Table 1).

Table 1

Types of Foster Parent Roles^a

Type of Foster Parent	Responsibilities
Traditional Foster Parents	Primary caregivers of foster children for a temporary timespan
Respite Care Providers	“Step in to give foster parents needed time off...usually on a regularly scheduled basis”
Emergency Care Providers	Providers who “agree to be on call and to accept short term placements as the need arises”
Kinship Care Providers	Relatives of foster children who can provide care for them formally or informally
Therapeutic Foster Care Providers	Providers who serve children with greater needs than most children in foster care (e.g., children with special needs, those who “have a higher degree of social, behavioral, and mental health needs and receive more intensive services”)
Foster-to-Adopt Care Providers	Individuals who foster children with the intent to adopt them permanently into their families

^a These definitions are provided by Adopt US Kids, as part of the United States Children’s Bureau in the Department of Health and Human Services.

Requirements for becoming a foster parent vary by state and role individuals wish to fill. Age restrictions, relationship status, and personal characteristics are important considerations but differ across states. For example, the age of eligibility to become a foster parent is 21 years old in 36 states and Washington, D.C., 18 years old in six states, and 19 years old in two states. Literacy is a requirement in three states, and four states require at least one English-speaking adult within the home (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2018).

No matter the capacity in which foster parents serve, there is no doubt they each play a vital part in the development and eventual success of the youth in their care. Foster parents often serve as mentors for foster children, are responsible for providing a stable and secure environment for the children in their care, and for helping them grow and thrive until they either receive a permanent placement or are reunited with their biological families (Annie E. Casey

Foundation, 2020a; Cooley et al., 2019; Schwandt, 2013). Foster parents undertake an important role as advocates for foster children's educational needs, communicating with teachers and school leaders as well as helping their foster children with daily academic tasks (Bass, 2017). These are not easy tasks, and just as with traditional family structures, they can be done in many different ways.

Implications of Foster Parents' Perceptions and Preparation

Parents of all backgrounds have different parenting styles and beliefs. The attitudes, actions, and behaviors of parents are unique and play an important part in the academic and social outcomes for their children (Storer et al., 2014). In a study of youth in foster care who attended college and their foster parents, Skilbred et al. (2017) found that certain characteristics of the foster family were important in eventual academic success, as reported by the young adults in foster care. They discussed key actions of foster parents who helped them succeed by encouraging belonging and order and focusing on academics and effort. Storer et al. (2014) found similar results in the focus groups they held about supportive foster child-caregiver relationships. Emphasizing belonging, structure, and supporting students' educational goals were important to the children in their study and were some of the reasons they felt positively connected to their caregivers.

Researchers have shown that foster parents may tend to focus on behavior rather than academics and may not have training related to the academic needs of the children they serve (Conger & Finkelstein, 2003; Finkelstein et al., 2002). Some foster parents may not be aware of the academic resources available within their community (Storer et al., 2014). This is not a one-sided issue, however. Finkelstein et al. (2002) explained that foster parents, school staff and administrators, and caseworkers should *share* the responsibility of meeting students' academic

needs but may miss the mark. In their study of 25 youth in foster care and 54 adults who are responsible for their care (“school staff, foster parents, and caseworkers”), the authors found the accountability passed among various adults, with no one stepping up to advocate for the children’s academics.

Foster parents were most concerned with the children’s behavior; they rarely expressed concern with their foster children’s poor grades, and most did not regularly help with homework. Caseworkers often were not aware of their academic progress, focusing instead on the frequent crises that characterize foster care. School staff usually had little knowledge of a child’s foster care background and how bureaucratic demands of the system might explain missed tests or assignments. No one acknowledged primary responsibility for the educational progress of these children. (p. iii)

Since few people have stepped up to advocate and taken responsibility for the academic needs of these children in foster care, this has led to a population of students whose strengths, gifts, and talents are ignored. This does not have to be the case.

Involving foster parents in training programs for the betterment of the youth in their care is not a new concept (Rork & McNeil, 2011). It is, however, an essential piece of meeting the needs of youth in their care (Strickler et al., 2018). Trainings can be used to develop awareness of academic needs of youth in foster care and opportunities available to them (Newell, 2018), while also helping foster parents feel more competent and like they can continue in their roles as foster parents (Bass, 2017). Another important part of working with foster youth is the perceptions of the foster parents (Strickler, et al., 2018). Parent perceptions and feedback are useful throughout many areas of education, including in identification procedures for gifted and talented education services (Brown & Stambaugh, 2014; Jolly & Matthews, 2012; Kumar, 2010; Reichenberg & Landau, 2009; Siegle, et al., 2016).

For foster parents to be involved, they must know the characteristics of youth with gifts and talents, so they can serve as effective advocates. Yet, little is known about youth in foster care related to the gifts and talents they possess. Understanding foster parents’ perceptions of

giftedness will help to inform their training needs, which could create more comprehensive and effective care for youth in foster care.

Youth with Gifts and Talents and their Parents

Defining giftedness is not a simple task—researchers have been clarifying what it means to be gifted for decades (e.g., Gagné, 2003; Renzulli, 1998; Shavinina, 2009). Davis, Rimm, & Siegle (2011) explained, “there are no universally accepted definitions of *gifted* and *talented*. The terms may be used interchangeably. Some see talented and gifted on a continuum, with gifted at the upper end” (p. 30). Even teachers who work with students identified with gifts and talents cannot come to a consensus (Miedijensky, 2018; Reis & McCoach, 2000; Renzulli, 1998). Generally speaking, most definitions of giftedness include identification of students with advanced ability as compared with their same-age peers across one or more academic areas. The National Association for Gifted Children’s (NAGC, 2019) position statement defined students with gifts and talents as those who “perform – or have the capability to perform – at higher levels compared to others of the same age, experience, and environment in one or more domains” (p. 1). Students who are gifted and talented may demonstrate strengths in the some of the following areas: problem-solving skills; advanced vocabulary; creativity; domain-specific skills (e.g., math, reading, science, athletics, arts, etc.); unique social and emotional needs; deep or abstract thinking; passion for or enjoyment of learning, curiosity, independence, a good sense of humor, social challenges or abilities, and more (Chan & Yuen, 2013; Davis et al., 2011; Haensly & Lehmann, 1996; Hébert, 2011; Maker, 2021; Mayes, 2018; National Association for Gifted Children, n.d.; Sternberg, 2018; Torrance, 1962).

Students who are twice-exceptional have gifts and talents in addition to some form of challenge, need, or disability (NAGC, n.d.), such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder,

Autism Spectrum Disorder, reading difficulties, and other challenges. For these children, sometimes their gifts mask their disabilities, or their disabilities make it difficult to recognize their gifts and talents. Students with gifts and talents, or who are twice-exceptional, may also face stigma and criticisms from their peers or society (Ronskley-Pavia et al., 2019).

The ways in which local, state, and federal departments of education, as well as the broader field of gifted education, define giftedness affects the policies and practices implemented in schools, and how students with gifts and talents are identified and served.

To be identified as having gifts and talents, most state departments of education identify students based on their scores on one or more standardized achievement tests. Thirteen states specifically require a measure of an individual's IQ score in order for a student to be identified for gifted education services (National Association for Gifted Children, 2015). However, IQ scores have been shown to be biased toward certain racial, cultural, and socioeconomic subgroups, yet they continue to be applied to identification procedures despite methodological errors (Irby & Floyd, 2016). Conceptions and stereotypes about various population subgroups can be perpetuated by the continued use of IQ tests and similar standardized measures. One such population that may be negatively affected by the continued use of these measures is youth in foster care, who may not have the same access to resources or consistent education as children not in foster care.

Parents of students with gifts and talents likely have their own distinct definition of giftedness generated through experiences with their children. What parents deem as defining characteristics may differ from that presented in the literature. Louis and Lewis (1992) found that “parents of higher IQ children believe more strongly than parents of lower IQ children that memory, abstract thinking, and creativity-imagination are important elements of giftedness in

preschoolers” (1992, p. 29). Therefore, what one parent views to be key characteristics of giftedness may vary from other parents, as well as accepted definitions in the field.

Just as parents may differ in their definitions of giftedness, they also likely vary in their perceptions of what it means for their children to be gifted. What role does this play in their child’s academics? What role does it play in their child’s day-to-day life, or their parenting as a result? Studies of how parents of students with gifts and talents view giftedness have produced mixed results. Keirouz (1990) said, “research has generally found that parents feel ambivalent about the labeling of their child as gifted” (p. 57). Some researchers found that giftedness is a source of pride in parents (Cornell, 1983; 1989); whereas, other parents see it as a negative trait (Matthews et al., 2014), and find it alters relationships within the family (Cornell, 1983; Pfouts, 1980). Parents may perceive the characteristics associated with their child’s giftedness to affect their parenting and other family interactions. As such, parents may or may not advocate for the identification of their child as gifted, depending upon their perceptions of giftedness and how they think it will affect their child and family. The same is true for foster parents. Their perceptions of giftedness and the role of academic abilities in a child’s development could affect the types of support they provide or services they actively seek out for the foster youth in their care. Although all parents want their child to succeed academically (Spera et al., 2009), some parents may have increased access to educational programs and services about giftedness and how it affects their child’s academic needs (Chan, 2005; Horvat et al., 2003).

Role of Parent and Teacher Support

Although multi-faceted, one key aspect of a positive support system is the parent or guardian in an individual’s life. Developmental psychologists emphasize the importance of early and strong relationships with adults who support the needs and goals of all youth. Bowlby

(1969), for example, suggested the attention infants and toddlers receive in their first formative months can affect academic and social interactions for years. Multi-dimensional support from family members is frequently referenced as a key feature in literature for parenting students with gifts and talents across many cultures (Davis, 2014). In a study of ten high achieving Asian American women, Paik et al. (2018) found, “parents of most of the women were generally described as encouraging and supportive...Many parents wanted to see their daughters succeed educationally or within their profession” (p. 181). Additional support later in life can have noticeable effects on the academic achievement of youth in foster care specifically. Courtney et al. (2018) found additional academic, employment, financial and general support from parents and administrators beyond the traditional foster care timeline increased educational attainment and rates of employment, while decreasing dependency on public support programs (e.g., food assistance). Morton (2016) had similar results in a study of eleven youth formerly in foster care, who went on to obtain post-secondary education. The youth in this study explained that academic and emotional support were essential in their eventual academic successes. To provide this additional support, foster parents need to have an initial understanding of the academic needs of these youth in foster care.

Need for Foster Parent Training

Foster parent requirements and training programs vary by state. In 45 states and Washington, D.C., some training or orientation program is required by law (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2018). Some states (34 and Washington, D.C.) have detailed requirements for the content provided in trainings, and some (25 and Washington, D.C.) require prospective foster parents to complete a designated number of hours of training. In most states this initial

training is not the only program parents must complete. Forty-two states and Washington, D.C. require additional trainings each year for the duration of the foster license period.

The content of these trainings, both initial and ongoing, differ by state. Prospective foster parents in Indiana have four specific training sessions they must attend, for a minimum of 15 hours. These are: an introduction into the Indiana Department of Child Services “mission, vision, and values”; policies and procedures for “Child Abuse and Neglect”; “Attachment, Discipline, and Effects of Caregiving on the Family”; and a review of common challenges related to adoption (Indiana Department of Child Services, 2019). These courses run a total of 16 hours, with many hours of optional training available on other topics. These include cultural competency (for multiple populations), educational advocacy, and relationship building. Annual in-service trainings cover these and similar topics, with a minimum of 15 hours of required training each year. To compare, Iowa’s Department of Human Services requires 30 hours of pre-service training, and a minimum of six hours of annual in-service training (Iowa Department of Human Services, 2002).

Some of the mandatory trainings list that they address the basic educational needs or requirements of children in foster care. However, the depth of the training and topics discussed may not be sufficient in meeting the needs of foster parents and their foster children. For the most successful outcomes, these trainings should aim to foster and adoptive parents feel prepared for their upcoming experiences. “Successful adoptions of foster children partially depend on parents possessing realistic expectations of vulnerable youth, being as ready as they proclaim, and having supports in place should difficulties arise” (Simmel, 2007, p. 248).

Additional training for foster parents on the nature and needs of youth with gifts and talents could be a helpful addition to the limited resources available to foster parents. This

training is one small aspect of what is hopefully a multi-dimensional support structure that exists between the foster care system, foster parents, teachers, and school administrators. Establishing these partnerships has been shown to be beneficial to students and parents. Palmieri and La Salle (2017) suggested forming a “home-school partnership to work with caregivers, child welfare agencies, and students to decide on appropriate individualized supports” (p. 121). In Australia, children identified at an early age as having potential for high academic achievement, and/or those who may have special needs, are connected with government resources and services. “The NQS [National Quality Standards] further requires that services establish and maintain links with support agencies, provide parents with access to relevant information, and facilitate inclusion and support assistance as needed” (Wellisch, 2019, p. 330).

Understanding foster parents’ perceptions of the youth in their care, and of youth with gifts and talents is an important part of providing youth in foster care with optimal support structures. Creating an awareness among foster parents of the characteristics and needs of children with gifts and talents may help them be better advocates for their foster children. These perceptions can also help to inform and shape training for pre-service and in-service foster parents.

Training Teachers of Foster Children

Just as foster parents play an important role in the lives of foster children, their teachers also have a substantial responsibility in the educational and socioemotional outcomes of foster children in their classrooms. Teachers of foster children should identify and advocate for foster children’s needs and strengths, just like foster parents should.

Berardi and Morton (2019) explained that teaching using “a trauma-informed approach is not about excusing behavior due to a child’s circumstances or past history. But, it is asking

educators to seize moments of disruption as an opportunity to mentor a child into what it means to be human” (p. 82). The authors elaborated that when teachers apply trauma-informed practices in schools, the goals are “connecting and developing a relationship with the student and walking alongside the student as they are held accountable for their actions” (p. 83).

Brunzell et al. (2015) discussed the benefits of trauma-informed teaching practices. They said when teachers incorporate students’ development of self-regulation skills, promote their strengths, and help to create positive and productive relationships, this can relieve some of foster children’s struggles and help them succeed. Other beneficial strategies for teachers include frequent and friendly exchanges with students and communications with family members; teachers and students learning about each other; teachers exhibiting sensitivity, respect, and understanding about students’ cultures and backgrounds; and providing students with situations in which students can recognize and express their abilities to help them feel successful (McCoach, 2010; McDermott, 2000; Vandervort et al., 2012).

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

In this study, I surveyed foster parents about their perceptions of giftedness and its effects on the youth in their care. To date, no research exists on the perceptions of foster parents related to their foster children's academic strengths or talents. What foster parents believe about giftedness likely informs the ways they talk to the children in their care about their gifts and talents, and the extent to which they can advocate for these children's strengths in their schools. Also, identifying foster parents' perceptions of the characteristics of youth with gifts and talents can help facilitators to develop useful pre-service and in-service training programs for current and prospective foster parents.

The research questions are:

- 1) What do foster parents view as defining characteristics of giftedness?
- 2) What role, if any, do foster parents perceive ability, gifts, and talent have in their child's daily life in and out of an educational context?
- 3) What resources are available for foster parents related to their child's abilities, gifts, and talents?
 - a. What training or curriculum is available for foster parents related to their child's abilities, gifts, and talents?
 - b. What recommendations for schools and foster care facilities do foster parents have related to their child's educational career?

Participants

To answer these questions, I sought perspectives from foster parents throughout the United States. A range of participants in different states were needed so that there will be

sufficient scope, as a foster parent's experience in one state or area may differ from that of a foster parent in another area. Foster parents surveyed preferably had foster youth currently in their care to offer a sense of the experiences of foster parents and children currently in the foster system. However, as foster children move placements, or some foster parents choose to adopt, this was not a requirement. These foster parents were individuals who had a license to foster youth, are currently fostering, or have fostered at least one child of school age (K-12). Since the focus of this study is on the perceptions held by foster *parents*, no identifiable information was collected about the youth in their care. I also did not collect information about the current academic standing of the children in their care (e.g., GPA, standardized test scores.). This study is about foster parents' perceptions, which may or may not reflect the academic performance of the children up to that point. Additionally, due to the frequent mobility of foster children and the stereotypes often present regarding their academic abilities, foster children may not be accurately identified or served for gifted education services.

Information collected about the foster child included demographics, such as their gender, race and ethnicity, as well the duration of their relationship with the foster parent, and educational activities. Parents were asked to respond about one foster child currently in their care. If they had more than one foster child in their care, they were asked to respond about a foster child who received gifted education services or programming. If none of their foster children received these services, foster parents were asked to provide information about the oldest foster child in their care.

As this is a qualitative study, I did not have a set number of participants needed to determine sufficient power. Even determining what would constitute a representative sample of the overall population of foster parents is difficult. The population of foster parents is limited,

and not much information is available on these individuals. The current number of foster parents within the United States is not easy to identify due to variances in reporting, lapses in licensing, and an overall lack of continuity of the information available about foster care systems.

Multiple qualitative studies on foster parents and youth in foster care included responses from between ten to 30 youth, and ten to 50 foster parents (Balsells Bailón et al., 2018; Finkelstein et al., 2002; Mack, 2012; Morton, 2016; Rosenwald & Bronstein, 2008; Skilbred et al., 2017; Taylor & McQuillan, 2014; Zarate, 2013). In this study, I initially received 96 survey responses. After cleaning the data and eliminating duplicate responses, using processes described below, 53 survey participants were included in the final data analysis. From these 53, I conducted follow-up interviews with 14 participants. Further demographic information about participants can be found in the first section of the results.

Design

This study is primarily qualitative in design. As I studied foster parents' perceptions, my questions were answered best by an in-depth analysis of participants' responses and explanations, rather than brief quantitative responses devoid of context. Qualitative data, such as open-ended responses and interviews, can provide key insights into unpredictable or non-standardized experiences (Johnson & Christensen, 2020). Qualitative research also allows the reader to "understand and appreciate particular groups and individuals" and "inform local policy" (Johnson & Christensen, 2020, p. 33). Children in foster care and their parents are overlooked by the field of gifted education. Identifying and understanding parents' perceptions and children's experiences related to the children's gifts and talents could lead to future awareness and studies in the field. Creswell et al. (2006) stated, "qualitative research can help

develop quantitative measures when there are no measures available or change is involved, because qualitative research is holistic” (p. 2).

I collected data in this study in two phases. In the first phase, participants completed a short questionnaire (see Appendix A). This questionnaire was adapted from a study I conducted with parents of students with gifts and talents at a midsize suburban school corporation (Salazar, 2018). The questionnaire included a demographics section for participants to complete about themselves and about one of their foster children. Participants also responded to survey items to determine their perceptions of giftedness and the role they perceive their child’s abilities play in the child’s daily life and experiences. There were seven open-ended response items, and five closed-ended responses (See Table 2). The first closed-ended question asked participants if they would describe their foster child as gifted, to which they can respond “Yes” or “No”. The other four closed-ended response items were on a Likert-style scale. The fully-anchored, five-point rating scale included options ranging from “Not at all” to “Very much so” (Johnson & Christensen, 2020). See Figure 1 for an example. Each of these closed-ended items had an optional area for parents to provide a rationale for their response.

Table 2

Survey Items

Closed-Ended Items	Open-Ended Items
3. Would you describe your foster child as gifted? (Yes/No)	1. How would you define giftedness?
4. Do you think foster children are different than other children academically?	2. What do you think are characteristics of a “typical” gifted child?
5. Do you think foster children are different than other children in other ways?	8. What needs do you have as a parent of a foster child?
6. Do you think a foster child’s educational experience is different than the experiences of other children?	9. Specifically, what needs do you have related to your foster child’s academics?
7. Have do foster children’s academic abilities, strengths, and talents affect you as a parent?	10. What recommendations would you make for your child’s school/school corporation to best meet your needs as a parent of a gifted child?
	11. Prior to becoming a licensed foster parent, did you receive any training about foster children’s strengths, talents, or abilities? (Yes/No) If yes, what training did you receive?
	12. Prior to becoming a licensed foster parent, did you receive any training about foster children’s academics? (Yes/No) If yes, what training did you receive?
	13. After becoming a licensed foster parent, have you received any training about foster children’s strengths, talents, or abilities? (Yes/No) If yes, what training did you receive?
	14. After becoming a licensed foster parent, have you received any training about foster children’s academics? (Yes/No) If yes, what training did you receive?



Figure 1 *Example Survey Item*

The second phase of data collection involved participant interviews. Following the completion of this questionnaire, participants were asked if they wished to participate in a follow-up interview specifically related to their perceptions of giftedness, the academic abilities of children in their care, and the supports available to them. Johnson and Christensen (2020) explained qualitative data should involve, “interviews that capture direct quotations about people’s perspectives and experiences” (p. 47). These interviews were an important part of the process of identifying key themes and commonalities in foster parents’ perceptions.

Examining parents’ perceptions through multiple measures can generate a more thorough understanding of the lived experiences of these parents as they relate to their foster children’s academic abilities (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & McCoy, 2007).

The final source of data for this study came from state foster care agencies. To answer my third research question about the training available to foster parents about their foster children’s abilities, gifts, and talents, I reviewed the required pre-service curriculum for each state and Washington, D.C. I identified the topics discussed by each state, if provided, and the number of training hours foster parents are required to log prior to obtaining their license to foster and having foster children in their care.

Data Collection Procedures

To generate a large enough participant pool for my study, I engaged in snowball sampling. In this method, “each research participant who volunteers to be in a research study is

asked to identify one or more additional people who meet certain characteristics and may be willing to participate in the research study” (Johnson & Christensen, 2020, p. 254). The population of potential participants is limited because I recruited foster parents within the United States with active foster license, who are currently fostering or have fostered at least one child of school age (K-12). These individuals share key characteristics and experiences and can provide unique perspectives and responses related to the research questions.

I used Qualtrics data collection program to host the survey. To distribute the survey to the population of interest, I reached out to foster parent organizations. These organizations included the National Foster Parent Association (NFPA), the North American Council on Adoptable Children (NACAC), and many state and local organizations for foster parents. According to their website, NFPA consists of “thousands of foster families nationwide,” and aims to “be a respected national voice for foster, kinship, and adoptive families through networking, education, and advocacy (NFPA, n.d.). Similarly, the NACAC “promotes adoption from foster care; supports, informs, and empowers adoptive, foster, and kinship parents and young people who experienced foster care and adoption; educates child welfare professionals; and advocates that children have families and families have support” (NACAC, n.d.). I also distributed study information through multiple state foster care agencies and groups that train and support foster parents.

Due to the lack of information or databases of foster parents available, I encouraged the participants I recruited to identify other foster parents share their perspectives. Johnson and Christensen (2020) stated snowball sampling “can be especially useful when you need to locate members of hard-to-find populations or when no sampling frame is available” (p. 254). This will be true in the population in the scope of my study.

I offered \$15 Amazon.com gift cards to those who participate in follow-up interviews, as compensation for their time. I also had a drawing for five \$10 Amazon.com gift cards for those who complete only the online survey. This may have incentivized foster parents to share the survey with fellow foster parent friends and encourage participants to engage in follow-up interviews.

Data Analysis

For this study, I used an inductive approach to data analysis (Thomas, 2006). According to Thomas (2006), inductive analysis uses “detailed readings of raw data to derive concepts, themes, or a model through interpretations made from the raw data by an evaluator or researcher” (p. 238). This approach is similar to grounded theory as it includes identifying key themes with rich representations. One key difference between grounded theory and a general inductive approach is that an inductive approach allows for greater flexibility in analysis. It allows researchers to focus primarily on the experiences of the participants, rather than trying to fit those experiences to a model or theory. Liu (2016) noted, “overemphasizing and defending established methodologies may result in researchers paying insufficient attention to the substantive findings of social reality” (p. 129). This research method allowed me to explain the perceptions of foster parents with little bias from my own experiences and perceptions. According to Johnson & Christensen (2020), “the theory must correspond closely to the real-world data, not to our personal wishes or biases or predetermined categories” (p. 433). Given the lack of information available about foster parents’ perceptions and beliefs, particularly as they relate to giftedness, it is important that I selected a method of analysis that portrays the populations’ perceptions accurately. I engaged in reflections throughout this process and tried not to infuse my experiences and perceptions into my data analysis.

As with all data collection, some cleaning of data was required. First, I removed personally identifiable information from survey responses. These include participants' or children's names, school districts, and other personal information that could be used to identify the participants in the study. I generated a unique identifier number for each survey participant and labeled their response accordingly. The code consisted of the year the survey was taken (2021), the month the survey was taken, and the order in which the response was received that month. For example, if the response was the fourth response collected during February 2021, the code would be 2021-02-04. I conducted these steps in correspondence with Purdue University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocol (Holland & Linvill, 2019).

Since the survey was distributed online, some participants may have completed the survey more than once. Duplicate responses and those determined to be false (such as spam) were removed. There were open-ended responses, which means there is room for typing errors from participants, a common problem in qualitative data collection (Seale, 2004). I corrected typing errors as little as possible, only correcting errors when they could cause challenges in the analysis process, to maintain the integrity of participants' responses and meanings. These errors were corrected using contextual evidence from the surrounding response. Any corrections or changes made to the data were logged.

Interviews were conducted via telephone or video calling services (Zoom). With their permission, I recorded participants' interviews to ensure accurate reporting. These recordings were stored in a safe and secure location according to IRB protocol. I used GoTranscript audio transcription service to increase efficiency and accuracy. Even though this service should have accurately transcribed the interviews, I also examined the transcripts for accuracy (White et al., 2012). For anonymity, each participant was given the option to either choose their own

pseudonym or I could select one for them. I removed any names or identifying information from the transcripts and replaced the participants' names with their designated pseudonym. I then engaged in member checking, sending participants the transcripts created "to immediately correct errors of fact or challenge interpretations" (Thomas, 2006, p. 244). Participants responded to acknowledge they received the transcripts. Only one participant responded to clarify a minor misinterpretation.

Once member checking was completed, I began the process of identifying key themes through general and specific coding (Creswell, 2013; Johnson & Christensen, 2020; Thomas, 2006). To do this I used NVivo 12 software (QSR International, 2020, Version 12). General, also called open or upper-level, coding involved locating general ideas and themes from the data, which are "likely to be derived from the evaluation aims" (Thomas, 2006, p. 241). Looking for phrases and word choice throughout the responses to identify and highlight important aspects. Once general ideas and text segments were identified, I engaged in more specific coding (or axial coding) to determine more discrete categories and themes. This also involved narrowing categories and identifying commonalities among participants' responses. In inductive analysis, this process reduces repetition of categories and streamlines ideas. I needed to consistently group together common themes generated in this step (Richards, 2015). As an example, in the survey participants were asked what recommendations they have for their child's school or district to help meet their needs as a parent of a child in foster care and/or child with gifts and talents. When some parents discussed the need to be updated by the teacher on the child's progress, and some parents discussed their desire to be heard by their child's teacher about their strengths and possible solutions to behavioral challenges, I grouped those two ideas into one category of "Communication." Finally, I determined the main ideas generated by participants, "creating a

model incorporating [the] most important categories” (Thomas, 2006, p. 242) or selective codes. Through this inductive analysis, I synthesized the responses from participants’ surveys and interviews to generate a clearer picture of their lived experiences and perceptions. Following analysis, I sent my conclusions to participants for their verification, again engaging in member checking.

For the state foster parent requirements, I used a similar method of analysis. I gathered information on the topics discussed in each state’s (and Washington D.C.’s) required pre-service foster parent training. This was obtained from the state’s website or foster parent manual. I recorded the topics discussed and began to identify key themes within the listed training curriculum. This general coding, or open coding, was followed by specific or axial coding (Creswell, 2013; Johnson & Christensen, 2020; Thomas, 2006) to find commonalities between states’ training topics. The final step was to group together the axial codes into selective codes to pinpoint the main themes in foster parents’ required pre-service training curricula.

Some states also provided information on their in-service training, which foster parents engage in after they have obtained their licenses to foster. According to a 2018 review by the Child Welfare Information Gateway, “in 42 states and the District of Columbia, foster parents are required to complete ongoing, annual training in order to maintain licensure” (p. 3). I chose not to analyze this because in-service foster parent training options, the hours required, and the duration of foster license validity are vastly different in each state. For example, Indiana’s foster parent certification is valid for two years, during which time foster parents need to engage in 20 hours per year of training or professional development (Indiana Department of Child Services, n.d., Indy Adult & Child Foster Care, n.d.). Compare this to the case of Nevada, which requires foster parents to undergo four hours of in-service training per year, or Washington, D.C., in

which foster parents must take 30 hours of training over the course of two years (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2018). Foster parents in many states can receive credit for a variety of training options, including taking courses, book studies, support groups, or attending conferences. Because of this variability in state training options, requirements, and duration of licensure, I decided to focus on the more consistent options presented in pre-service training. Another reason I chose not to analyze in-service foster parent training requirements is I wanted to highlight the initial education offered to foster parents before they have foster children in their care, each with unique needs that may prompt foster parents to study a particular topic. I wanted to examine how states prepared foster parents from the outset for the strengths and needs of their foster children.

Trustworthiness of Data

I took many steps described above to ensure accurate and trustworthy data. The first way I increased trustworthiness is to use multiple data sources (Johnson & Christensen, 2020). Using the online surveys and follow-up interviews gave me a more thorough understanding of the experiences of foster parents. Also, for each closed-ended response in the online survey, there was an optional area for parents to provide a rationale for their response. This allowed participants to elaborate and clarify points of confusion if they occurred.

When participant interviews were complete, I processed the audio files through GoTranscript audio transcription software. Rather than assume these transcripts are correct, I reviewed each file to ensure accuracy. Once I checked the transcripts, I engaged in member checking with participants in two ways. I sent participants the corrected transcripts so they have a record of their statements. This reduced chances for miscommunications or misinterpretations of statements made in interviews. Also, following the completion of the coding process, I made

my interpretations available to participants. Johnson & Christensen (2020) described this as a “discussion of the researcher’s interpretations and conclusions with the study participants...for verification, insight, and deeper understanding from the members’ perspectives” (p. 283). This is a common method used in qualitative data analysis to increase rigor (Birt et al., 2016; Johnson & Christensen, 2020; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

To reduce researcher bias and assumptions, I participated in self-reflection prior to the interviews and while analyzing data (Johnson & Christensen, 2020; Oliver et al., 2005). This included reflecting during the process of making coding decisions and interpreting statements made by participants. I also used low-inference descriptors when providing examples of codes within my results. Providing direct quotations or statements as accurate as possible to those made by participants reduces opportunities for misinterpretations as well (Johnson & Christensen, 2020).

One strategy common in the field of gifted education designed to increase validity of results is to collect and report information on students’ achievement scores (or whichever measurement of giftedness the author chooses). This is typically used to verify that the students being described have been formally identified as having gifts and talents or show an achievement level above what is expected of their age group. This may serve as a form of descriptive validity, as described by Johnson & Christensen (2020), to ensure accuracy of the participants’ responses and researcher’s reporting. However, I purposely chose not to collect this information from participants for two reasons. First, there are many reasons why students in foster care may not be identified as having gifts and talents. As previously mentioned, traditional definitions of giftedness adopted by school districts and states often rely on the use of standardized test scores that may or may not have been normed on the population being studied. Children, particularly

children in foster care, may not demonstrate high achievement on a standardized test. This does not mean they do not have gifts and talents to be recognized. The second reason I did not collect standardized testing information is because of the purpose of this study. I was not only seeking to understand the experiences of foster parents whose foster children are formally identified as gifted. Instead, I attempted to understand the perceptions and experiences of foster parents, related to the strengths and abilities of the foster children in their care. I wanted to understand the foster parents' definitions of giftedness, and if they believe their foster child has gifts and talents, regardless of if they are formally identified.

Researcher Role and Positionality

Each experience with the foster care system is unique. No two foster children or foster families have the same experiences, outcomes, or challenges. I am not a member of the population I studied. I am not a foster parent, nor was I a participant in the foster care system. I was a teacher in a local school and have worked with parents on many occasions in schools across Indiana. I taught in youth programs for five years and have worked with parents in these youth programs for ten years. I am also adopted, but I was not in foster care myself. Therefore, I cannot claim to know the experiences of these foster parents and foster children.

My role as a researcher is to present the data from foster parents as accurately as possible, with limited influence from my analysis. However, I acknowledge that as this is primarily qualitative work, that is not entirely possible. My experiences and understandings can unintentionally influence the interview and analysis processes (Seidman, 2013). As Richards (2015) explained, it is not possible to entirely separate oneself when creating, interpreting, and analyzing data when conducting qualitative research. Instead, "you attempt to enter the world of

those you study...you watch, ask and listen; they give you one of many possible accounts of their experience; you interpret, select and record” (p. 27).

I tried to limit any misinterpretations by engaging in member checking. I attempted to bracket myself, relying on the “frequent, dominant, or significant themes inherent in [the] raw data” (Thomas, 2006, p. 238), as is used in inductive analysis. Before analyzing the data and throughout the analysis process, I self-reflecting, ensuring that I did not add my own preconceptions into the story the foster parents present (Tufford & Newman, 2010).

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

In this study, participants first completed a survey with quantitative and qualitative items. They provided demographic information about themselves (Tables 3 and 4), their current foster family composition (Table 5), and one foster child currently in their care (Tables 6 and 7). Although no identifiable information was collected about their foster children, the information that was collected helped to provide insight about the extent of the foster parent's relationship with their child and their foster child's educational experiences.

Survey Participant Demographics

Foster Parents

A total of 96 responses were collected. During the data cleaning process, I removed 43 responses. Most of these responses were removed because they were duplicates or spam entries. Some were also removed if the participant indicated they had not received a foster parent license, or if they did not respond to any of the content questions past the demographic section. These responses did not provide adequate or accurate information that could be used in the final analysis. The final data set included 53 participants from 21 states (Tables 3 and 4).

Participants represented five of the six main categories for foster parenting. Most (43.4%) were traditional foster parents and 17% were fostering to adopt. A majority of the participants (57.78%) stated they have served as foster parents for less than five years.

Table 3

Demographics of Foster Parents Survey (N = 53 foster parents)

<u>Demographics</u>		<u>Number of Parents (%)</u>
Gender (n = 53)	Male	8 (15.09%)
	Female	45 (84.91%)
	Other/Prefer Not to Say	0 (0.0%)
Race/Ethnicity (n = 53)	American Indian / Alaskan Native	0 (0.0%)
	Asian	0 (0.0%)
	Black/Non-Hispanic	6 (11.32%)
	Hispanic	5 (9.43%)
	Native Hawaiian / Pacific Islander	0 (0.0%)
	White / Non-Hispanic	42 (79.25%)
	Two or More Races	0 (0.0%)
	Other / Prefer not to Say	0 (0.0%)
Education (n = 53)	High School Graduate or less	2 (3.77%)
	Some College	10 (18.87%)
	Associate's Degree	4 (7.55%)
	Bachelor's Degree	18 (33.96%)
	Some Postgraduate	3 (5.66%)
	Master's Degree	15 (28.3%)
	Ph. D. Degree	1 (1.89%)
Household Income (n = 52)	\$10,000 or less	0 (0.0%)
	\$10,000-\$15,000	1 (1.89%)
	\$15,000-\$25,000	2 (3.77%)
	\$25,000-\$50,000	13 (24.53%)
	\$50,000-\$75,000	15 (28.3%)
	\$75,000 or more	21 (39.62%)
	No Response	1 (1.89%)
Type of Carer (n = 53)	Respite	6 (11.32%)
	Emergency Care	4 (7.55%)
	Kinship	6 (11.32%)
	Traditional Foster Parent	23 (43.4%)
	Foster-to-Adopt	9 (16.98%)
	Other ^a	5 (9.43%)
Years as Foster Parent (n = 45)	Under 1 year to 1.9 years	8 (17.78%)
	2 to 4.9 years	18 (40%)
	5 to 9.9 years	6 (13.33%)
	10 to 14.9 years	8 (17.78%)
	15 to 19.9 years	3 (6.67%)
	20+ years	2 (4.44%)

^a Participants who responded other provided explanations. Three participants indicated they were licensed for multiple types of caring (e.g., traditional fostering, foster-to-adopt, and emergency or respite care). One participant stated they were a previously licensed foster parent, and one stated they were the child's legal guardian.

Table 4

States and Regions Represented by Survey Participants (N = 53 foster parents)

<u>Region</u>	<u>Number of States from Region Represented</u>	<u>States</u>	<u>Number of Participants from Region</u>
Midwest	6	IL, IN, MN, MO, SD, WI	14 (26.42%)
Northeast	3	MA, NH, NY	5 (9.43%)
South	8	FL, GA, LA, MD, OK, TN, TX, WV	19 (35.85%)
West	4	AZ, CA, MT, WA	15 (28.3%)

Note. States in each region were obtained from the United States Census Bureau (2010).

Family demographics varied (Table 5), with some participants stating they had no children currently in their home, and one participant had eight children currently living in their home. Most had one to two children in their home (56.6%). Most also had one to two foster children currently in their home (62.75%), but eleven participants (21.57%) said they did not have any in their home at the time of the survey.

Table 5

Family Demographics of Foster Parents Survey

<u>Category</u>	<u>Range</u>	<u>Number of participants (%)</u>
Total Number of	0	6 (11.32%)
Children (Ages 0-18)	1	20 (37.74%)
Currently in Home (<i>n</i>	2	10 (18.87%)
= 53 foster parents)	3	5 (9.43%)
	4	3 (5.66%)
	5	5 (9.43%)
	6	2 (3.77%)
	7	1 (1.89%)
	8	1 (1.89%)
Number of Foster	0	11 (21.57%)
Children Ages 0-18)	1	20 (39.22%)
Currently in Home (<i>n</i>	2	12 (23.53%)
= 51 foster parents)	3	6 (11.76%)
	4	0 (0.0%)
	5	2 (3.92%)
Number of Children	0	36 (72.0%)
Identified as Gifted	1	12 (24.0%)
(<i>n</i> = 50 foster	2	0 (0.0%)
parents)	3	2 (4.0%)

Foster Children

Fifty participants provided information on the number of children (foster children or not) in their home who were identified as gifted. A majority of participants (72%) reported that none of their children were identified as gifted. The remaining 14 participants had one child (24%) or three children (4%) who were identified.

Forty-six participants provided demographic information about one foster child in their care (Table 6). Most children were in school, with nearly half (42.22%) in elementary school, about 24% in middle school, and about 11% in high school. About 22% had not yet entered K-12 schools. Nearly 60% of children were in public school, just over 19% were in private school, and about 10% were being homeschooled.

Eleven participants, or about 24% of the 46 respondents, indicated that their child was enrolled in high ability programming (Table 6), and an additional two participants (4.35%) qualified for high ability programming but have not yet enrolled, meaning that most of the children who were identified as gifted were currently enrolled in high ability programming. Interestingly, when asked if they would describe their foster child as gifted, 50% of the 46 respondents said “Yes”, and 50% said “No” (Table 7). This means that there were more foster children who were described by their foster parents as gifted than the number of children enrolled in high ability programming or identified as gifted.

Table 6

Demographics of Foster Youth in Foster Parents' Care

Characteristic		Number of Children (%)
Gender (<i>n</i> = 46)	Male	19 (41.3%)
	Female	26 (56.52%)
	Non-binary / third gender	1 (2.17%)
Race/Ethnicity (<i>n</i> = 46)	American Indian / Alaskan Native	0 (0.0%)
	Asian	1 (2.17%)
	Black/Non-Hispanic	12 (26.09%)
	Hispanic	6 (13.04%)
	Native Hawaiian / Pacific Islander	0 (0.0%)
	White/Non-Hispanic	15 (32.61%)
	Two or More Races	12 (26.09%)
Length of Time in Current Foster Parent's Care (<i>n</i> = 40)	Under 1 year	13 (32.5%)
	1-2 years	15 (37.5%)
	3-4 years	2 (5%)
	5-6 years	5 (12.5%)
	7-9 years	2 (5%)
	More than 10 years	3 (7.5%)
School Level (<i>n</i> = 45)	Not Yet in School	7 (15.56%)
	Pre-School / Pre-Kindergarten	3 (6.67%)
	Elementary	19 (42.22%)
	Middle	11 (24.44%)
	High	5 (11.11%)
School Type (<i>n</i> = 42)	Public School (in-person, virtual, or hybrid)	25 (59.52%)
	Private School (in-person, virtual, or hybrid)	8 (19.05%)
	Home School	4 (9.52%)
	Other (Please explain) ^a	5 (11.9%)
Current Enrollment in High Ability Programming (<i>n</i> = 46)	Enrolled	11 (23.91%)
	Not Enrolled	33 (71.74%)
	Qualified for a High Ability program, but have not yet enrolled	2 (4.35%)
# Years in High Ability Programming (<i>n</i> = 10)	0 years (Recently qualified)	2 (20.0%)
	1 year	1 (10.0%)
	2 years	2 (20.0%)
	3 years	3 (30.0%)
	4 years	1 (10.0%)
	5 years	1 (10.0%)
Participates in Extracurriculars (<i>n</i> = 48)	Yes	15 (31.25%)
	No	29 (60.42%)
	Participated, but cancelled due to COVID-19	4 (8.33%)

^a Responses for Other (Please explain.) include: "Remote learning", "Preschool program", "Not currently in school", "Day care", and a specific program for infants and toddlers.

Table 7

Would you Describe your Foster Child as Gifted? (n = 46 foster parents)

<u>Response</u>	<u>Number (%)</u>
Yes	23 (50%)
No	23 (50%)

Interview Participant Demographics

Following completion of the survey, 32 participants said they would be willing to participate in a follow-up interview about their perceptions of giftedness. Of these, I conducted interviews with 14 participants. The remaining 18 did not respond to the interview request or had scheduling conflicts. Most interviews lasted approximately one hour. Interview participant information is included in Table 8. Interviewees were from ten states across three regions. Twelve of the 14 interviewees (85.71%) had been traditional foster parents at some time, one was a foster-to-adopt foster parent, and one was an emergency care provider. Their time as foster parents ranged from just over nine months to 20 years.

Table 8

Foster Parent Interview Participants (N = 14 foster parents)

<u>Name</u> ^a	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Ethnicity</u>	<u>State</u>	<u>Type of Carer</u>	<u>Years of Fostering</u> (At time of interview)
Amanda	Female	White/Non-Hispanic	MN	Emergency Care Provider	1 year
Annie	Female	White/Non-Hispanic	OK	Traditional Foster	1 ½ years; 3 ½ years unofficially
Barbara	Female	White/Non-Hispanic	IL	Traditional Foster	4 years
Caroline	Female	White/Non-Hispanic	MO	Foster to Adopt	4 years
Chloe	Female	White/Non-Hispanic	OK	Traditional Foster	5 years
Diane	Female	White/Non-Hispanic	WA	Traditional Foster	13 years
Heidi	Female	White/Non-Hispanic	IL	Traditional Foster	4 years
Kennedy	Female	White/Non-Hispanic	CA	Traditional Foster	9 ½ months
Natalia	Female	Hispanic	CA	Traditional Foster	1 ½ years in CA; 4 years in IL
Miss Purple	Female	Black/Non-Hispanic	GA	Former Traditional Foster; Current Kinship Foster	20 years
Michelle	Female	White/Non-Hispanic	WV	Traditional Foster	3 years
Savannah	Female	White/Non-Hispanic	IL	Traditional Foster	6 years
Whitney	Female	White/Non-Hispanic	SD	Traditional Foster; Legal Guardian	10 years; 7 years as legal guardian
Zora	Female	White/Non-Hispanic	WI	Traditional Foster	6 years

^a Pseudonyms were created by author or participants.

What is giftedness?

Definitions of Giftedness

In their survey responses, foster parents provided their definitions of giftedness, as well as their perceived characteristics of gifted children. Forty-three participants provided 46 references to their definitions of giftedness (Table 9). Topics represented included academic aptitude, comparisons to the norm, ease or approach to learning, motivation to learn, and other characteristics.

In the category of aptitude, 13 foster parents made 14 references to academic achievement. Foster parents' definitions included things like a student's ability to perform well on standardized tests or in classes, have a high GPA, and generally being able to excel academically. One specific example is from participant 2021-03-21¹, who stated that giftedness meant "high natural aptitude for academics".

Twenty foster parents referred to domain-specific capabilities in their definitions 21 times. Participants mentioned abilities or excellence in one or more area or field of study. Foster parents make comments such as "Reading or math levels significantly above their grade levels" (2021-03-02) and "Specific areas in which someone naturally does very well" (2021-03-03).

Twenty foster parents specifically stated 20 times that ability or talent is involved in giftedness. References included "abilities above the standard norm" (2021-02-07), "ability to soar in an area" (2021-02-22), and "A child that has abilities or talents that are at a higher level than other children their age" (2021-02-28).

¹ Unique identifier numbers were assigned to each survey participant. This code consisted of the year the survey was completed (2021), the month the survey was completed, and the order in which the response was received that month. For example, the code mentioned here (2021-03-21) is for the 21st participant to take the survey in March 2021.

Nine participants addressed intelligence nine times. “Highly intelligent” (2021-02-26), “Gifted children have a higher IQ” (2021-02-23), “Smart in areas” (2021-02-25), and “Has a higher than average intelligence or is overly talented in a specific area” (2021-03-22) were just some of the comments about intelligence mentioned by foster parents.

Foster parents defined giftedness as someone being above average or above their peers, with 18 parents making 19 references to this area. Foster parents referenced this comparison to children’s peers or typical development, saying things like “Having a skill they do better than other kids their age” (2021-03-06), “a skill that is above and beyond developmental level” (2021-02-31), and “Typically learn faster and/or differently than other children” (2021-02-23).

Six participants made six references to individuals with gifts and talents being able to learn concepts quickly or easily. These statements included, “Quick to understand new concepts” (2021-02-03), “Ability to excel academically without much effort” (2021-02-05), and “Child can easily understand and complete tasks, often beyond his training or exposure” (2021-03-12).

Foster parents’ definitions of giftedness also included someone’s approach to learning. Two participants included creativity four times. These foster parents mentioned creativity by saying giftedness means “being resourceful” and “being imaginative” (2021-02-27), and “thinking outside the box, creative” (2021-02-03). Two parents also addressed someone’s approach, making two references to one’s ability to problem solve. They stated giftedness involved “possessing problem-solving skills” (2021-02-27) and “the ability to solve problems with book smarts and common sense” (2021-02-04).

Four foster parents addressed the motivational aspects of giftedness four times. “Resilient” (2021-02-24) and “persistent in learning” (2021-03-01) were two of the ways these foster parents defined giftedness.

Foster parents also included other characteristics as part of giftedness, such as being “brave, social” (2021-02-21), and having a good memory (2021-03-10 and 2021-03-19). Four parents made five references to other characteristics.

Table 9

Definitions of Giftedness, According to Foster Parents Survey (n = 43 foster parents)

Open coding	Axial coding	Selective Coding	Number of Parents Supporting Axial Code	Number of References
Ability to excel or perform well academically; GPA of 4.0; Achieve at high standards; High academic aptitude	Academic Achievement	Aptitude	13	14
Achievement or skill in a specific field or area of academics; Ability to soar or excel in an area; High reading or math levels; Athletic ability; Music ability; Artistic ability	Domain-Specific Capabilities		20	21
Exceptional or above average ability; Ability to excel or thrive; Intellectual ability; Ability to perform at a higher level; Special talents; Overly talented in a specific area	Ability or Talent		20	20
Highly intelligent; High or above average IQ; Book smarts and common sense; Smart; EQ	Intelligence		9	9
Above the standard or norm; Higher intellectual ability than peers; Learns faster than other children; At or above grade level		Above average / Above peers	18	19
Quick to understand new concepts; Ability to excel academically without much effort; Easily understand and complete tasks		Quick or easy learning	6	6
Thinking outside the box; Creative; Being imaginative and resourceful	Creativity	Approach	2	4
Possesses problem-solving skills or abilities	Problem-solving skills		2	2
Resilient; Strong; Persistent in learning		Motivation	4	4
Brave; Social; Memory; Ability to memorize characters' actions in cartoons and act them out later		Other Characteristics	4	5

Characteristics of Gifted Children

In addition to the definitions of giftedness they provided, participants explained what they perceived to be characteristics of gifted children. Forty-three participants made 92 references to various characteristics (Table 10). These responses were similar to the definitions of giftedness provided by foster parents. However, some responses included unique characteristics that were not addressed in their definitions. Again, categories of characteristics included one's aptitude for academic success, intelligence, motivation, and approach to learning. Foster parents also characterized children with gifts and talents as having specific non-academic attributes and difficulties in school.

Within the academic traits, foster parents most often referred to children's domain-specific skills. Eleven foster parents made twelve comments about abilities in certain areas such as math, reading, and athletics. Examples of participants' responses include "good with numbers" (2021-02-25), "advanced in reading or math skills" (2021-03-16), and "excels in one or two particular subjects" (2021-03-14). One foster parent connected the characteristics of children with gifts and talents to trauma they may have experienced, saying "some trauma has caused them to latch on to a specific skill and master it" (2021-02-31).

Seven foster parents made seven references to an innate ability or natural talent. Foster parents aid things described these characteristics by saying things like "talented" (2021-03-17) and "succeeds without having to try very hard" (2021-03-18).

Fewer foster parents commented on achievement in response to this question. Five participants responded six times about academic achievement or performance. Foster parents stated children with gifts and talents are seen "getting great grades" (2021-03-06) and "high test scores" (2021-03-19) and viewed as "high achievers" (2021-03-13).

Four comments were made by four foster parents about children with gifts and talents being advanced in some way. Participants said these children were “advanced” (2021-02-20, 2021-03-11), and “advanced in reading or math skills” (2021-03-16).

Finally, two participants made two comments stating children with gifts and talents learn easily. These foster parents explained these children “OFTEN [emphasis original] find academic school work to come fairly easily” (2021-02-01).

Many more foster parents included motivation as a characteristic of children with gifts and talents, than in their definitions of giftedness. Five participants said six times that children were curious. “Natural inclination to find answers, inquisitive” (2021-02-01) and “seeks knowledge on their own” (2021-02-03) were some examples.

A love for learning was addressed six times by six foster parents. These participants stated that children with gifts and talents are “excited to learn” (2021-02-02), show a “willingness to learn” (2021-03-04), are “interested” (2021-03-09), and “motivated” (2021-03-13, 2021-03-21).

Four foster parents said children with gifts and talents demonstrated an ability to focus. Three of the foster parents specifically said children were “focused” (2021-02-22, 2021-03-05, 2021-03-09), and one noted “a child with great focus” (2021-03-04). In a similar vein, work ethic was referenced twice by two foster parents, who said children with gifts and talents were hardworking (2021-02-21, 2021-03-21).

Participants included individuals’ approaches to learning as characteristics. One parent simply stated that a child with gifts and talents “shows the ability to learn differently from other children” (2021-02-16).

Four parents explained that children with gifts and talents had good problem-solving skills. They said these children are ones who are “able to solve problems easier” (2021-02-04), and are “possessing problem-solving skills, being resourceful” (2021-02-27). Also under the category of learning approach was when four participants made four references to their abilities to be “creative” (2021-02-01, 2021-02-03), “imaginative” (2021-02-27), and “inventive” (2021-03-19).

Foster parents included non-academic attributes in how they characterized children with gifts and talents, more so than in their definitions of giftedness. Things like socioemotional characteristics were referenced eleven times by eleven foster parents. References addressed that children with gifts and talents are “kind, caring” (2021-02-25), “responsible” (2021-03-11), and “independent” (2021-03-19), and that they “easily adapt to change, new challenges” (2021-02-06). Alternatively, other foster parents also said these children are “easily frustrated” (2021-02-28) and “overthink” (2021-03-07).

Three participants referred to children’s social skills three times. Two participants stated negative views of children’s social skills, saying children with gifts and talents are “typically anti-social” (2021-02-31) or “possibly socially awkward” (2021-03-22). One parent, however, stated that these children are “social” and “active in outside groups” (2021-02-21).

Although foster parents often included academic achievement and good performance in school in their defining characteristics, they also suggested children with gifts and talents sometimes have difficulty in school. Two foster parents made two comments about how children are “bored in class at times” (2021-02-03) and “get bored easily” (2021-03-07).

Two participants referred three times to other challenges at school. They stated attributes include “difficulty in school, bad at tests” (2021-03-08), and “possibly behind or less skilled in some areas” (2021-03-09).

Table 10

Characteristics of Gifted Children, According to Foster Parents Survey (n = 43 foster parents)

Open coding	Axial coding	Selective Coding	Number of Parents Supporting Axial Code	Number of References
Aptitude to excel in one or two areas or subjects; Advanced in reading, math, or athletics; Masters certain skills due to trauma	Domain-specific skills	Aptitude for Academic Success	11	12
Talented; Natural inclination to find answers; Understands and succeeds with little or no assistance	Natural Talent or Ability		7	7
Good grades; High achieving; High test scores; Studies frequently	Academically achieving		5	6
Advanced; Above average; Advanced in reading or math	Advanced		4	4
School comes fairly easily	Learns Easily		2	2
Curious; Inquisitive; Seeks knowledge on own	Curious	Motivation	5	6
Excited to learn; Interested; Motivated; Willingness to learn	Loves Learning		6	6
Focused; Child with great focus	Focused		4	4
Hard worker; Hardworking	Hardworking		2	2
Smart; Intelligent; Bright; Clever		Intelligent	15	16
Possesses problem-solving skills and abilities; resourceful	Problem-solver	Approach to Learning	4	5
Creative; Inventive; Imaginative	Creative		4	4
Learns differently	Learns differently		1	1
Independent; Responsible; Mature; Easily frustrated; Kind; Caring; Persistent; Flexible	Socioemotional characteristics	Non-academic attributes	11	11
Social; Anti-social; Socially awkward	Social skills		3	3
Bored in class; Gets bored easily	Bored in school	School Difficulty	2	2
Difficulty in school; Bad at tests; Possibly behind or less skilled in some areas	Has school challenges		2	3

What it Means to be Gifted

In the follow-up interviews, I asked participants what they thought it meant to be gifted. The 14 interviewees made 191 references to their perceptions of what giftedness looked like to them. As the sample of interview participants was gathered from those who completed the survey, their beliefs about what it means to be gifted were similar to the definitions previously provided. Foster parents included things like aptitude, intelligence, and comparisons to the norm. they also addressed the different ways in which children with gifts and talents learn, other forms of giftedness, drive for learning, and their need for challenge.

Within the area of aptitude, twelve foster parents made 32 references to natural talents or innate abilities. One participant, Heidi, explained, “I guess for me, I think of giftedness as being like a natural aptitude. It could be for academics, athletics, some other area. Not just having that inborn talent but also working to refine that talent.” Barbara commented similarly, stating,

Certainly, if I think about someone being gifted, probably I would say like they have some kind of inborn inclination to do well at some thing. Doesn't have to be academics, but athletically gifted, artistically gifted, musically gifted. I do think we have these things that, I don't know if we're born with, but they certainly seem to pop up young.

Ten participants made 28 comments about academic achievement. Diane noted her foster child’s participation in AP classes and time on the Honor Roll in school. Natalia also noted that children with gifts and talents may get “straight A’s in school”.

Half of the foster parents interviewed addressed IQ or standardized testing, commenting 19 times about this type of achievement. Foster parents noted although they might not include standardized testing in *their own* definitions of giftedness, schools often identify students using these measures. The school Chloe’s foster child attended used verbal and non-verbal IQ measures, and the school attended by Barbara’s foster child used “MAP tests or something like that” to identify children with gifts and talents. Caroline said this was common, stating, “I think

that traditional schools often identified kids as gifted if they have a higher-than-average IQ.” She expressed her concerns at the frequent use of standardized tests. “I think that we need to make the system more equitable, because right now, we’re looking at standardized tests, the NWEA. We’re looking at MAP scores and things that are just not culturally competent, not necessarily age-appropriate.” She said if schools and teachers used other mechanisms to identify children with gifts and talents, “we would have way more kids in gifted and talented programs from all walks of life because would be more equitable in our measure.”

Eleven participants incorporated intelligence into their understandings of giftedness 23 times. They said often all children are intelligent or smart. Referring to her foster children, Zora stated, “Oh, lots of them have been smart. There’s lots of different ways to be smart, though.” Michelle highlighted that one of her foster children was “a lot smarter than any teachers ever gave her credit for” because “she just didn’t learn in a conventional way.”

Being or performing above average or above their peers was part of giftedness according to foster parents, with eight foster parents making 13 references to above norm performance. One of the references came from Kennedy, who said giftedness was “definitely just being well above the average person in that particular skill or ability. I think that’s pretty much it. Well above average and sticking out for that being a strength of yours more than the average person.” Similarly, Amanda explained giftedness as “having a special talent or ability that’s above the average kid, and I guess being accelerated at something as well academically.” Miss Purple indicated that children with gifts and talents are not simply one step above their peers. “I think gifted certainly means to me above average. Maybe even more than above, like *above above* average, so you’re not just above average but you’re a little bit above that too.”

Foster parents also commented on how children with gifts and talents learn. Seven participants made twelve references to quick learning. When describing one of her foster children, Chloe said, “I just noticed that he was learning things really quickly and asking the kinds of questions that most kindergartners aren't.” She also highlighted the importance of recognizing rapid growth, particularly for foster children who come into school with academic delays. Speaking of another foster child in her care, she said:

I would say that she's very smart. It just probably doesn't show to your average person yet, because it looks like she's average to still struggling in a lot of subjects when you just measure it on the basis of academic achievement. When you look at how far she's come and how quickly she's just learned all that and picked it all up, I would say that's hugely intelligent.

Five foster parents made seven comments about children’s ability to learn independently, an aspect that was not addressed in the survey definitions. Natalia noted how her stepson “learned how to play guitar and then he learned all the instruments. Now he's a musician, on his own. No formal lessons from anyone. We gave him a guitar and he just took a look at some videos and learned.” Heidi said some children with gifts and talents have “independent functioning beyond what I would consider typical for a child of that age.”

Other forms of giftedness outside of academics were an important part of foster parents’ perceptions of giftedness. Thirteen participants—nearly all—addressed non-academic forms of giftedness 51 times. For Annie, giftedness came in many forms. “Well, most people tend to think of it as more academics. But I think it's more broad-based, like art or music.” She continued, “It could be anything. I used to know a kid that could go by any animal, mean, or nice, friendly, whatever, and that animal would be as happy as it could be and be sound asleep within 10 minutes.” Savannah highlighted the importance of being willing to learn from others and consider different perspectives, saying, “I think there's just such a wide range of skills...I think there can also be a resiliency piece that goes along with being—are you teachable? Are you

moldable? Or are you so set in your perspective?” Athletic and artistic abilities were also mentioned.

Something rarely addressed by survey respondents was the aspect of social skills, and the inclusion of social abilities as part of giftedness. Eleven foster parents included social giftedness 19 times as part of what it meant to be gifted. Amanda said a foster child who is often in her care is:

very intelligent with social cues and she likes to be manipulative, which you could think of intelligence as a different way, being able to get what she wants from different people. If that is considered intelligence, which it is, she's very good at reading people and she's very good at getting what she wants, or trying to. She's one in particular that has been very smart.

Caroline described her foster child as “hypervigilant about emotions” as a survival mechanism in response to traumatic events in his life. “He can identify feelings in adults that I don't even recognize that I have. He'll be like, “Your eyebrows look different today. What's bothering you?” He's very in tuned to feelings. And that's a really cool and important...”

Foster parents also addressed drive as a key part of giftedness. This included drive to learn, succeed, or follow their interests. Passion and curiosity were mentioned 14 times by nine foster parents. Natalia said gifts and talents can often come from children’s interests. “Curiosity is what started. It starts with curiosity then, to develop passion.” Michelle noted that while passion is important, foster children are not always able to hone their gifts due to a lack of opportunities. “Those are pieces that I think are often missed with children in care because you have to be perceptive. You have to see, “What does this kid like?” And then provide them the tools to do it.”

Motivation was part of the drive category, with seven participants making 27 references. Kennedy said her foster child is “definitely very organized, very self-motivated, and driven to succeed. She wants to become a nurse when she graduates, so she's been taking more science

than is required for graduation. I think that's impressive.” For Heidi, an essential component of actualizing gifts is working to go after and improve one’s talents. “There are people...that never really pursue it. I think that in addition to having that natural ability, there also needs to be a component of motivation and working on enhancing that talent to the best of their ability.”

Finally, four foster parents said eight times being gifted meant needing opportunities to be challenged. Chloe said being gifted means “that those kids are just more curious, get bored easily, need to be challenged.” Michelle said she has had foster children who she would describe as gifted, but schools were not willing to enroll them in high ability programming. “The schools aren't intentionally acknowledging that, or challenging for those that school comes very easy to them, aren't going that next step that maybe they do for students who are not in foster care.” She added “they're not challenging those students to try to see their true—or realize their true potential.”

Diane found the lack of services or challenge for children with gifts and talents to be a disservice to their education. She explained:

Here in Oklahoma, they don't. The services that gifted kids get—When I had asked about the kid in kindergarten, [the school] was like, "We don't really do anything until they're in third grade." I'm like, "Well, that's dumb to me." You've got younger kids getting bored in class because you're not identifying and serving them in that way. There's just a lot of focus on the bottom half, "Don't leave anybody behind," then the top gets left behind.

Table 11

What it Means to be Gifted, According to Foster Parent Interviews (N = 14 foster parents)

Open coding	Axial coding	Selective Coding	Number of Parents Supporting Axial Code	Number of References
Natural inclination in an area; Domain-specific abilities; Computer abilities	Natural Talent or Innate Ability	Aptitude	12	32
Straight A's and Honor Roll; Math or reading skills; Can perform academic tasks; Achievement; Book smart	Academic Achievement		10	28
Standardized testing; Non-verbal and verbal IQs; Higher IQ; MAP Scores	IQ or Testing		7	19
Smart; Extremely smart; Intelligent; Smarter than people recognize		Intelligence	11	23
Above the average person; Above grade level; Physically above age group; Excelling beyond average or peers		Above average or peers	8	13
Picks up on things quickly; Learns quickly; Shows rapid growth	Quick learning	Learning	7	12
Independent learning; Can learn concepts on their own, without much instruction or guidance	Independent learning		5	7
Artistic ability; Kind; Physically or athletically gifted; Emotional self-regulation skills; Hands-on learning	Non-academic giftedness	Other forms of giftedness	13	51
Attuned to emotions; Aware of body language and cues; Picks up on social cues; Socially strong	Intuitive or socially gifted		11	19
Passionate about specific topics or domains; Interested; Pursues areas of interest; Curious	Passionate or Curious	Drive	9	14
Self-motivated; Pursues education despite no one pushing them; Driven; Drive to excel or succeed	Motivation		7	27
Gets bored easily; Not challenged in school; Need engaging instruction		Need for Challenge	4	8

What role do ability, gifts, and talent have in foster children's daily lives?

Foster Children's Lives and School Experiences

Foster parents answered a variety of questions throughout the survey and follow-up interviews to describe their foster children's daily lives and school experiences. In the survey, participants responded to four closed-ended questions on a Likert-style scale about foster children's differences from their peers (Table 12). Many also provided explanations for their responses, which were analyzed using the coding methods previously discussed (Tables 13 and 14).

Fifty-three participants responded to each closed-ended Likert style question (Table 12). When asked if they think foster children are different from other children academically, most foster parents (64.15%) indicated that they believe foster children are different, either "a little bit" or "very much so". Similarly, about 70% of foster parents said foster children are either a little different or very different than other children in other ways. More than two-thirds of participants (77.36%) responded that they perceive foster children's educational experiences to be different than those of other children. Of the four questions, the fewest participants felt foster children's abilities, strengths, and talents affected foster parents, with 62.27% responding "a little bit" or "very much so".

Table 12

Perceptions of Foster Children's Differences and Effects on Parenting (n = 53 foster parents)

Question	Response Percentage					<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
	1 (Not at all) (%)	2 (Not very much) (%)	3 (Neutral) (%)	4 (A little bit) (%)	5 (Very much so) (%)		
1. Do you think foster children are different than other children academically?	11.32	7.55	16.98	41.51	22.64	3.57	1.25
2. Do you think foster children are different than other children in other ways?	1.89	7.55	20.75	45.28	24.53	3.83	0.96
3. Do you think a foster child's educational experience is different than the experiences of other children?	1.89	9.43	11.32	35.85	41.51	4.06	1.05
4. Do foster children's abilities, strengths, and talents affect foster parents?	7.55	7.55	22.64	26.42	35.85	3.75	1.24

Participants explanations for their responses to the questions about foster children's differences are summarized in Table 13. Forty-one foster parents made 217 references about the perceived differences. They elaborated on academic, social, socioemotional, and other differences. Foster parents also included comments about what they perceived to be the potential causes of these differences. Twelve foster parents expressed their belief that foster children were not different from other children.

When participants commented on academic differences, 15 included 34 comments about general academic difficulties faced by children in foster care. Foster parents said for some foster children "it is hard to process information in a timely manner" (2021-02-02) and "Foster children may be more likely to have had interruptions in their schooling and thus may struggle to catch up with peers" (2021-03-18).

Five foster parents referred to foster children being behind academically ten times, including comments like "Most foster children have come to us behind academically. Potential giftedness may get overlooked until they catch up." (2021-02-23) or "They are normally behind in their studies so it is harder for them to catch up" (2021-02-21).

Six participants made eight references to foster children not being able to focus during school due to outside concerns and may lack motivation or buy-in at the school. Participant 2021-03-05 encompassed these responses, saying "They aren't allowed to focus only on school and leave their home troubles at home. This can lead them to be less motivated at school or not understand the importance of school because they are worried about other things." Participant 2021-03-17 echoed that foster children's "minds are occupied with thoughts and memories and uncertainties that other children are not facing."

The last academic domain addressed was about foster children being misidentified for services in some way, with four foster parents making four references. For example, one foster parent said, “As a result of life experiences, multiples moves (often resulting in moving schools, sometimes 2+ times in a school year), I think that that are under serviced and under identified-- both in special ed and gifted opportunities” (2021-02-01).

Social differences were also perceived by foster parents. Nine foster parents commented eleven times about challenges foster children may face socially due to their experiences in foster care. These difficulties were addressed when participants stated, “Unfortunately, sometimes they don’t get to participate in extracurricular activities, may have difficulty making friends/fitting in.” (2021-03-09) and “they can transfer schools a lot making it hard to form friendships and build relationships with the teachers and other staff members” (2021-03-22).

Foster parents commented on what they perceive to be socioemotional differences foster children exhibit. Twenty-one participants made 23 references to general socioemotional differences, such as low self-esteem (2021-03-08 and 2021-03-09), self-doubt (2021-03-09), and have self-regulation or attachment issues (2021-03-03, 2021-02-23). On the other hand, some foster parents looked at these differences positively. Foster parents said foster children were “resilient and can bounce back” (2021-03-15) and “They are strong in ways others don’t have to be. They persevere and grow” (2021-03-01).

Behavior was mentioned ten times by ten foster parents. Participant 2021-03-16 explained, “They have complex backgrounds so they have to work to overcome that and it could affect really any facet of their development or behavior.”

Foster children’s maturity was referenced five times by five foster parents. Some said they were more mature—“I also think many are more mature than their peers, due to exposure to

situations and decisions that non foster children do not typically find themselves in” (2021-03-14); yet, other foster parents said foster children might be less mature—“Some foster children have a lower emotional age than biological age so they might not fit in with peers that are the same biological age” (2021-03-05). Another participant indicated this maturity might vary depending on the child and the situation. “I feel that they can be very "street smart" and have high maturity beyond their peers in regards to many life events; however, their emotional maturity can often be lower than their peers” (2021-02-01).

Eight foster parents made nine references to other differences they see in foster children, compared to their peers who are not in foster care. For example, “They often need parents to have extra patience with them. They might have trauma in their past that parents, having never gone through it, don’t understand” (2021-03-11).

Participants frequently made statements about potential causes for the differences they perceive in foster children’s academic, social, and socioemotional aspects. Trauma was the most common thing foster parents believed caused these differences, with 31 foster parents making 57 statements about the trauma foster children face. One participant expressed their concerns about the constant stress many foster children experience, saying “I feel like foster children are clouded by the shark music always in their heads” (2021-03-06). Another foster parent explained, “If the kid wasn't dealing with ACEs [Adverse Childhood Experiences] or any other sort of trauma they will be very similar to their peers” (2021-02-05).

Twenty participants made 30 references to the effects of foster children’s environment, either before they entered foster care or during their time in care. Participant 2021-03-02 commented on these effects. “In some cases they haven’t been exposed to learning or they have been neglected...Someone that is suffering at levels these kids do may not have the mental

bandwidth to perform at the same level of someone in a stable environment.” Not all foster children live in what is seen as “traditional foster homes”. Some live in group homes, as explained by Participant 2021-03-11, who said, “In group homes, it is difficult for parents to provide the one-on-one attention and tutoring that children often need.” One foster parent noted improvements that can happen with the right surroundings. “I think they have challenges, but in the right environment with specific guidelines and clear expectations, foster children can and will perform as well or better than children not in foster care” (2021-03-22).

Moving was another common concern for 21 foster parents, who commented 28 times about foster children moving frequently. Participant 2021-03-23 said teachers might exhibit biases toward students who frequently move, explaining that “children who are in foster care may switch homes, causing them to switch schools. This causes teachers to sometimes treat kids differently.” Additionally, Participant 2021-02-06 said “The schools have immediately placed a stigma on the kids and treat them differently. They are more on high alert and expect them to have problems that we have never seen or believe them to have.” Other foster parents discussed the academic interruptions caused by moving schools or foster placements. “They are frequently moved during the school year, disrupting their schooling.” (2021-03-08) and “Many have holes in their learning from disrupted educational trajectory” (2021-03-13) are two examples.

Sixteen participants referred 26 times to foster children having fewer opportunities or resources, leading to differences in various domains. Foster parents were concerned about this lack of resources, with one saying, “All children can learn and should be provided access to resources and experiences that allow them to do so in a variety of settings” (2021-02-27). Participant 2021-03-11 also added, “They often don’t have the resources other children have...” Some foster parents take in children because they need the money. Those parents might not have

the financial resources to buy educational supplies.” Another commented, “Diff [different] experience and opportunity. Less basic needs met often” (2021-02-22).

Bias from many individuals toward foster children was also referenced, with nine foster parents making ten statements about negative treatment their foster children received. These biases presented as a lack of services from schools, according to Participant 2021-03-17, who said, “Change of schools. Schools do not want to invest in foster children.” A similar response noted “Children who are in foster care may switch homes, causing them to switch schools. This causes teachers to sometimes treat kids differently” (2021-03-23). Another foster parent explained that bias does not only come from schools. “Implicit bias may drive expectations of teachers and foster parents regarding foster children” (2021-02-27).

Nine foster parents commented nine times about the effects biological and foster parents have on children’s lives. Foster parents’ differing expectations were highlighted by participants, who stated, “[foster children] have typically had several homes of placement with different parenting styles” (2021-02-31) and “Depends on their reasons for removal, but they have likely had to change schools with little to no notice. Potential for bio[logical] parents to have trauma themselves which does not allow for them to support their children’s education to the fullest potential” (2021-02-07).

Finally, twelve participants made 15 references to foster children not being different from their peers. “It’s all the same”, commented foster parent 2021-02-29. Another foster parent added, “In today’s world, most children have something that impede learning” (2021-02-02). One participant elaborated that it was not the foster children that were different, but the experiences they have can lead to unique challenges not faced by their peers.

I don't think foster children themselves are different, rather the circumstances presented in their lives. Being removed from your home, regardless of the reason, is traumatizing.

In addition, many foster children lived in fight or flight mode, so they focus more on survival than what a parallelogram is. I also think age of foster child at time of removal (and compounded when [there] are multiple removals) impacts the foster child in ways non-foster children do not have to contend. I think non-foster children have an advantage academically, from not experiencing these deep traumas, but despite their circumstantial disadvantages, I do believe foster children can complete their academic studies and excel. (2021-03-14)

Table 13

Foster Children's Differences, According to Foster Parent Interviews (n = 41 foster parents)

Open coding	Axial coding	Selective Coding	Number of Parents Supporting Axial Code	Number of References
Hard to process information; Gaps in schooling; Interruptions to daily schooling; Trauma makes it harder to learn	General academic difficulties	Academic differences	15	34
Behind academically; Struggle to catch up to peers; Developmental delays; Lack of academic foundation	Behind academically		5	10
May need help focusing; Children worry creating difficulty focusing on school; Difficulty engaging; May not have buy-in at school due to moving	Lack of motivation or focus		6	8
Underserved and underidentified for Special Education and Gifted Education; Gifts may be overlooked; Fall through cracks and don't receive services	Misidentified for services		4	4
Have trouble with peers due to different experiences and asynchronous development; Difficulty trusting others; Difficult to form friendships and relationships		Social differences	9	11
Low self-esteem and self-doubt; Resilient; Difficulty adjusting; Fearful; Strong	General socioemotional differences	Socioemotional differences	21	23
Behavioral struggles; Challenges expressing behaviors in a healthy way	Behavior		10	10
More mature due to life experiences; Less emotional maturity than peers	Maturity		5	5
Physical changes; Attachment-related issues; Living in stress or fear; In need of additional patience; Attachment challenges		Other differences	8	9

continued

Open coding	Axial coding	Selective Coding	Number of Parents Supporting Axial Code	Number of References
Stress responses and concerns create challenges academically and difficulty focusing on school; ACEs; Attachment issues due to trauma; Ongoing trauma; Neglect in multiple ways	Trauma	Causes of differences	31	57
Environment can be an advantage or disadvantage academically; Exposure to negative situations; Lack of exposure to positive environments; Circumstances beyond their control; Unique home life	Environment		20	30
Moving foster homes; Moving schools often; Changing resources; Lack of consistent support or individuals; Moving with little or no notice; Educational interruptions	Moving		21	28
Lack of foundational experiences; Fewer educational opportunities; Lack of advocacy in education; In need of resources and experiences to succeed; Fewer resources	Lack of opportunities or resources		16	26
Teachers do not understand experiences; Teachers misinterpret misbehavior; Adults give up on foster children or do not give them a chance; Harder to build relationships with teachers and staff; School system is not treating foster children equitably; Stigma	Bias		9	10
Little exposure or help from parents; Varying home expectations; Lack of academic foundation from parents; Foster children worry if they will see their parents	Parents		9	9
All the same; Foster children are just like others if it were not for circumstances; Same ability to learn as others; Most children have something impeding learning		No differences	12	15

Effects of Foster Children's Strengths, Gifts, and Talents on Foster Parents

In response to the question, “Do you think foster children’s abilities, strengths, and talents affect foster parents?”, about 62% of participants indicated the children’s gifts affect foster parents “a little bit” or “very much so”. In their explanations, 30 foster parents made 32 statements about these perceived effects (Table 14).

Eight participants mentioned foster children’s strengths eight times. A foster parent said that foster children with more noticeable strengths may affect foster parents differently. “I think every child’s strengths and talents affect their parents. It’s human nature to encourage and support your children’s strengths. The stronger or more evident that strength is, the more effort and resources you tend to put into it” (2021-03-11). Some foster parents noted that variances in abilities exist across all populations of children, with one stating, “A child’s strengths or abilities mean the parent needs to work to give the child what they need to excel (really this applies to any child)” (2021-03-16). Participant 2021-03-18 said foster children’s strengths might affect how foster parents engage with them.

I was immediately taken in by [Foster son]'s humor and curiosity. I think a "bright" child – one who is curious and open to other people/the world (though not necessarily "gifted" in the way society judges giftedness) – absolutely attracts foster parents to like/love them more than a child who is perhaps withdrawn.

Alternatively, seven foster parents commented seven times about academic challenges foster children face, and the effort foster parents need to expend to address and assist with those challenges. These challenges put pressure on foster parents, according to one who explained, “Foster parents often feel that they have to try to work to improve these things that they are delayed in” (2021-02-20). Others may not feel prepared or supported to fully address challenges, as noted by Participant 2021-03-15. “Some foster parents may not be knowledgeable of special disabilities and not equipped to seek help.”

Seven participants also commented seven times about foster children's socioemotional challenges. A foster parent emphasized that strengths may not always be viewed or expressed positively. "Sometimes these strengths are displayed through anger or yelling. The kids are resilient but like to push you as far as you can go to see if they can trust you or believe you" (2021-03-05).

Academic resources were mentioned seven times by seven parents, who discussed the resources they utilize and need to encourage and strengthen foster children's academics. Foster parents explained, "It takes extra time out of your day to help with homework, help them figure out alternative ways to cope..." (2021-03-19) and "A good parent wants to provide a child with appropriate extra opportunities. This means more running, more reviews of work, and each child is different. So, each new child in a home changes how the family will operate" (2021-02-02).

Three participants made three references to resources they needed to support their foster children's interests, including "The foster parent should have things in their home that foster their child's mind and what they are excited about" (2021-02-03).

One foster parent mentioned one time that in addition to their strengths, foster children have additional needs relating to support and advocacy. "The fact that my children were all substance exposed means they've needed different types of advocacy for school etc." (2021-02-31).

The remaining eleven participants made twelve statements indicating foster children's strengths, gifts, and talents do not have a specific effect on them as foster parents. Most said that each child—foster, adoptive, or biological—had their own unique needs, so their parenting varied with each one. Participant 2021-03-06 acknowledged that the only difference for them came from the length of time they knew the foster children. "No different than biological kids we

just know our biological kids because we had them since birth. [When] you get a kid at six you have a puzzle of trauma to work with to find out what this kid needs.”

Table 14

Effects of Foster Child's Strengths, Gifts, and Talents on Foster Parents (n = 30 foster parents)

Open coding	Axial coding	Selective Coding	Number of Parents Supporting Axial Code	Number of References
Foster children's talents and personality can attract foster parents; Foster parents should support exploration of gifts; Adjustment of activities due to strengths of foster child; Academic success can affect foster parent's emotional state; Evidence of strengths should encourage more effort from foster parent	Strengths	Effects of child's gifts and talents on parenting	8	8
Takes extra time and effort to support academics; Knowledge of foster child's needs can affect if foster parents seek help; Foster parent should strengthen weaknesses; Foster parents have to work hard to improve academic gaps and keep children on level	Academic Challenges		7	7
Foster child's emotions can affect parents; Strengths displayed in difficult ways (e.g., anger or yelling); Have to gain foster child's trust to see strengths; Have to work past trauma to identify needs; Finding alternate coping methods and emotional regulation skills	Socioemotional challenges		7	7
Providing additional resources to support academic strengths; Providing engaging environment; Seeking out opportunities to challenge and engage academically	Academic resources		7	7
Providing materials and activities that interest and excite foster children; Adjusting activities to support interests; Allowing exploration	Resources for interests		3	3
Foster child needs additional advocacy and school support due to life experiences	Need for support		1	1
No effects on parenting; Parents respond differently to each child; No standard parenting; Each child needs different care		No specific effects	11	12

Foster Children's School Experiences

During the interviews, participants had the opportunity to expand further on their perceptions of the lived experiences of the foster children in their care, focusing on the effects of their strengths, gifts, and talents on their time in school, as well as the effects of their lived experiences on their academic abilities. Table 15 characterizes foster children's school experiences, both positive and negative. Tables 16 and 17 discuss the things in foster children's lives that have helped and hindered their academics, respectively. Table 18 addresses the reasons foster parents perceive foster youth are not identified for gifted or high ability education.

Foster parents explained in detail about the challenges their foster children have faced in school, as well as the positive moments (Table 15). Eleven foster parents made 39 references to generally positive school experiences or positive instances. For example, Barbara described her foster child's experience in his most recent school as an enjoyable one.

When he moved to—When he started in fifth grade, his comment in that first week of school is, “Wow, this is the nicest school I've ever been to,” and I was like, “Do you mean the building is nice or the people is nice?” and he was like, “Kind of everything.” I would say on the whole he's had very supportive teachers. The social workers have been great at both the elementary school and the junior high.

Seven participants made 16 comments about the academic growth they have witnessed from the foster children during the time in their care. Annie said her foster child made significant improvements once he received the coping mechanisms he needed.

My little one, I got him at five. He was testing at a two-year-old level. He didn't know shapes, colors, numbers, nothing. By the time he went back to his parents, when he was 9 1/2, he was testing at a 10-year-old level. They said for each month I had him, he gained three months in knowledge. They were not stupid kids at all. They just had issues that they needed help with and how to learn to cope with them.

Foster children also had many negative experiences throughout their schooling. While some of the negative occurrences were attributed to issues related to foster care, others were related to the school environment and teacher or administrator interactions. Ten foster parents

made 28 references to teachers' biases toward their foster children. Diane recalled an incident when her foster child included that she was in foster care within an assignment, and the child's sibling overheard the teachers "gossiping" about the child in the hallway. Diane also said most teachers are often unaware of what foster children experience on a daily basis, so they make assumptions about the children's behaviors.

When asked if teachers know that her foster child is part of the foster care system, Whitney explained that she informed them with some hesitancy.

I normally share it with them because their mom isn't allowed to be around them, so I have to kind of give a background of why and try to fill them in. Sometimes I feel like the teachers almost feel sorry for them like, "Oh, I'm so sorry." Which I get that, but I don't want them to say that to the kids, because to them, I don't want them to think of it as a bad thing.

Miss Purple, who was a foster parent for 20 years, said she sees less bias from teachers now than in the past. "Back then, there was a stigma on children that were in foster care. People didn't understand foster care. It's almost like they blame the kids for being in foster care. With so much education...everybody has been reeducated."

Ten foster parents indicated 29 times that they did not receive the support they needed from teachers, administrators, or the county/state. Whitney recalled that for her youngest foster child, it has been a struggle to get appropriate services. "I've been fighting with the school for three years now. They finally got her on an IEP a year ago. I've been fighting...to get her help to do work with her. They finally put her in a behavior program." Zora also had to fight to place her foster child in an appropriately challenging math class. She said her foster child's school tried to put her in the math class for her age and would not provide a tutor until later in the year.

She was perfectly smart, perfectly capable. She could do the work if somebody would teach her. But they wouldn't. It is so frustrating because they wouldn't meet her where she was at, and give her the skills to be able to advance. It was just [sighs] so frustrating.

Two foster parents shared three times about their foster children being bullied by peers due to their status as foster children. Annie simply stated that “bullies pick on them.” Savannah revealed that she had to go into the school to teach the children about understanding each others’ differences, after another kindergartener at her foster daughter’s school told her “that she looked like poop because her skin was brown.” Savannah later read the book, *The Skin You’re In*, and her foster daughter felt “really special to have me in her class.”

Foster parents connected some of the negative experiences faced by foster children to the challenges that come with being in foster care. Ten participants referred 36 times to the effects of trauma or neglect on foster children’s schooling. After sharing multiple examples of curriculum and in-classroom experiences that were upsetting to her foster child, Caroline summarized the long-lasting effects trauma can have on foster children. “It’s just a whole different lived experience that can impact all areas of life and all areas of learning. Social-emotional, ability to regulate or co-regulate, or ability to learn academic material.” Zora also explained, “Trauma really messes with the brain. So you know, if you’re hungry, or scared, or stressed, it’s really hard to focus on something like learning your multiplication tables.”

Eleven participants made 32 comments about the frequency of foster children moving homes and foster families, and how that plays a part in their academics. Kennedy said her foster child moved frequently, which affected that child’s education.

It was definitely a lot more disruptive, because she ended up going to, I think three, maybe four different schools between the time she got put in the system and got placed with us. It was definitely more disruptive, which is going to affect her grades and things like that.

Even young foster children, like Heidi’s foster child who is in pre-school, are often moved to different homes and foster care placements. Heidi elaborated on her foster daughter’s frequent moves at a young age.

She already, in her first year, she has been in two different schools. She attended actually the public school where I teach for the first three months of her preschool experience. Then she had a disruption in education for several months where she didn't attend school at all, and now is in a private school. I would say that that is not typical. Most kids in their first year of preschool haven't had that many schools.

Foster parents also explained the social or emotional issues foster children faced. Eleven participants made 31 statements about these challenges. Whitney has had to teach her foster child about how to set social boundaries, and that she doesn't "have to say you're in foster care. You're not really in foster care. You're in our home, you're our family." Three of Amanda's foster children "have a rough time at school in general with either making friends or being able to focus enough in class on schoolwork. I think most of the kids we've had have IEPs as well."

Nine foster parents addressed specific challenges related to their foster children's special academic, emotional, or physical needs 18 times. They referred to children's IEPs for Autism, Emotional Disturbances or Emotional and Behavioral Disturbances, ADHD, and depression, as well as the difficulties they had obtaining the IEPs. Foster parents also shared about academic delays due to physical neglect, and challenges they had due to the limited number of special needs evaluations the school would conduct. Despite state mandates, multiple foster parents shared that schools initially would not provide services for foster children with IEPs, until their foster parents repeatedly advocated for the services.

As exemplified above, foster parents often felt the need to advocate for their foster children. Eight participants made 18 references to their advocacy efforts. Annie said this was an ongoing issue for her foster children.

Basically, there wasn't anyone standing up for these kids' rights, even before that. Then they went into foster care, and a lot of the foster parents that they seemed to have just weren't fighting for them. Once somebody gets in and starts standing in their face, then things start changing around really quick.

Advocacy can also occur behind the scenes between foster parents and teachers or school leaders. Diane stated that since she has been sending children to the same school district for 16 years.

They know me, and so I know them, and I'm able to say, "Hey, can you have the school psychologist kind of check in on them?" The kids don't have to know that I've said it. So they might think that, "This is just between me and the school psychologist. Mom doesn't know anything." When I'm the one that put it together, that they need to talk to somebody to make their school be okay, and whatnot.

Finally, four foster parents discussed seven times that they enrolled their foster children in some form of alternative or additional programming when their foster children's schooling was not sufficient in meeting their needs. These included GED programs, residential treatment centers, schools that have attached daycares for the students' children, dual-language classes, and extracurricular STEM programs.

Table 15

Foster Children's School Experiences, According to Foster Parent Interviews (N = 14 foster parents)

Open coding	Axial coding	Selective Coding	Number of Parents Supporting Axial Code	Number of References
Minimal issues with education; Positive school experiences; Supportive teachers who recognize strengths; Involvement in extracurriculars or passion areas; Smooth transitions due to legislation	Generally positive	Positive	11	39
Foster child demonstrated significant growth once supported; Child admitted to special programs; Once needs were recognized, continued improvement and progress occurred; When teacher worked with student, growth occurred	Growth		7	16
Teacher mistreatment or judgement; Curriculum that is not culturally competent, not inclusive of family situations, or is triggering; Teachers discussing foster child's experiences publicly; Teachers not understanding trauma or misreading behaviors; Issues related to multiculturalism or family structure	Teacher bias	Negative due to school environment	10	28
Lack of consistent, productive parental involvement; Schools would not support foster children's interests or goals; Insufficient support or services from county or state; Lack of teacher or administrator support	Lack of support		10	29
Peers picking on students due to foster care status, or multicultural family structure	Peer bullying		2	3
Issues with control and trust; Neglect and abuse causing physical, social, or emotional challenges; Adjustment to new homes and schools; Lack of foundational experiences; High stress levels; Behavioral challenges	Trauma or neglect	Negative due to issues related to foster care	10	36
Moving schools; Schools failing to provide resources due to likelihood of moving; Delays due to gap in schooling; Frequent instability in home life; Displacement far from family	Moving		11	32

continued

Open coding	Axial coding	Selective Coding	Number of Parents Supporting Axial Code	Number of References
Required counseling or therapy sessions leading to missed school; Social or emotional difficulties or delays due to life experiences; EDs or EBDs; Not trusting of others; hard time making friends	Social or emotional issues		11	31
Difficulty obtaining IEPs or 504 plans; Academic delays due to hearing or other physical issues; Increased special education services due to trauma or neglect, sometimes at an overly high rate		Special needs-related challenges	9	18
Repeated requests to teachers and administrators; Fought for identification for special needs and/or high ability; Made suggestions about behavior management techniques; Requested therapeutic services		Advocacy	8	18
Alternative graduation path; GED; Enrolled in alternative school; Additional tutoring; Found specific clubs		Sought Alternative Programs	4	7

Foster Children's Experiences that Help Them Academically

One area not often discussed in gifted education or foster care literature is the experiences foster children have that can help them academically or in life. During the interviews 14 foster parents made 39 references to how foster children can gain positive skills or perspectives from their life experiences (Table 16). Participants discussed interpersonal and intrapersonal domains, as well as the positive unique experiences faced by foster children that children not in foster care do not have.

In the interpersonal domain, seven foster parents commented 13 times about the motivation or drive to succeed that many foster children have. Miss Purple said her foster children received “positive reinforcement for getting good grades,” which encouraged and motivated them. “I think that is a drive. It's a push for some of these kids. Just to feel accepted in a way that they've never been before.” Amanda said her foster child's past experiences have shaped her and push her to do improve herself. “One of the kids we have is so motivated to work on herself knowing where she came from, so I think that definitely helps her as well to achieve at school.”

Eight parents also referred 13 times to the perseverance and resilience exhibited by the foster children in their care. Kennedy tied foster children's motivations to their perseverance.

I think that going through the kinds of things that make them enter the system can definitely build resilience. I think it can get them focused on “I don't want to be in this situation myself when I get older.” So they have a little bit more determination and resiliency.

Three foster parents mentioned seven times that their foster children were self-reliant. Diane credited foster children's life experiences with helping to prepare them for the future. “I think that survival skill that other kids don't have because they're so dependent on their parents,

that kids in foster care have because they don't have that ability to be dependent on the adults in their lives. It's self-fight.”

Foster parents also perceived intrapersonal skills possessed by their foster children due to their experiences. Six participants made eight statements about the social attributes their foster children possessed. Caroline explained that some foster children may be more social and have

the ability to make friends and notice body language and social cues. I think like I said before it can be a positive and it can be a negative. There are pros and cons of that. But I think that the kids that I've had and met that are in foster care are often way more socially aware than the other kiddos... it sucks that it's a survival skill, but it's a skill that can be really important.

Five participants commented six times that foster children may find it easier to adapt to new situations than children who have not had to do so previously. Annie said these frequent changes may “make them less afraid of changing schools to go to college.” Kennedy noted they may be more prepared to face challenges. “I also think they're able to handle setbacks a little better than maybe an average child who hasn't really had a lot of hardship.” Barbara added that her foster son “is very flexible and he’s used to kind of just going with the flow, which I think that can be an important trait in school.”

Three foster parents made three references to the positive academic moments their foster children had when teachers considered their backgrounds and supported them. One example came from Zora, who said “We’ve certainly heard some kids where a teacher has been, like their one positive influence in their life. You know, where that's been the thing that has gotten them through some hard times and let them have a hope.”

Finally, unique experiences were mentioned 15 times by ten participants. Whitney commented, “I think the unique thing about foster kids, they're used to people and willing to learn new things. I feel like they're probably a little more open about social settings and stuff like that.” Due to her home life, Savannah described her foster child as:

very strong academically, which, I think part of that was her coping skill for her. She spent a lot of time reading. She tried to spend as much time as she could at school before coming into care because home wasn't a great place to be.

Table 16

Foster Children's Experiences that Help Them Academically (N = 14 foster parents)

Open coding	Axial coding	Selective Coding	Number of Parents Supporting Axial Code	Number of References
Motivated by own success; Motivated to overcome background; Driven to improve self and be better; Fight to survive and succeed	Motivation or drive	Interpersonal	7	13
Unwilling to stop fighting and pushing self; Resilience; Continued push without external reward; Resilient despite difficult situations	Perseverance or resilience		8	13
Self-reliance; Self-parenting and monitoring; Working to improve for themselves; Self-fight because they cannot depend on adults	Self-reliance		3	7
Vigilant and aware of social cues; Noticing body language; Easy to make friends because they move often; Open in social settings; Able to use social skills to obtain goals	Social benefits	Intrapersonal	6	8
Less afraid of changing schools or go to college; Flexibility, goes with flow; Ability to handle setbacks and overcome hardships	Easier to adapt to new situations		5	6
Does better in school when teachers consider background; Teacher flexibility and understanding helped; Good relationships with teachers or school	When teachers consider background		3	3
Awareness of different lived experiences and family structures; Resourceful; Unique perspectives; Coping skills; More exposed to world; Different definitions of success; Supportive foster parents		Unique experiences	10	15

Foster Children's Experiences that Hinder Them Academically

Just as some experiences helped them academically, other experiences were perceived by foster parents as hinderances to their foster children's academics. Table 17 shows the 86 references made by 14 parents to academic hinderances related to foster children's experiences in care. Included were foster care's effects on relationships, various aspects of their home lives, and interpersonal differences of youth in foster care.

Foster parents perceived foster children to have challenges in their relationships. Ten foster parents referred 35 times to the challenges foster children face with personal relationships related to their experiences in foster care. Whitney, Heidi, and Savannah mentioned that not all foster parents are supportive, and not all foster homes are places in which foster children feel secure. Caroline said some foster children might find it difficult to trust new people.

Now I do think that people being extroverted or introverted could be directly related to their feelings at the time. If kids that are in foster care, or have been adopted through foster care and have experienced trauma are less likely to be trusting right away when they meet a new person. They might be more nervous when they meet new people.

Eight foster parents commented an additional eleven times about foster children's relationships with school and teachers. Amanda connected their difficulties with peers and schools to foster children's ongoing stressors, saying "I think their experiences are different because they can't just leave their home life at home and go to school just to learn. A lot of them, like I said, have a hard time at school just making relationships." Michelle said sometimes teachers will not challenge foster children in the ways that they need because the teachers pity them.

But a lot of it's the neglect, not being pushed, not being challenged. The feeling of sorrow for the children. You're like, "Oh, they have it so rough at home that I'm really not going to push them to do their homework. Or I'm not going to hold them to the same standards as I would some of the other students," which can be a disservice to the children.

Foster children's home lives, as well as their environments both before entering foster care and while they remain in foster care, were categories addressed by foster parents. The trauma foster children face was referenced 31 times by ten parents. Natalia described the effects trauma can have on the brain when she said, "A kid that...is in the foster care system has experienced some trauma, either neglect or abuse or both. When trauma happens, the brain suffers. They have areas of the brain, with the stress and everything, that is not working." She continued, "their ability to handle stress and their box in which they handle stress is different, so yes, it hinders them. They don't have the same coping mechanisms someone that hasn't gone through trauma has." Zora addressed the negative ways in which education literature describes children in foster care, and attributed those negative academic outcomes to the trauma, abuse, and neglect in their lives. "Hunger, stress, sleeplessness—I guess it's not surprising to me that the literature mentions the deficits because there are just so many things that kids have to overcome."

Moving was another factor hindering children academically, according to eleven parents who made 31 statements. They mentioned things like truancy, difficulties transitioning, and a lack of stability and sense of security due to the frequent moves the foster children were forced to make.

Nine foster parents made 30 references to inconsistencies in foster children's lives and schooling. Annie discussed the challenges foster children face when each school has different academic requirements and learning tracks. "Just the groove getting messed up. In one semester she was in 17 different cities, schools, same state...Each school does different things at different times. She's gone from algebra to geometry to pre-algebra. There's no consistency of schooling." Barbara added:

Every time you move, of course, there are things that you miss. There's still things, he'll be like, "Well, I didn't learn that." And maybe he did, and he forgot it or maybe he just really didn't really learn it because those were a few weeks where he just wasn't at school.

Also related to foster children's home lives was the lack of exposure or opportunities for foster children provided by their biological or foster parents, or their schools. Seven parents commented 13 times about how these hindered children academically. Savannah explained that children not in foster care "have lots of privilege and opportunities provided to them a lot of stability, a lot of extracurriculars, tutors...early exposure to language, STEM, math, all of that. I don't think that is true for your average child in foster care."

The other domain referenced by foster parents was interpersonal challenges students deal with due to their experiences in foster care. Three foster parents made five references to foster children being hesitant to stand out or receive praise, which they perceived to hinder the foster children academically. They said foster children want to fit in and according to Savannah, "don't want any other reasons to feel different or singled out. They don't really want to have any extra eyes on them, because they've already had lots of people involved in their life that they never asked for."

Three foster parents also made four comments related to foster children's behaviors. Occasionally, foster children's misbehaviors are simply trauma responses or a need for control, according to these foster parents. They also may be trying to fit in with peers who may not make what are seen as positive life choices.

Table 17

Foster Children's Experiences that Hinder Them Academically (N = 14 foster parents)

Open coding	Axial coding	Selective Coding	Number of Parents Supporting Axial Code	Number of References
Peer interactions and bias; Difficult to trust others; Hypervigilant about others' emotions and social cues; Family disruptions; Lack of family support, or explicit discouragement	Personal relationships	Relationships	10	35
Unsure if they can trust teacher or school; Adjustment to new school and expectations; Lack of involvement or investment from school; School experiences and resources prior to care; Truancy; Academic neglect	Relationships with school		8	11
Trauma, abuse, and neglect; Stress responses to trauma; Reliant on survival skills; Lack of control; Deficits due to experiences and physical neglect; Need for safety	Trauma	Home life and environment	10	31
Changing schools, homes, peers, and families; Unsure how long until next move; Transitions; Loss of learning; Cannot be involved in extracurriculars	Moving		11	31
No sense of normalcy; Inconsistent schooling; Unsure of expectations; Interruptions and disruptions; Fear of removal; Unsure who will care for them each day	Inconsistencies		9	20
Academic neglect prior to care; lack of home support; Resources from parents, foster parents, school, and county/state; Less involvement in extracurriculars; Lack of challenge and rigor	Lack of exposure or opportunities		7	13
Desire to fit in; Desire to feel normal; No extra pressure or attention; Too many adults involved in life	Hesitant to stand out or receive praise	Interpersonal	3	5
Moved foster homes because of behavior; Trauma-related behavioral changes; Desire to control anything in life; Desire to fit in with peers leading to poor behavior choices	Behavior		3	4

When asked, all 14 foster parents interviewed stated foster children could be gifted. However, many are not identified as gifted or determined to be eligible for high ability programming. The 14 interviewees made 95 references as to why they perceived foster children are not identified for gifted education (Table 18). The reasons foster children were not identified were often connected to the experiences that hindered them academically. Only *two* of the references commented on foster children's lack of motivation for academics. The other 93 references were about things that were out of the control of foster children, or about their actions as a result of the experiences and challenges they have faced.

One of the primary reasons foster parents felt that foster children were not identified was lack of recognition from teachers, schools, or foster parents. Thirteen parents made 39 comments about this lack of recognition of foster children's gifts, talents, and abilities. Zora said behavioral challenges, stress, and ongoing anxieties may mask foster children's gifts. "There's so much else going on so I think it might be harder for people to see, "Oh, wait. If I look past these other issues, look at this talent here." When asked she has had any foster children that have been formally identified as gifted, Michelle responded:

We have not. But I would follow that up with we've never had anybody ask us for any kind of testing or tell us that that was even something that was a possibility or an option to be tested. I found that very interesting about your survey because I thought, "Nobody's ever asked to test our very remarkable straight-A students for gifted classes." And I don't [know] why.

Three participants also made four comments about explicit biases faced by foster children. Michelle noted that often teachers may not think they are biased, and although they do help foster children, she said they may be unaware of the biases they present.

Foster parents cited inconsistent schooling as another reason children in foster care were not identified for gifted education. Seven foster parents referred 13 times to gaps in academics creating issues for identification. Zora commented that due to multiple moves, some of her foster

children display “pretty significant learning gaps...Some...were actually fairly bright, but just due to neglect and not being sent to school or changing schools, they've missed so many of the basic foundation pieces, that they really struggle to keep up.” Similarly, six foster parents made 15 comments about how frequently moving may result in a lack of identification. Chloe explained that these moves might lead teachers to not invest in or notice foster children’s talents and abilities. “if you don't have a kid for long enough to get to know them on a deep enough level to see where their actual talents are, then it's just going to get passed to the next [person].”

Resource availability was an issue for foster children, according to their foster parents. Ten participants referenced a lack of opportunities for foster children to develop their gifts and talents 24 times. This was not just because the children did not receive resources from the state, however. Annie specifically commented that the schools did not allow foster children to participate in certain programs or clubs because they were in foster care. Chloe recalled a teacher who said their school did not provide services for children in kindergarten, the grade level of her foster child. Because of this and because the child was in foster care, the teacher would not test the foster child to determine giftedness. “Since we knew that he was moving soon, they didn't do anything while he was with us.”

Funding was also a hinderance to foster children’s identification, with two foster parents citing five times that the cost of various resources was a prohibitive factor. They said that many foster families may not be able to afford the extra fees associated with music lessons and instrument rental, extracurricular clubs, tutoring, or supplies for children’s specific talents.

Trauma, abuse, and neglect were referred to 23 times by nine foster parents as something creating challenges for foster children’s academics. According to Barbara, some of the trauma experienced by her foster child “comes simply from being separated from his family, at this

point. He did not come from a severe abuse situation. But he is very reluctant to try activities that he thinks, "Well that's—Maybe I won't be good at that." This led to him not participating in activities in which he could excel.

Nine foster parents made 22 comments about the effects of foster children's social, emotional, or behavioral challenges, and how these can often mask the children's gifts and talents. Natalia explained that occasionally with foster youth, "what could be tainting things is some behaviors, because in my experience through the foster kids that we've had, they come with some behaviors. Sometimes if you're not patient, it's hard to see the gift through some of the behaviors." Miss Purple added that foster parents should reconsider behaviors exhibited by younger foster children having "tantrums" and children with ADHD, and learn what they are trying to communicate, in order to see past the behaviors to the gifts.

Foster children's fears were another area of concern for foster parents. Foster children's fear of praise was mentioned five times by ten foster parents. Sometimes these fears were the result of previous instances of abuse. Additionally, a fear of rejection was mentioned four times by six foster parents. Whitney said foster children are sometimes afraid to showcase their strengths due to inability to trust previous adults in their lives. "Because they're going to get rejected. Even if you tell them, 'No, I would never do that to you,' they're not going to believe you."

Finally, two participants referenced foster children's lack of motivation two times. Annie's foster child was simply not motivated by the typical experiences offered in school and needed to have other goals to work toward. Savannah said children with gifts and talents often need to "self-motivate", due to a lack of privileges afforded to them. "Any skill that they're really

honing themselves I think is—That's great if you've got 15 tutors and a private lesson for every single thing. But if you're not able to do it yourself...it can look differently.”

Table 18

Why Foster Children Are Not Identified for Gifted Education (N = 14 foster parents)

Open coding	Axial coding	Selective Coding	Number of Parents Supporting Axial Code	Number of References
Teachers do not notice gifts; Foster parents do not notice less obvious abilities; Other challenges mask gifts; Growth not recognized	Lack of Recognition	Perception	13	39
Teachers' low expectations for foster youth; Identification measures not culturally competent	Bias		3	4
Gaps due to lack of foundational experiences prior to or during school-age; Disruptions in school; Not attending school regularly; Varying standards and content	Gaps in Academics	Inconsistent Schooling	7	13
Schools did not provide services because foster child would not remain in same school; Foster child moved schools and/or homes; Inconsistent school records available	Moving		6	15
Schools did not allow foster youth to participate in activities like music, athletics, or clubs; Lack of resources in school or home; Non-foster children have opportunities	Lack of Opportunities	Resources	10	24
Cost of additional activities, such as enrichment programs; Cost of instruments; Cost of tutors if needed	Lack of Funding		2	5
Lack of confidence or security; Trauma can mask gifts; Hypervigilance towards others' emotions or reactions; Difficulty focusing on school or interact with authority figures		Trauma	9	23
Special education needs (e.g., Autism, ADHD) mask gifts; Trauma responses present as misbehaviors; Emotional challenges; Social difficulties with peers or teachers		Social, Emotional, or Behavioral Issues	9	22
Fear of praise due to prior experiences; Foster youth not wanting to stand out, even positively	Fear of Praise	Fear	5	10

continued

Open coding	Axial coding	Selective Coding	Number of Parents Supporting Axial Code	Number of References
Not showing skills due to prior instances of rejection; Lack of self-esteem; Abandonment	Fear of Rejection		4	6
Not motivated by certain school experiences; Need internal drive to be identified		Lack of Motivation	2	2

Foster Parents' Resources and Needs for Foster Children's Education

In the survey, foster parents were asked the following questions: “What needs do you have as a parent of a foster child?” and “Specifically, what needs do you have related to your foster child’s academics, strengths, gifts, and talents?” The 126 references made by 43 foster parents addressed the supports they needed from various members of the educational and foster care system, information and education, and other needs that were not directly related to the purposes of this study (Table 19).

Foster parents’ need for support was a frequent request. Participants said they particularly needed additional support from foster children’s schools, teachers, and administrators. Twenty-three participants mentioned this 37 times. Common comments were about help for extracurriculars, enrichment, and in-school services, assistance or tutoring to get students caught up to grade level, and support from trauma-informed teachers and school leaders who understood their foster children’s experiences and resulting actions.

Sixteen foster parents made 21 references to their desire for more support from caseworkers, social workers, and county or state foster system employees. One participant needed the state to redesign “the system to be set up for the benefit of the kid” (2021-03-06). Another foster parent said they needed “communication from department [DCS] and agencies,” and “documentation for enrollment in programs or schools” (2021-03-04). Sometimes it can be difficult for foster parents and schools to access their foster children’s educational records and assessments, so foster parents encouraged the state and county to keep better track of this data.

Many foster children receive access to therapy services through their state. Seven foster parents referred ten times to their need for additional access to therapy services and help from therapists. Foster parents highlighted the need to access therapists for all members of the foster family, explaining “I would like counseling and support for when you have a difficult child and

how that child integrates to your own bio kids” (2021-03-02). Another participant would like to see a greater variety of therapy options for foster children. “Better therapists, especially for younger children, who take state insurance. More music therapists, play therapists, art therapists, etc.” (2021-03-08).

Support from families, either biological or their own foster families, was mentioned four times by three foster parents. Participant 2021-02-07 said they needed “support from friends and family, grace and understanding for why our lives are different.” “Find ways to include all the important people not just the foster parents” was suggested by Participant 2021-03-13.

Finally, nine participants made ten comments about their need to connect with other foster parents. Suggestions included foster parent support groups, comprised of “A tribe of other foster families to contact at the drop of a hat that understand the frustrations and struggles as well as the victories no matter how small” (2021-02-06).

Foster parents expressed their own desire to learn and gather resources. Twelve foster parents referred 17 times to the education and training they needed about how to best help and encourage their foster children. Five of these suggestions were for more training in a general sense. Some foster parents suggested more specific topics for trainings, including “Knowledge and resources related to substance exposure specific to children who are adopted” (2021-02-31), and “help navigating the administrative/legal part of fostering. I don’t always know the rules in different situations, or what paperwork is required” (2021-03-11). Three foster parents requested additional trainings on how to advocate for their foster children’s educational needs.

Ten foster parents also felt they needed additional resources for themselves and various members of their foster care team. Thirteen references were made to things like resources, supplies, and enrichment opportunities. Participant 2021-03-05 said they wanted to see “Camps

that foster kids can attend that help them feel like they fit in.” In the same vein, Participant 2021-03-21 expressed twice that they needed “resources for enrichment and tutoring to catch up academically.”

Some participants stated that they did not have specific needs, academic or otherwise. Eleven foster parents made eleven statements to this effect. Most of these participants responded with “none” or “N/A”. One foster parent said they had the support and network they needed, explaining “None, mine is considered delayed. I have had several children in this realm that I seek help from outside assistance with” (2021-02-04).

There were foster parents who referred to their needs which were outside the scope of this study. Fifteen foster parents made 21 references to other needs, such as time, sleep, and support for issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic. A participant, 2021-02-16, said they needed to better communicate with their foster child. Foster parents are often frustrated at the language used in the general public to describe foster children and foster parents. This was embodied by participant 2021-03-08, who said they needed “Understanding from community, for people to freakin' STOP saying ‘Oh I could never give them back’ or ‘What about their REAL parents?’.”

Table 19

Foster Parents' Needs (n = 43 foster parents)

Open coding	Axial coding	Selective Coding	Number of Parents Supporting Axial Code	Number of References
Flexibility and understanding; Support from school and teachers; Communication; Support and guidance to help foster child; Specific training for teachers so they understand; Periodic evaluation of student skills; Compassion	School or teachers	Support	23	37
Assistance with paperwork and legal support; Support and communication from state workers, county, and caseworkers; Transparency from social workers; Documentation for school, program enrollment; Respite care	Caseworkers or County/State		16	21
Support from therapists to help child excel; Access to available and state-covered therapy services; Counseling support for foster parent and foster family; Different kinds of therapy	Therapists		7	10
Support, flexibility, and understanding from family; Other adults in child's life attending events	Family		3	4
Foster parent peer support groups; Connections to other families in similar situations; Parent groups for school advocacy	Connections with other Foster Parents		9	10
Education and training; Learn how to advocate for them; Ideas on working with each child, different behaviors, and substance-exposed children; Legal education; Ways to foster their talents	Foster parent education	Information	12	17
Resources for schools to understand trauma; Resources and opportunities for foster and adopted children; Supplies; Enrichment and camps for foster youth; Tutoring	Resources		10	13
Already receive help; None; Not worried about academics;	No specific academic needs	Other	11	11
COVID-19 challenges; Financial assistance, meals, and transportation; Understanding from community; Time; Sleep	Other needs unrelated to study		15	21

State-Mandated Pre-Service Training

One of the needs foster parents expressed was their desire for training to prepare them for the situations and challenges they face. All 50 states and Washington, D.C. require some form of training for foster parents. The number of training hours and the topics discussed vary by state. I reviewed the pre-service curriculum and requirements for each state and Washington, D.C., to see if they thoroughly addressed the topics of foster parents' concerns and prepared them before they became licensed and took foster children into their care.

As each U.S. state is responsible for their own foster care system, the number of hours required to obtain a license to foster ranges from approximately five hours in Nebraska to 36 hours in Ohio (Table 20). Nearly half of all states ($n = 22$) require 26 to 30 hours of training, with 13 of those states requiring 30 hours. Seven states do not list their required number of training hours. Some of these states list their online training program, but do not say how long it takes to complete this program. In California, the licensing requirements vary by county, so a set number of hours for state licensure was not provided.

Table 20

Required Pre-Licensure Training Hours by State (N = 50 states, and Washington, D.C.)

<u>Hours Required</u>	<u>Number of States</u>	<u>States</u>
0-5 Hours	1	NE
6-10 Hours	3	AK, IN, WI
11-15 Hours	7	AK, FL, HI, KY, MI, MS, SC
16-20 Hours	5	CO, ME, MT, TX, WY
21-25 Hours	8	LA, ME, NH, OR, PA, VT, VA, WA
26-30 Hours	22	AL, AZ, AR, DC, DE, ID, IL, IA, KS, MD, MA, MO, NV, NJ, NC, ND, OK, RI, SD, VT, WA, WV
More than 30 Hours	3	NM, OH, UT
Hours Not Specified	7	CA, CT, GA, MN, NY, PA, TN

Note. The number of hours represent what was listed by the respective state's foster care training website and training documents, as of April 2021. These are the minimum number of hours required to obtain a license to foster or foster-to-adopt. Additional training may be required for respite, emergency, or therapeutic care providers. States also vary in their requirements for kinship care providers. If states require a different number of hours than what is listed in this table, this is likely due to a lack of continuity of information from the state or website. Private foster parent licensure agency requirements may differ.

In addition to the variety of hours required by each state, states also address many different topics within their training. Topics required during pre-service training can be found in Table 21. Table 22 presents a state-based view, listing for each state and Washington, D. C., which topics are discussed. According to their state websites, required curricula include things like rules and regulations, psychological and psychosocial concepts, collaboration with various team members, instructions for the foster parents and their families, lessons about characteristics of foster children, and other topics. I found 20 different topics addressed, which I categorized into seven groups. These groups are: Rules, regulations and general information; Psychological concepts; Psychosocial concepts; Collaboration; Foster parent and family; Foster child's characteristics and actions; and Other.

Rules, regulations, and other general information about foster parenting were often the first training topics addressed by many states. Foster care laws and state policies were referenced 31 times by 19 states. How to provide a safe environment and care for foster children's health was another important topic, with 15 states making 21 references to these topics. Thirteen states commented 15 times about the general information about foster parenting they discuss. Definitions, goals, and expectations for fostering were included.

Meeting children's educational needs was only addressed one time, by Washington, D.C. Other states may include discussions of educational requirements but did not explicitly state that this is part of their training. For example, PRIDE, or Parent Resources for Information, Development, and Education, is used by 13 states. Although the title of this program includes "education," this refers to the education of foster parents, not the foster youth in their care. In the information provided about what is taught in the program, none of the instructional modules appear to address educational needs of foster youth or how to encourage their academic efforts.

One state, Alaska, also mentioned “working with the child’s schools,” but did so with the goal of teamwork, and did not specifically state an emphasis on children’s educational experiences.

Training programs often incorporated psychological concepts into their curriculum. Fifteen states made 23 references to discussions of the effects of attachment and separation on foster children.

Trauma was frequently addressed, with 13 states mentioning 19 times about instructing foster parents on the effects of trauma, abuse, and neglect. Fifteen states made 18 statements about children’s developmental needs. Seven states covered grief and loss in their foster parent instruction, making eight comments about the subject.

Psychosocial concepts were also included in required trainings, although less so than the psychological concepts. Nine states made 12 references to the topic of culture. In a similar vein, two states stated three times that they addressed race and bias in their training. Gender and sexuality were covered in two states, who made two references to this area of instruction.

States encouraged collaboration between foster parents and various members of the foster care system. For 18 states (25 references), this included learning how to work with biological or birth families. Sixteen states referred 21 times to the need to work with other associated staff or services.

The effects of fostering on foster parents and their families, as well as rules about parenting within the foster care system, were often discussed. Parenting standards and requirements were mentioned 23 times by 16 states. These included training sessions about discipline, parenting techniques, and the “Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard,” which was specifically mentioned by five states (AL, CO, CT, ID, and KY). This standard is derived from a federal law signed in 2014 (Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act of 2014,

Supporting Normalcy for Children in Foster Care Provision). The law is multi-faceted, and according to the American Bar Association (Redlich Epstein and Lancour, 2016), the provision related to foster care:

requires caregivers use a “reasonable and prudent parent standard” when determining whether to allow a child in foster care to participate in extracurricular, enrichment, cultural, and social activities. Additionally, a “caregiver” must be appointed to apply the reasonable and prudent standard for children who reside in congregate or institutional care.

This federal act “requires state to provide training for caregivers and directs HHS to provide technical assistance to states on best practices in assisting foster parents in applying the standard” (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2016). Despite the Act being enacted federally and requiring foster parent training from states, only five states specifically stated that they trained foster parents on the Reasonable and Prudent Parenting Standard.

Eleven states made 15 references to foster family self-care. For example, Indiana addressed the “effects of care giving on the family” (Indiana Department of Child Services, 2020).

An important domain addressed often was foster children’s characteristics and how to understand their actions. Behavior was a common topic, with 13 states making 14 references to foster children’s behaviors. Six states addressed information about the foster child’s background seven times. Only three states made three comments about foster children’s or foster families’ strengths, and how to encourage them. Finally, two states discussed characteristics of foster children, and foster parents’ need to consider those characteristics when they decide to become foster parents.

Specific state- or company-run programs were provided 31 times by 29 states. Programs mentioned include Parent Resources for Information, Development, and Education (PRIDE); Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting (MAPP); Resource and Adoptive Parent Training

(RAPT); and Initial Interest, Mutual Selection, Pre-Service Training, Assessment, Continuing Development and Teamwork (IMPACT).

Seven states did not provide sufficient information about what topics they required in their pre-service foster parent training. These seven references were either not specific, or the state's regulations varied. For example, California's requirements for pre-service training varied by the county in which a potential foster parent applied.

Table 21

Pre-Service Training Topics for Foster Parents^a (N = 50 states and Washington, D.C.)

Open coding	Axial coding	Selective Coding	Number of States Supporting Axial Code	Number of References
Legal requirements; Medication; Mandated reporting; Relevant laws and rules; Travel and finance regulations	Laws and policies	Rules, Regulations, and General Information	19	31
CPR and First Aid; Sleep safety; Driving; Nutrition; Emergency preparedness	Safety and Health		15	21
Expectations; Definitions and goals of foster care; Processes; Overview; Orientation	General Information		13	15
Educational aspects of foster care	Education ^b		1	1
Attachment; Planning for and impact of separation; Change; Permanency; Connections and relationships	Attachment and Separation	Psychological Concepts	15	23
Effects of trauma, abuse, and neglect; Sexual abuse; Trauma behaviors; Trauma-informed parenting	Trauma		13	19
Children's developmental needs; Developmental delays; Emotional, cognitive, and behavioral implications; Stages of development	Development		15	18
Process of grief and loss; Stages of grief; effects of grief and loss	Grief and Loss		7	8
Cultural issues in parenting; Understanding and valuing cultural differences; Cultural competency; Importance of birth parents and culture; Culturally-specific services	Culture	Psychosocial Concepts	9	12
Diversity; Discrimination and racial bias	Race and Bias		2	3
Sexuality and sexual orientation; Gender sensitivity	Gender and Sexuality		2	2

continued

Open coding	Axial coding	Selective Coding	Number of Parents Supporting Axial Code	Number of References
Characteristics of parents whose children are placed in foster care, and their needs, rights, and responsibilities; Valuing and partnering with families; Relationships between children and their families	Biological or Birth Families	Collaboration	18	25
Working with the agency, DCS/DHS; Navigating the system; Local social services; Veteran foster parents' experiences; Teamwork with caseworker, parents, and schools	Associated Staff and Services		16	21
Discipline; Reasonable and prudent parenting; Behavior management skills; Parenting techniques	Parenting Standards	Foster Parent and Family	16	23
Impact of foster care on foster parent and family; Foster family self-care; Effects of caregiving; Family functioning	Foster Family Self-Care		11	15
Behavior management; Understanding behavior as an expression of underlying needs; Rerouting trauma behaviors; Helping children learn healthy behaviors	Behavior	Foster Child's Characteristics and Actions	13	14
Family breakdown and circumstances resulting in children enter the foster system; Process of children entering care; Child's past experiences; Valuing heritage	Child's Background		6	7
Identifying strengths of families and children; Building self-esteem	Strengths		3	3
Characteristics of children in care; "What type of child can I parent?"	Characteristics		2	2
PRIDE; RAPT; MAPP; CORE; IMPACT; Foster Parent College; Rescue 100; STARS	Specific Programs	Other	29	31
Differs by county; Other required licensing classes; Mandatory training through state or department; Building skills to prepare someone to care for a child	Undefined		7	7

^a Private foster parent licensure agency requirements and topics may differ.

^b Education was specifically mentioned by Washington, D.C. Multiple states require PRIDE Training, which stands for Parent Resources for Information, Development, and Education. Although Education is in the title, this program is for the education of foster parents, not for discussing education requirements or procedures for foster youth.

Table 22

Pre-Service Training Topics by State, Part 1 (N = 50 states and Washington, D.C.)

Rules, Regulations, and General											
State	Information			Psychological Concepts				Psychosocial Concepts			
	Laws and policies	Safety and Health	General Information	Education	Attachment, Separation	Trauma	Development	Grief and Loss	Culture	Race and Bias	Gender and Sexuality
AK	X						X				
AL	X		X		X		X	X	X		
AR		X									
AZ											
CA											
CO	X	X				X					
CT	X	X									
DC	X		X	X	X	X					
DE											
FL											
GA			X				X		X		X
HI											
IA			X								
ID						X					
IL											
IN	X				X	X					
KS											
KY	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X		
LA											
MA											
MD	X						X				
ME	X	X									
MI					X		X		X	X	
MN	X	X	X						X	X	X
MO	X	X			X		X				

continued

<u>State</u>	<u>Rules, Regulations, and General Information</u>				<u>Psychological Concepts</u>			<u>Psychosocial Concepts</u>			
MS	X	X			X						
MT		X									
NC											
ND					X		X	X			
NE	X		X								
NH	X		X		X	X	X	X			
NJ					X		X	X			
NM	X	X	X			X				X	
NV											
NY			X		X						
OH		X				X	X			X	
OK		X			X	X	X				
OR						X	X			X	
PA									X		
RI					X				X		
SC	X		X								
SD											
TN						X					
TX											
UT		X	X		X	X	X			X	
VA											
VT						X					
WA	X										
WI	X		X								
WV		X			X		X				
WY	X	X									
Total	19	15	13	1	15	13	15	7	9	2	2

continued

Pre-Service Training Topics by State, Part 2 (N = 50 states and Washington, D.C.)

<u>State</u>	<u>Collaboration</u>		<u>Foster Parent and Family</u>		<u>Foster Child's Characteristics and Actions</u>				<u>Other</u>	
	<u>Biological or Birth Families</u>	<u>Associated Staff or Services</u>	<u>Parenting Standards</u>	<u>Foster Family Self-Care</u>	<u>Behavior</u>	<u>Child's Background</u>	<u>Strengths</u>	<u>Characteristics</u>	<u>Specific Programs</u>	<u>Undefined</u>
AK		X			X		X			
AL	X		X	X	X	X	X			
AR										X
AZ									X	
CA										X
CO			X						X	
CT			X							
DC	X	X	X	X		X		X		
DE									X	
FL									X	
GA	X				X				X	
HI										X
IA	X	X		X	X				X	
ID		X	X	X				X	X	
IL									X	
IN		X	X	X					X	
KS									X	
KY	X		X	X	X	X				
LA										X
MA			X				X		X	
MD		X			X					
ME										
MI									X	
MN		X							X	
MO	X	X	X						X	
MS	X	X							X	

continued

<u>State</u>	<u>Foster Parent and</u>		<u>Family</u>		<u>Foster Child's Characteristics and Actions</u>				<u>Other</u>	
MT										X
NC									X	
ND	X		X						X	
NE	X			X						
NH					X				X	
NJ	X	X	X						X	
NM	X				X				X	
NV									X	
NY		X				X			X	
OH	X	X		X	X					
OK	X	X	X							
OR	X		X		X	X				
PA		X	X			X				
RI	X		X	X	X				X	
SC										
SD									X	
TN		X	X		X				X	
TX									X	
UT	X			X	X					
VA									X	X
VT										X
WA									X	
WI	X			X						
WV	X	X							X	
WY										
Total	18	16	16	11	13	6	3	2	29	7

Foster Parents' Perceptions of Training

Although each state or territory required training for foster parents to become licensed, not all foster parents felt this training was sufficient or useful. Foster parents were asked about what instruction they received prior to their licensure, as well as what ongoing instruction they have received since obtaining their licensure. They were asked four closed-ended questions about topics discussed. The results of these questions can be found in Table 23. If they did receive training about specific topics, they were asked to briefly explain what was provided. These explanations are included in Tables 23 and 24.

When asked if they received any pre-service training about foster children's strengths, talents, or abilities, most parents said they either did not receive this training prior to becoming licensed (45.28%) or were not sure (18.87%). Only about 36% of parents said they did receive this training. Additionally, about 40% of parents said they received any pre-service training about foster children's education. The remaining approximately 60% said they did not receive this training (47.17%) or were not sure (13.21%).

After becoming licensed foster parents, only about 29% of participants said they had received training about foster children's strengths, talents, or abilities. Most had not received any (59.62%) or were not sure (11.54%). More foster parents said they had received additional training about foster children's education, with 42.31% stating they were trained on this topic after becoming licensed foster parents. Again, about 54% said they did not undergo training about foster children's educations, and about 4% were not sure if they did.

Table 23

Training Received by Surveyed Foster Parents, Pre- and Post-Licensure

Question	Response Percentage		
	Yes (%)	No (%)	Not Sure (%)
Prior to becoming a licensed foster parent, did you receive any pre-service training about foster children's strengths, talents, or abilities? (<i>n</i> = 53)	19 (35.85%)	24 (45.28%)	10 (18.87%)
Prior to becoming a licensed foster parent, did you receive any pre-service training about foster children's education? (<i>n</i> = 53)	21 (39.62%)	25 (47.17%)	7 (13.21%)
After becoming a licensed foster parent, did you receive any training about foster children's strengths, talents, or abilities? (<i>n</i> = 52)	15 (28.85%)	31 (59.62%)	6 (11.54%)
After becoming a licensed foster parent, did you receive any training about foster children's education? (<i>n</i> = 52)	22 (42.31%)	28 (53.85%)	2 (3.85%)

Foster parents provided information about the training they received prior to receiving and since obtaining their licenses. The 27 foster parents who provided 37 references to their pre-service training discussed similar topics to those required by the states and territories (Table 24). They stated they learned about education, regulations or standards, and specific concepts. Participants also frequently commented on the lack or insufficiencies of training provided.

Unlike the state-mandated training, which only made one reference to children's educational needs, three foster parents made three comments about educational advocacy training. Of these, two said their training did address educational advocacy, one of whom said they learned "how to advocate for the child inside the school. We learned about DCS education liaisons" (2021-02-02). Participant 2021-03-14 suggested it should have been addressed.

This was not covered and 100% should have been. Children need foster parents to advocate for them, and if you are unaware you of how the school system works, you will place your kid at a disadvantage. ([For] example, not knowing what an IEP is)

Five parents said five times they received information about special education requirements for children in foster care. These references centered on training about IEPs, like the training mentioned by Participant 2021-03-08. “There may have been a bit about IEPs and special needs.”

Similar to state training requirements, foster parents also explained that they received instruction about regulations and standards for foster parenting. Three participants made three comments about the state or county information that was discussed, including information about the Department of Child Services (DCS).

Six parents made seven references to general information provided, which sometimes addressed requirements for school enrollment. One foster parent said they learned about “steps to enroll them in school” (2021-03-10). Another foster parent explained, “It was not very detailed. Just described that kiddos need to be enrolled in school” (2021-02-06). Two foster parents noted the trainings were simply long periods of “general info” (2021-03-12, 2021-03-20) and “basic” (2021-03-17).

The specific PRIDE training program, mentioned earlier, was listed four times by four foster parents. Topics mentioned from the PRIDE training were things like behaviors, IEPs, and trauma-informed practices. When one foster parent took the PRIDE training, describing it as “basically worst-case scenario survival training” (2021-02-24).

When discussing specific topics addressed in the training, five participants referred five times to the instruction they received about trauma and abuse. Participant 2021-02-01 detailed their pre-service training experience. “We received 20 hours of therapeutic foster training, which focused on the effects of trauma, signs and effects of abuse...and some practical tips for parenting children who have experienced trauma.”

Five foster parents also mentioned five times about foster children's strengths, talents, and abilities. For example, a foster parent mentioned they received "general info on learning styles, gifts, and delays" (2021-03-12). Two of five references about this topic were to the lack of training about this information. In the Likert-style question, Participant 2021-03-15 said they had received training on foster children's strengths, talents or abilities. But when given the chance to explain, the foster parent said, "This specific area was not talked/discussed enough or even to help parents to identify areas of gifted children."

Finally, ten foster parents made twelve comments about the lack of training provided on needed topics. When asked if they received any training on foster children's education prior to becoming licensed foster parents, Participant 2021-03-01 said they did not, and explained, "As an educator and foster parent I think this training would be extremely helpful for supporting the academics of the children in your home at any level." Another foster parent said "those trainings were useless compared to real life" (2021-02-21).

Table 24

Pre-Service Training Topics Available to Surveyed Foster Parents (n = 27 foster parents)

Open coding	Axial coding	Selective Coding	Number of Parents Supporting Axial Code	Number of References
How to advocate for child in school; Need for advocacy education	Educational Advocacy	Education	3	3
IEPs; Special needs; Delays; Foster Parents don't learn about what an IEP is	Special Education		5	5
Information about DCS (Department of Child Services) procedures; DCS educational liaisons; Where to go for extra support	State or County Information	Regulations or Standard Trainings	3	3
General rules about school enrollment; Steps to enrollment; Basic; General information; Not very detailed	General Information, primarily School Enrollment		6	7
PRIDE Training; Trauma; Behaviors; IEPs; Worst-case scenarios	PRIDE		4	4
Signs and effects of trauma and abuse; Practical tips for parenting children who experienced trauma; Trauma-informed training; Could have used more trauma-based therapy education	Trauma	Concepts	5	5
Child should be allowed to flourish; Encouraged children to explore interests and talents; Emotional, academic, and social needs; Information on learning styles and gifts; Needed more training on gifts to advocate; Identification was not discussed	Strengths, Talents, or Abilities		5	5
No education training; Nothing specific; Useless for real life; Minimal amounts; Was not covered and should have been; Had to learn on own, as you go	Minimal or Insufficient Training	Lack of training	10	12

Foster parents also provided information about the in-service training they received since becoming licensed. Eighteen participants made 27 references to the topics discussed in these trainings (Table 25). Curriculum was similar to pre-service training, with foster parents mentioning they received some training on education, regulations and standard practices, and specific concepts. They also addressed the lack of training and unhelpful delivery of courses.

When commenting on the instruction they received about education, three foster parents made three references to educational advocacy training. Participant 2021-03-18 described the training, saying “Educational Advocacy is required for relicensing, and it was very helpful about legal requirements for services that must be provided to foster children and children with disabilities or IEPs.” Five participants commented six times about obtaining special education training. These trainings primarily focused on IEPs and 504 plans (2021-02-22, 2021-02-27, 2021-03-13, and 2021-03-18). One foster parent’s in-service training talked about twice-exceptionality (2021-02-27). The final mention of special education training came from Participant 2021-03-12, who said they received “Regular training on learning styles, comprehension, processing, and problem-solving difficulties.”

Curriculum about state or county information was less prevalent in in-service training than in pre-service training, with only two parents referencing this topic twice. One training was a group event with many members of the foster care and social work team (2021-03-12). The other mention of local information was only discussed after Participant 2021-03-11 inquired “about benefits available to them when applying for college. These questions were researched and answered.”

Specific concepts were covered by in-service training courses. Trauma and its effects on the brain were mentioned twice by two parents. Similarly, two parents made two comments

about foster children's strengths, talents, or abilities, including twice-exceptionality. A foster parent said during their in-service training, there was "not much emphasis on gifted or how to identify potential gifted children in foster care. I identified my children's talent on my own and pursued to keep them actively involved in school and in community events" (2021-03-15).

Just like the pre-service training, foster parents also felt the in-service training available to them was insufficient or provided in unhelpful formats. Five participants addressed this issue seven times. Participant 2021-02-01 is a teacher who had to seek out training about foster children's education through their teacher training programs, as it was not offered from their foster care program. Another foster parent described the inconvenient format of their in-service training as a "Large packet (100+ pages) to sift through" (2021-03-17).

Table 25

In-Service Training Topics Available to Surveyed Foster Parents (n =18 foster parents)

Open coding	Axial coding	Selective Coding	Number of Parents Supporting Axial Code	Number of References
Educational advocacy course; Legal requirements for services for foster children and children with disabilities	Educational Advocacy	Education	3	3
IEPs and 504s; Twice-exceptionality; Learning, processing, and problem-solving difficulties;	Special Education		5	6
Group trainings with county caseworkers, agency workers, mental health professionals; Benefits available for college	State or County Information	Regulations or Standard Trainings	2	2
Trauma training; Resiliency, the brain, and behaviors	Trauma	Concepts	2	2
Twice-exceptionality; Lack of emphasis on giftedness or how to identify potentially gifted children in foster care	Strengths, Talents, or Abilities		2	2
Had to find training through other means (e.g., PGPs); Ineffective formats; Courses are not required; Would take training if available	Minimal or Insufficient Training	Lack of training	5	7

Suggestions

Pre-Service and In-Service Training

During the follow-up interviews, foster parents had the opportunity to express their concerns about the training provided to them prior to licensure as well as after they received their license to foster. They also were asked what they would change about the trainings offered. Their suggestions were similar for the pre-service and in-service training and can be found in Tables 26 and 27.

Thirteen interviewees made 47 suggestions for pre-service foster parent training. These suggestions included involving the foster parent community, instructional topics they would like to see addressed, the format of the training, and specific programs they think should be incorporated or improved.

The foster care community involves foster parents and their families, biological families, case workers and social workers, foster children's teachers and foster parent educators, and state and county foster care agencies. Within this community are new and veteran foster parents. Participants suggested involving veteran foster parents in the pre-service foster parent training to provide support and useful information that was relevant to their experiences. Six interviewees made twelve references to this, and to providing support groups to connect fellow current foster parents. Savannah had to take a pre-service training class in a different county than her own, which had different schools and regulations, and irrelevant information. She said she would appreciate a "real-life panel of current foster parents. Not to talk to 60-year veterans of the system that have never been directly in my shoes...It'd be nice to talk to other people that were really doing it...in my area." Kennedy encouraged foster parent trainers to include veteran foster parents, like those in her training to provide perspective.

I liked hearing from actual foster parents who have gone through it and what their experience was like. Just to get a better idea of what to expect. These were just average situations. These weren't like, 'Oh, here's the worst that could happen, and here's the best that can happen.' It's just like, 'On a day-to-day basis, here's what my average day looks like', which is good to understand.

Three foster parents suggested eleven times that agencies should instruct foster parents on how to work with biological or birth families throughout the care process. Miss Purple is an educator for foster and adoptive parents. She said that in one training program, the organization discussed "partnerships and parenting...They kind of brush across it. It's not a requirement that if you are a foster parent that you have to allow the kids to have a connection to their family. It's encouraged, but it's not mandated." Diane suggested incorporating parenting instruction for biological families into their training and visits with foster children. "Teaching that parent how to deal with their child's life would be much better served as a visit than—having one of those visits be therapeutic, that's not going to hurt anything. That will help so much."

The effects fostering can have on families of foster parents was also referenced three times by three foster parents. Natalia felt pre-service trainings should offer support for foster families and their children, expressing that there was "no training for your own kids, which is irrational." Savannah suggested additional training on the stresses and effects of fostering, which not many people understand.

I think it would also be helpful to have some sort of like, "How this is going to impact the mental health of your foster parents." The secondary trauma of being a foster parent is not talked about and very, very real. They talk about having a support system, but it's like, 'Okay, what's this really look like when my kids are having to go on visits and everything's crazy and then we're dealing with the fallout from visits?' They're stressed and I'm stressed and everybody's stressed, but people are like, 'Oh, yes. My two-year-old has tantrums.' I'm like, 'No, that's not what this is...I don't feel like I was equipped for that part of it at all.'

When discussing what topics should be addressed in pre-service training, nine participants commented 24 times that this training should include real-world skills and examples.

Foster parents discussed incorporating conversations about why the rules about fostering exist, using examples from real scenarios faced by foster parents and how those rules helped them. Caroline described her training from a private agency as more useful to her than the training provided from her county. “We were trained in de-escalation techniques, lots of trauma-informed stuff,” whereas Caroline said the county largely focused on checking security measures for the foster parent’s home.

Seven foster parents made eleven references to the need for increased training on educating foster children. Amanda thought “having an education-centered training would be helpful.” She added that since most children in the foster care system are at an age where they should be attending school, “it would’ve been nice to talk about that a little bit more in detail rather than just saying most of them have an IEP if you need to advocate for them.” Savannah said that gifted education and methods to encourage and support children’s interests was not addressed, which could lead to assumptions that children in foster care are not gifted.

Trauma-informed trainings were suggested seven times by five participants. Miss Purple explained that even though foster children are placed into safe environments, they may not immediately feel safe or stop having behavioral challenges. She suggested pre-service training should “educate [foster parents] also on trauma, and just being patient that it would make it and putting in the resources, it would make it much better today.” Michelle said pre-service training should educate foster parents on skills to “nurture or show these children that they don’t have to be what they’ve experienced so far. There is a different way of life...other outlets for our feelings. That is where I felt they really missed the mark on the training.”

Specific to the pre-service training was the suggestion of incorporating instruction about foster parents’ rights and resources, which four foster parents commented on eight times. For

example, Diane realized the training she received through a private foster care agency helped her understand how to navigate a difficult interaction with her foster child's biological parent. "But I knew enough of what my rights were, and as a first-time foster parent would not. I'd have been crying like, 'What?'"

Seven participants had concerns about the format of pre-service training, making 14 suggestions to change the format of the instruction. Natalia expressed her disappointment in the lack of childcare available during the pre-service training. "There's no babysitting for when you have training...If my husband and I have to take the training, then what do you do with your own kids? It's just difficult to accomplish all the trainings if you're a working parent." Zora's pre-service training was different than what was offered by other states, and the flexibility offered was not necessarily beneficial to other foster parents. She said her pre-service training had to be completed within the initial two years of fostering. She suggested foster parents participate early, completed the training "pretty early on after we got our license. I think that worked better. Some people I know waited until right close to the end of their two years and went, 'Oh man I wish I would have known that.'"

Three foster parents also had comments about specific programs offered, which they referred to four times. These were suggestions about PRIDE, IMPACT, the National Training and Development Curriculum (NTDC), and Trust-Based Relational Intervention (TBRI).

Table 26

Suggestions for Pre-Service Foster Parent Training (n = 13 foster parents)

Open coding	Axial coding	Selective Coding	Number of Parents Supporting Axial Code	Number of References
Veteran foster parents offer unique perspectives and suggestions; Mentoring from veteran parents and peers; Support group of fellow current fosters to problem-solve and connect	Veteran foster parents and peer support	Community	6	12
Suggestions on how to work with birth families; Navigating communication and rights; Visit-based trainings for foster and birth families	Working with birth families		3	11
Impact of fostering on spouse and other children; Managing stress; Managing children's relationships and behaviors	Impact on foster family		3	3
Hands-on training to solve real-world situations; Less lecturing on requirements; Practical suggestions and solutions; Tangibles	Real-world skills	Instructional topics	9	24
More training on education; Educational needs; Working with schools and teachers; Encouraging foster children's gifts and strengths; How to advocate for educational needs	Education		7	11
Trauma-informed parenting practices; Learning how trauma affects the brain, body, behaviors, and development; Nurturing after trauma	Trauma-informed practices		5	7
Regulations for foster parents, and reasons behind those regulations; places or people to find more information; Legal processes; School requirements	Foster Parent Rights and Resources		4	8
Less lecturing; More hands-on, practical learning; Increase engagement; Provide childcare; Role play and provide analogies; Smaller groups for classes		Change format	7	14
TBRI; PRIDE; IMPACT; NTDC		Specific programs	3	4

Many of the suggestions provided by interviewees about the in-service foster parent training were similar to those made for pre-service training. Some foster parents made the same suggestions for pre-service and in-service training. Fourteen participants made 47 references to their in-service training needs (Table 27). Topics discussed included working with the foster parent community, instructional topics that should be addressed, specific programs offered, and suggestions to change the format.

When discussing the foster care community, six participants made twelve references to the need to include veteran foster parents during trainings. They also suggested ongoing mentoring programs and peer support groups. Heidi would incorporate veteran foster parents throughout the entire foster parenting process.

I think I would add a mentoring aspect. Actually probably through, starting at pre-service and then continuing through the initial placement. To just assign a mentor, as someone who's been doing it a couple of years and kind of to give that personal connection, you can ask questions, and just give additional support going forward. There are a lot of things that you don't know until you've been through it.

Three foster parents made seven comments about needing help working with biological or birth families. Another three participants suggested four times that training should discuss the impact of fostering on the foster family. Natalia said foster parents' biological children should also receive age-appropriate training. This training should address "how do you treat your family? Your family dynamic significantly changes, and there's no coping for that. Your training only applies to the foster kid. It doesn't apply to what happens with your own biological kids."

Real-world skills and practical tools were recommended 23 times by nine foster parents. De-escalation techniques, addressing power struggles, and suggestions for problem-solving and trouble-shooting issues that arise were all topics encouraged by foster parents.

A need for training on encouraging and developing foster children's educations was emphasized by five foster parents, who made eight comments. Heidi noted that unfortunately it

can be hard for foster families to focus on academics, and in-service training on how to navigate and advocate for gifted education might help with that.

I feel like pursuing gifted education and enrichment activities, and things for children in foster care is almost like an afterthought or could be an afterthought, because of the more pressing things that have to be done at the beginning of a placement. For example, doctor's appointment, dentist appointments, a lot of the legal stuff, things like that. I think that if a lot of the stress of that, I guess, were lessened that it would be possible, perhaps, to more quickly identify those strengths and gifts, and get kids into programs that would help them to make the most of their giftedness and those natural abilities.

Three foster parents made six references to trauma-informed parenting practices. These included comments from Zora who mentioned “food issues and sensory issues” as well as “one on drug-affected babies.”

Four statements were made by three foster parents about area resources they would like to see discussed during in-service training. Annie described a benefits program offered by her state, which is only available to “active foster parents, only foster parents, not adoptive parents.” The program sends foster parents a card with information about “all kinds of local businesses and other things, discounts and things like that to connect that actually help out foster families a lot.” The card can be used at a science museum and aquarium that provides foster parents with discounted admission for their adoptive and biological children, and free admission for foster children. Other local businesses are also included, like bakeries, florists, restaurants, and hair salons. Diane also would appreciate “trainings that would actually help you [to] use your resources, use your community, use the foster parents that have been doing it for a long time and learn from it.”

Specific training programs were suggested six times by five foster parents, including programs like TBRI and PRIDE. Finally, four participants made five references to ineffective or preferred formats for training provided. Chloe enjoyed that she was allowed to choose from a variety of options to complete her in-service training requirements, such as reading books about

certain topics. Zora appreciated the modifications to in-service trainings that have occurred in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, like the inclusion of virtual trainings.

Table 27

Suggestions for In-Service Foster Parent Training (N = 14 foster parents)

Open coding	Axial coding	Selective Coding	Number of Parents Supporting Axial Code	Number of References
Veteran foster parents offer unique perspectives and suggestions; Ongoing mentoring from veteran parents and peers; Support group of fellow current fosters to problem-solve and connect	Veteran foster parents and peer support	Community	6	12
Suggestions on how to work with birth families; Respecting and processing foster children's emotions after visits; Visit-based trainings for foster and birth families	Working with birth families		3	7
Impact of fostering on spouse and other children; Secondary trauma of fostering; Managing stress; Managing children's relationships and behaviors	Impact on foster family		3	4
Hands-on training to solve real-world situations; Practical suggestions and solutions; Navigating real problems with foster parenting	Real-world skills	Instructional Topics	9	23
More training on education; Educational needs; Working with schools and teachers; Encouraging foster children's gifts and strengths; How to advocate for educational needs	Education		5	8
Trauma-informed parenting practices; How trauma affects behaviors and development; Need for control; Foster child's safety vs. perceived safety	Trauma-informed practices		3	6
Area resources for foster families; Teach foster parents how to find and use resources; Places to get help	Resources		3	4
TBRI; PRIDE; University training		Specific programs	5	6
Provide childcare; Virtual training options; Optional training menu		Change Format	4	5

Recommendations for New Foster Parents and Educators of Foster Children

Experienced foster parents had a multitude of suggestions for those who work with children in foster care. Thirty-two surveyed foster parents made 35 suggestions related to their foster child's teachers, schools, and school corporations (Table 28). Areas of emphasis included changing the requirements for gifted education identification, making accommodations, improved communication between all members of the foster child's care team, and teacher training.

Foster parents referenced eleven times that teachers should undergo additional training about the unique challenges, needs, and experiences of foster children, and how to address these topics in the classroom. They said teachers need "more resources and understanding of dealing with ACE [Adverse Childhood Experiences]" (2021-02-05). Five participants recommended that teachers, school counselors, and school leaders should be trained on the effects of trauma and how to incorporate trauma-informed practices into the classroom. Two foster parents stated teachers are often biased toward foster children, with one explaining teachers should instead receive training about how to "Treat kids in foster care as you would any other kid. They already have enough stress and turmoil in their lives without recognizing that they are being treated differently [than] their classmates" (2021-02-06).

One important area that could be addressed in training was suggested by Participant 2021-03-23 and was frequently echoed in interviews. They would tell teachers:

to not use phrases like "tell your mom and dad". Instead use phrases like "tell the grown up in your home". Avoid having kids make a family tree or search their lineage. This can be traumatic. Don't assume kids have families who look like them. (2021-03-23)

Eleven statements were made by eleven foster parents about increasing teacher communication with foster parents and other important people. One specifically referred to communicating about foster children's gifts and talents, saying, "If you notice exceptional

abilities, Let the foster parents know. Tell them about resources available” (2021-03-11).

Participants said they needed “communication” (2021-02-26, 2021-03-10) and “transparency and availability” (2021-02-27). Foster parents acknowledged that communication goes both ways, saying they needed “close collaboration” (2021-03-20), that teachers should “listen to the foster parent” (2021-02-08), and “be in more communication with me as the foster when things are not being done. I monitor his grades and assignments and reach out to the school, but I do not get a lot of returned communications” (2021-03-22).

Nine foster parents made nine references to making accommodations to curriculum, adjusting schedules, providing additional resources, and modifying communications, to best meet the needs of foster children and foster families. Foster parents said teachers should “have patience when it comes to emotional coregulation. Incorporate occupational therapy strategies for trauma-based therapy. Provide access to social worker” (2021-03-19). Another agreed, recommending teachers “check in with the [foster child] one-on-one, especially if he falls behind or seems disconnected...because he often needs that extra nudge, that feeling of being wanted” (2021-03-18). Participant 2021-02-20 summarized these requests:

I would say that schools should know the situation (to some extent) and give assistance to help the child as much as possible. They could provide additional tutoring, give updates on what the child seems to be struggling with, and prepare some additional resources to work on outside of school to help the child catch up.

Three foster parents recommended three times that schools adapt the requirements for identification for gifted education or high ability programming. One participant suggested schools “make acceptance into programs be less rigid, and see the whole child, instead of a test score or the bad behavior reports as a no-go” (2021-02-03). Another said identification should be ongoing, explaining, “To be able to adjust things as they become apparent. Most times, they want them in a spot first day. Then insist they can't change what's needed since everything is

settled” (2021-02-22). Participant 2021-03-14 agreed, saying there should be “Early and often testing to identify gifted children.” They also added their school needed a “dedicated gifted classroom so children aren't pulled from their ‘normal class’ to go do ‘gifted stuff’.”

Table 28

Survey Suggestions for Foster Children's Schools and Teachers (n = 32 surveyed foster parents)

Open coding	Axial coding	Selective Coding	Number of Parents Supporting Axial Code	Number of References
Training about trauma, ACEs, what foster children experience, and how it affects behavior; Biases teachers have; Training on what curriculum is appropriate, and what comments or curriculum could be triggering	Teacher training	Schools and teachers	11	11
Communication; Collaboration; Listening; Inform foster parents and other important people of progress, resources, and abilities;	Communicate with Foster Parents		11	11
Modify curriculum, workload, and resources offered to ensure it is not upsetting, and help students catch up; Allow for flexibility in schedules and provide routines; encourage foster child when they need it; provide access to social workers	Make accommodations		9	9
Adapt identification measures to include holistic evaluations of children; Flexible evaluation measures; Flexible timing of evaluations and identification	Change requirements for gifted identification		3	3

The fourteen interviewees provided 156 comments about their recommendations for new foster parents, as well as foster children's schools and teachers. These suggestions can be found in Table 29.

For new foster parents, the main suggestion provided by existing foster parents was to learn to advocate for children's needs and strengths. Twelve participants commented on the need for advocacy 31 times. Chloe said "I would just tell them they've got to be an advocate for the child. Don't be afraid of being the annoying parent, [chuckles] being perceived as a helicopter parent or whatever. Communicate with the teacher." She added that she would discuss "what they need in all aspects, academically, everything else...I would tell teachers, 'Hey, they had a visit tonight and it was really emotional. They might need an extra hug tomorrow.' Just trying to preempt anything." Caroline stated that her perspective as an educator and foster parent informed many suggestions.

Be a fierce advocate. When the teachers or the school or the special ed team calls you and says, "Hey, we want to have an IEP," Have a lot of questions take a lot of notes and pay attention to what is going on. If they're just saying like, "Your kid is causing X, Y and Z behavior problems", figure out why those behavior problems are happening. If the kid is leaving the classroom, figure out why they're leaving the classroom. Do they not like the teacher? Is there some kind of disconnect happening there? Are they thinking that they're not safe? Figure out what is causing the behavioral problems.

Diane summarized the need for foster parents to be advocates. "You're going to. That's not an exception. That is the norm, that you're going to have to fight for your child, no matter what it is. Whether it's mental health or education, you're going to have to fight."

Communication was also frequently noted, with eight foster parents making 17 references to the need for communication with various members of the foster care community. Savannah suggested foster parents find a middle ground between advocating for the child's needs, and not informing everyone of the foster child's experiences. "This isn't my story to tell to everyone...I want to protect their privacy, and I also don't want to put ideas in people's heads about what to

expect of this kiddo based on what's happened to them.” Natalia suggested having meetings between all members of the foster child’s network to ensure everyone is on the same page. “When I meet with my child family team, it should include the teacher. It should include the school counselor. It should include—My child family team... should be much bigger. It should be everyone involved to help this child.”

Eleven foster parents recommended fifteen times that new foster parents should check in often with their foster children’s schools and see how they can support and work with their children’s teachers. Miss Purple wanted teachers to understand her role as a foster parent. “I’m here to support you as a teacher. Anything that my child is going through, you and I, let’s discuss it, so I can help to try to get whatever that the child needs.”

The final suggestion for new foster parents offered by interviewees was that foster parents should be involved and invested in the foster child’s education. Seven participants made nine recommendations about foster parents’ hands-on involvement in children’s schooling, listening to and encouraging their interests, participating in learning environments with them, and prompting foster children to ask for help when needed. Kennedy mentioned:

I would say it's definitely very important to stay involved. To be aware of the student's experiences. Know who their teachers are. Ask questions of their student, “How are your classes going? What are you learning? Do you like your teachers? What are they like?” Definitely want to be involved, because a lot of times they won’t just come to you and be like, “Oh, I’m having trouble in this class or with this teacher.” Sometimes you have to probe and ask for that information. That’s really important.

Foster parents must frequently work with their foster children’s schools and teachers while those children are in their care. As such, interviewees had recommendations for schools and teachers on how to help meet the unique needs of foster children. The fourteen participants made suggestions about addressing their own biases and biases in curriculum, reeducating teachers and administrators on the effects of trauma on foster children and their behaviors,

communicating with foster parents, making instructional and scheduling accommodations, and creating relationships with the foster children in their classrooms.

Addressing biases was an important topic for twelve participants, who made 31 comments. Caroline referenced biases in standardized tests and the lack of equity in schools. She also said people can sometimes unintentionally harm or exclude foster children when they make statements about the foster children looking different from their foster families. Kennedy expressed foster parents often end up responsible for correcting teachers' and schools biases, working to ensure teachers' "expectations aren't set lower than for the average student. Let them know that these are kids, just like any other kids. They've been through more than most kids, but that doesn't mean that you should expect any less of them academically."

Twelve foster parents made 26 references to the need for teachers and administrators to re-educate themselves on trauma, its effects on development, and trauma-informed educational practices. Natalia discussed interactions between her foster child and their teacher, who did not understand the need for control some foster children experience, as a result of traumas. Heidi is a teacher, and recalled "one time in the last, probably, three or four years that we received a little bit of trauma training. Just like an explanation of the ACES study, and things like that. Our district does not make that a priority."

Communication with foster parents and other members of the child's team was encouraged 24 times by 14 interviewees. Miss Purple explained, "As a teacher, share with me some suggestions that you may have that might help the child intellectually or help the child just educationally. It's really just communicating or being partners together to help the child." Whitney expressed her efforts to inform her foster child's teachers about what works best for her

and her behaviors, but “it’s just been a mess...They just kept saying, ‘Well, we can’t.’” Barbara noted the role other school leaders can play.

I think forming a relationship with a school social worker is also important. The social workers at both schools have been awesome. They really, they like him as a person and it really tells. You can really tell. They've become people that he can trust, in a way that he hasn't necessarily been able to trust the academic teachers.

Nine foster parents recommended 20 times that teachers and school leaders reconsider the behaviors sometimes exhibited by foster children. Annie stated, “A lot of what they [teachers] consider bad behaviors isn't a bad behavior, it's actually a trauma reaction.” Miss Purple added, “teachers basically have been taught to look at behavior as being something bad. Behavior is just a communication of what a child is going through emotionally.”

Eight participants made 19 comments about needing accommodations in foster children’s instruction and school schedules. Often teachers would use curriculum and literature that would upset foster children or make them feel excluded. Books like *Are You My Mother?* and *The Ugly Duckling* were problematic for foster children who did not look like their foster parents. Another suggestion was that teachers read literature featuring diverse families and living situations, and promote tolerance and acceptance. Family tree assignments, family heritage research projects, and writing prompts about children’s summer vacations or families were also reported frequently as troubling to foster and adoptive children and their families. Five foster parents specifically mentioned the negative reactions they had to family lineage assignments and explained that teachers should work to create other assignments that accomplish similar research goals.

Amanda shared examples of schools and teachers who are flexible and will work around foster children’s schedules. “Some of the kids have shorter workdays or sometimes they only need to do the odd problems because doing all of the problems is too much. So really knowing, I guess, what your kid's strengths are, too, is very helpful.”

Finally, eight foster parents suggested ten times that teachers work to develop relationships and build rapport with the foster children in their classes, as well as those children's foster families. Michelle stated that teachers should help foster children feel like they are a member of their classroom community. "They don't like to be singled out as the kid in foster care. So stop it...And try to just let them feel as if they are another one of your 25 or 35...that they're another one of your students." While discussing her foster child's unique social characteristics, Barbara mentioned "I think how the teacher responds to the social aspect of his person [chuckles] tends to correlate strongly with how much they're willing to work with him academically." Caroline explained the importance of these relationships in helping students progress.

You need to build a rapport. You need to form a bond with the family, with the kid. There needs to be a level of trust before you can ask them to do things like, "Do your work. Let your guard down. And let me find something that you're not good at and help you with it." Because that's vulnerable. For a kid to be able to say, "I can't read this book." That's a vulnerable spot to be in. So if the kid is going to tell you that, they need to trust you first.

Table 29

Interview Suggestions for New Foster Parents, Schools, and Teachers (N = 14 foster parents)

Open coding	Axial coding	Selective Coding	Number of Parents Supporting Axial Code	Number of References
Do not be afraid to advocate; Encourage skills and abilities; Advocate for education, emotional needs, and services; Learn how to advocate; Address difficult situations in classroom	Advocate	New foster parents	12	31
Communicate with teachers and county/state workers; Do not overshare with teachers about foster child's background; Communicate about foster child's needs and schedule	Communication		8	17
Be known as a support for child and teacher; Ask other foster parents about school; Step in when needed to address concerns or ask for clarification, schoolwork	Check in with school		11	15
Encourage child to self-advocate and do their best; Foster interests and strengths; Ask questions about school, teachers, and peers; Expose them to opportunities	Be involved with student and their education		7	9
Be tolerant; Address own biases and teaching practices; Teach other students to be less biased; Reduce stigma; Do not make assumptions about family structure or relationships; Identify bias in literature and curriculum; Represent different families	Address bias	Schools and teachers	9	31
Trauma-informed teaching practices; Recognize effects of trauma and child's background; Use various trauma-informed resources; School-wide trauma-informed professional development; Approach with understanding	Re-educate on trauma		12	26
Notify foster parents of concerns, changes, and supports; Communicate with all members of child's team; Connect with families; Listen to foster parents' suggestions	Communicate with foster parents		14	24
Consider reason behind behavior and what child is trying to communicate; Consider trauma and stress responses;	Reconsider misbehavior		9	20

continued

Open coding	Axial coding	Selective Coding	Number of Parents Supporting Axial Code	Number of References
Focus on child's strengths; Modify curriculum to be more inclusive and reduce bias; Do not assign triggering work, such as family trees, name origins, and family traditions; Be flexible with schedules and workload; Consider appropriate challenge of education, rather than age	Make accommodations		8	19
Build rapport with students and family; Encourage and support foster child; Develop trust; Attempt to understand challenges foster child is experiencing; Be willing to work with students and family; Encourage normalcy	Develop connections or rapport with students		8	10

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Foster children are largely left out of discussions about giftedness, and reports of their academic abilities primarily focus on educational deficits, rather than their strengths. The responsibility of highlighting and advocating for foster children's strengths often falls upon foster parents. Thus, foster parents should be aware of the characteristics of children with gifts, talents, and abilities, and have the resources they need to help foster children showcase these strengths. The purpose of this study was to identify foster parents' perceptions of giftedness, the role they believe their foster children's strengths have in their lives and educational experiences, and what resources are available to foster parents to prepare them for and support their foster children's abilities, gifts, and talents. To fulfill this purpose, I collected survey and interview data from foster parents throughout the United States, and analyzed their responses for their perceptions and needs.

Defining Aspects of Giftedness

Foster parents' perceptions of giftedness aligned with common perspectives from leaders in the field of gifted education. In their interview and survey responses, foster parents defined giftedness as involving academic achievement, domain-specific skills, natural ability or innate talents, above average performance, intelligence—sometimes characterized by IQ scores and other standardized tests—creativity, problem-solving skills, and a motivation to learn and pursue their passions. These defining characteristics are similar to those generally accepted within the field of gifted education (Chan & Yuen, 2013; Davis et al., 2011; Gagné, 2003; Haensly & Lehmann, 1996; Maker, 2021; Mayes, 2018; NAGC, n.d., 2019; Renzulli, 1998; Sternberg, 2018; Torrance, 1962). Foster parents also added socioemotional characteristics, such as

responsibility, independence, motivation, and persistence (Carr et al., 1996; Franks & Dolan, 1982; Ngara, 2017; Renzulli, 2011). They noted that not all children with gifts and talents exhibit academic achievement in a traditional sense, and that they do not necessarily score well on standardized tests (Carr et al., 1996; Paris, 2009; Wilgosh, 1991). Some described difficulties they may face in school, like having learning difficulties, not being challenged enough and social concerns that can arise (NAGC, n.d.; Ronskley-Pavia et al., 2019). Interviewees also were quick to highlight that talent is not only restricted to academic domains. They included artistic, athletic, emotional, and social strengths within their conceptions of what it meant to be gifted (Gosain, 2012; LaBatte, 1991; Trankle & Cushion, 2006). Non-academic demonstrations of giftedness were the most prevalent comments made by interviewees about what it meant to be gifted.

Perceptions are often shaped by experiences, so I asked foster parents about their foster children's experiences in school, and how their foster children's strengths, talents, and abilities affected their foster children and themselves as foster parents. Some foster parents expressed their foster children were either a little or very different than children who are not in foster care, both academically (64.15%) and in non-academic ways (69.81%). More than 75% of foster parents indicated their foster children's educational experiences were different than the experiences of other children, largely due to traumatic events in their lives, moving, their environment and expectations, a lack of opportunities, and biases or stigma faced by children in foster care (Finkelstein et al., 2002; Townsend, 2011). Although their experiences were different, foster parents expressed that the foster children were not different or less capable than those not in foster care. Survey participant 2021-03-14 summarized this distinction by saying, "I don't think foster children themselves are different, rather the circumstances presented in their lives." They added, "I think non-foster children have an advantage academically, from not experiencing

these deep traumas, but despite their circumstantial disadvantages, I do believe foster children can complete their academic studies, and excel.”

Role of Foster Children’s Abilities, Gifts, and Talents in their Lives, Education, and the Experiences of Foster Parents

As explained above, foster children may be different from their counterparts not in foster care, but this is largely due to their experiences (Berardi & Morton, 2019; Vandervort et al., 2012; Seigel, 2012). This does not mean that they do not have strengths or gifts that can affect their own experiences or those of their foster parents. Just over 60% of foster parents said their foster child’s abilities, strengths, and talents affected them as foster parents. Participants said because of their foster children’s strengths, they needed to encourage and provide resources, activities, and support for their abilities (Bass, 2017). Foster parents said they needed to be aware of socioemotional characteristics and challenges (Hébert, 2011; Newell, 2018; Rumberger, 2015), and help their foster children learn to cope and self-regulate their emotions. Trust, trauma awareness, and advocacy were also pointed out by foster parents as additional needs due to their foster children’s strengths and experiences (Bass, 2017; Cahill et al., 1991; Reiland & Lauterbach, 2008; Salami, 2010; Suzuki & Tomoda, 2015; Vandervort et al., 2012). Foster parents cited their foster children’s rapid gains and positive school experiences that occurred once they were in a supportive environment with teachers that recognized their strengths (Rosenthal, 2002; Rubie-Davies, 2007; Sandilos et al., 2017). Unfortunately, foster parents described their foster children’s many negative experiences in school, often due to biases from teachers and peers (Finkelstein et al., 2002; Noh, 2013; Townsend, 2011) and unsupportive environments created by teachers and staff who did not recognize their gifts or understand their unique needs as foster children (Berardi & Morton, 2017; Sitler, 2009). Participants identified

many of the negative experiences foster children faced were specifically connected to their status as foster children and life events that led them to entering foster care. Challenges with control, trust, adjustment, and added stressors, as well as inconsistencies due to frequent moving and transitions, were all highlighted as hinderances to foster children's experiences (Day et al., 2013; Herzog and Schmahl, 2018; Newell, 2018; Ross, 2016; Rumberger, 2015; Sullivan et al., 2010; U.S. GAO, 2010). Foster children also experienced behavioral, social, and emotional issues, and challenges related to their special needs, that were not always understood by teachers or peers or supported in ways they needed. Foster parents cited their additional needs to advocate for their foster children and make teachers and school leaders see their strengths, talents, and abilities (Bass, 2017). Sometimes this resulted in foster children needing alternative programs and supports (DeCesare, 2004).

Although negative experiences and academic hinderances were often discussed, foster parents also explained the experiences and perspectives that are unique to foster children, that may help them succeed academically. Interviewees noted several aspects of their foster children, which are also connected to various characteristics of giftedness. They explained that their foster children possessed a strong internal motivation or drive to succeed and pursue their interests (Batsche et al., 2012). They said foster children were resilient, self-reliant, able to adapt to new and changing situations, and could notice social cues and body language at rates higher than their peers (DeCesare, 2004; Hass & Graydon, 2009; Newell, 2018; Vandervort et al., 2012). When teachers considered foster children's backgrounds and made attempts to form positive relationships with students, foster children made improvements and felt better about school (McCoach, 20110; McDermott, 2000; Vandervort et al., 2012).

All 14 foster parents interviewed expressed that foster children can be gifted and succeed academically. However, many foster parents felt their foster children were not identified for gifted education programming because of their status and experiences as part of the foster care system. Teachers often did not notice foster children's gifts or did not recognize strengths that were not simply academic achievement (Fox, 2016; Wilgosh, 1991). Interestingly, only two foster parents said their foster children were not motivated to perform in school, but they attributed that to the unengaging activities and environments that were not motivating, rather than the foster children's internal drive (Moyer, 2018; Rice et al., 2014). Explicit biases were also present, either from teachers' low expectations or a lack of cultural competency in procedures used to identify giftedness (Gentry et al., in press; Noh, 2013; Rosenthal, 2002; Wilgosh, 1991). A lack of trauma-informed teaching practices and twice-exceptionality seemed to hide many foster children's abilities (NAGC, n.d.; Vandervort et al., 2012).

Foster children have strengths, abilities, gifts, and talents that play a role in their lives and education. They help foster children pursue their interests and persevere, despite challenges and biases they face. Foster parents said it was their job to motivate, encourage, and advocate for their foster children, to help them realize their abilities and demonstrate their strengths (Bass, 2017; Vandervort et al., 2012).

Foster Parents' Needs and Resources Available to Meet these Needs

Being an effective advocate is a job that is easier said than done. It is also not a role only completed by one person in a child's life. Many members of a foster child's community need to be supportive and encouraging, in order to best help foster children reach their potential (Morton, 2016; Strickler, et al., 2018). Foster parents often felt this was not the case. They cited their needs for support from foster children's schools and teachers, caseworkers or state employees,

and therapists (Cooley et al., 2019; Vanschoonlandt et al., 2012). Foster parents also identified their desire for support from their own families, community, and the biological or birth families of foster children (Brown, 2008; Brown & Bednar, 2006).

Although foster parents in the United States receive some form of required training, foster parents in this study frequently expressed that the training provided was not sufficient in preparing them to help and support their foster children, particularly those children with unique needs and abilities. Nearly 40% of foster parents surveyed stated they received some training about foster children's education prior to obtaining their foster license, and this number only increased to 42% since receiving their license. Also concerning is that just approximately 36% of foster parents surveyed stated they received any training related to foster children's strengths, talents, and abilities before licensure, and fewer (about 29%) said they had participated in training about this topic since obtaining their license. Foster parents who did receive pre-service training mentioned that these lessons primarily focused on special education (e.g., IEPs and 504 plans) or the requirement that foster children be enrolled in school while in care. Only three parents said they received any instruction about educational advocacy during pre-service and in-service training.

Given the lack of training and resources foster parents said they had access to about their foster children's education or gifts, it is not surprising that few U.S. states even discuss foster children's education in their pre-service curriculum. According to the state foster parent training documents, only Washington D.C. explicitly stated they addressed the educational aspects of foster care during their training (Washington D.C. Child and Family Services Agency, 2001). Five foster parents mentioned strengths, gifts, and talents as part of their pre-service training, and

only two mentioned this topic for in-service training. However, some of these references were to the *lack* of training provided on foster children's education or strengths.

Less than one-third of the states and territories included the topics of attachment ($n = 15$) or trauma ($n = 13$) in their training or the effects trauma can have on foster children. Similarly, when surveyed, only five foster parents said they received training on trauma prior to licensure, and only two said they discussed trauma during in-service training. This lack of trauma-informed training can be a disservice to foster parents and result in a lack of preparedness to meet foster children's unique needs (Simmel, 2007).

Recommendations

Agencies and Trainers of Foster Parents

Trainings should be accessible to foster parents. Foster parents suggested pre- and in-service trainings be more hands-on and engaging and incorporate real-world problems and solutions (Simmel, 2017). One of the most common recommendations between interview and survey responses was to include experienced foster parents throughout the training and licensure process. These individuals can provide unique insights, mentoring, and support for new and licensed foster parents (Batsche et al., 2012; DeCesare, 2004; Hass & Graydon, 2009; Newell, 2018; Vandervort et al., 2012). Additionally, foster parents suggested multiple training topics that were not addressed by the trainings they received. Curriculum should include foster children's educational strengths, abilities, and talents, as well as their academic needs and challenges. Some foster parents received instruction about trauma-informed parenting practices after they obtained their licenses to foster; however, these foster parents emphasized that this training should happen sooner. Since foster parents serve as advocates for the foster, adoptive, and biological children in their care, it is important that they are prepared with the knowledge

and resources needed to support their children. Vandervort et al. (2012) explained the importance of engaging in relevant and practical trauma-informed training. “Children's advocates who are not familiar with trauma and its impact on children cannot provide professionally competent service to their clients without a basic understanding of these issues” (p. 13).

Foster Children’s Schools and Teachers

Working with foster children’s schools and teachers is another required task for foster parents, and one that they engage in frequently. As such, many foster parents made suggestions for teachers and schools who serve children in foster care. The primary recommendation was that all teachers and school leaders participate in training about the unique needs, experiences, behaviors, and strengths of foster children. Trauma-informed teaching should be incorporated into curriculum and teachers’ daily practices (Brunzell et al, 2015; Morton & Berardi, 2018). Teachers should also understand the effects of trauma on foster children’s development. Foster parents said teachers needed to take the time to reconsider misbehaviors as a response to a traumatic event, stressful situation, or task that is not appropriately challenging (Berardi & Morton, 2019; SAMHSA, 2014).

There is a need for all teachers to be trained on how to encourage children’s strengths, gifts, talents, and abilities. Only about 25% of the foster children discussed by their foster parents in this study were formally identified as gifted and about 25% participated in high ability programming. However, 50% of the foster parents asked said they would define their foster child as gifted. This indicates there a disconnect between the identification procedures for gifted education or high ability programming, and those who possess gifts and talents but are not identified. Thus, teachers should use a strengths-based and talent development approach with all children, so that all children receive engaging, challenging, and rigorous instruction, not just

those who are identified as gifted (Cohen, 1988; Gentry et al., 2014; Gentry, 2009; Renzulli, 2005).

Communication from foster children's teachers, and the lack thereof, was often mentioned by foster parents as an issue. Interviewees and survey participants recommended that foster children's teachers involve the child's foster parents and other members of the child's support network (e.g., case workers and biological families, as appropriate) of their needs and strengths (Bryan & Henry, 2008; Palmieri & La Salle, 2017). Foster parents also noted that communication and partnerships are a two-way street, with teachers also needing to listen to foster parents' insights and suggestions for what works for their foster children (Harrison, 2006; McCoach et al., 2010; McDermott & Rothenberg, 2000).

Teachers and schools need to be willing to make accommodations for foster children, according to their foster parents. This includes being understanding of foster children's stressors and additional time demands, such as visitation with biological families, required therapy and medical appointments, and more. Foster parents also recommended teachers evaluate their curriculum and language to ensure it is not traumatizing to or biased against foster children or children from diverse cultural or socioeconomic backgrounds (Gorski, 2013; Harrison, 2006). For example, five foster parents specifically expressed their frustrations about "family tree" projects or similar assignments involving children's families. This made their foster children uncomfortable or subject to negative comments. This evaluation extended to literature used in the classroom, with multiple foster and adoptive parents suggesting removing books like *Are You My Mother?* (Eastman, 1960) or similar texts, which may leave children with a notion that children must look similar to their family members. Foster parents also said teachers should include texts that represent multiple family dynamics or lived experiences, so that children feel

accepted and validated (Creany et al., 1993; Fox & Short, 2003; Gardner, 2017; Strekalova-Hughes, 2019; Wargo & Coleman, 2021). Multiple foster parents mentioned that their foster children could not participate in activities specifically because of their experiences and status in foster care. This included missing participation deadlines in clubs or activities, and teachers prohibiting foster children from taking home instruments to practice because they were concerned about the foster children moving to a different school over the weekend.

Foster parents recommended a change in the ways schools identify giftedness. They said schools should have ongoing observations and evaluations, not forcing children to be evaluated on the first day they are in a new school facing new stressors. This would also help children who move to schools after the period of evaluation, who might not otherwise receive appropriate services (Mun et al., 2021). Foster parents suggested identification measures that are equitable and provide holistic evaluations of students. Some foster parents noted a lack of equity and prevalence of biases in standardized tests, which may contribute to a disproportionate number of students being identified for high ability programming or gifted education services (Gentry et al., in press; Irby & Floyd, 2016; Peters et al., 2019).

Finally, interviewed foster parents suggested that teachers work to develop relationships and positive rapport with foster children and their families. They said this could help to build trust, empathy, and a sense of normalcy for children in foster care and may help them be more willing to express their gifts and talents (Vandervort et al., 2012).

Future Foster Parents

As veteran foster parents, interviewees and survey respondents are experienced in the benefits and challenges that come with working in the foster care system. Therefore, they shared unique insights and perspectives that could be helpful for new foster parents just beginning their

journey into foster care. They said new foster parents need to frequently communicate with teachers about their foster children's challenges, schedules, and unique experiences (McCoach, 20110; McDermott, 2000; Vandervort et al., 2012). However, some foster parents emphasized not oversharing information with teachers, to prevent biases, stigma, and pity, as well as preventing teachers from sharing this information with others. Foster parents should check in with children's schools and step in when needed.

The most common suggestion from veteran foster parents is that new foster parents should not be afraid to advocate for their foster children's needs and strengths (Vandervort et al., 2012). They said foster parents should not be concerned with being labelled as a "helicopter parent", because they are ultimately helping to ensure their foster children's gifts are recognized and needs are met. Foster parents should be trained on effective advocacy methods and have the ongoing support to continue their advocacy efforts (Simmel, 2007).

Limitations

This study was comprised of 53 survey respondents and 14 interviewees. As such, I cannot attempt to draw conclusions about the perceptions all foster parents hold based on this small sample size. All interviewees identified as female, and twelve identified as White/Non-Hispanic (see Table 8). The survey consisted of a more diverse population, with about 80% of participants identifying as White/Non-Hispanic, more than 11% identifying as Black/Non-Hispanic, and just under 10% identifying as Hispanic (Table 3). According to the data reported by foster parents, the foster children in their care were from a wider range of races and ethnicities (Table 6). Therefore, the population included in this study may not be representative of all foster parents in the United States and their experiences. However, accurate representation is difficult

to assess, since data on the demographics or even the number of foster parents in the United States are not available.

Due to the sampling procedures used to gather participants, it is likely that participants in this study were already interested in the topic of foster children's education, strengths, and talents. Also, four interview participants stated they or their spouses were current or former K-12 teachers, and three reported they participated in gifted programs as children. This may mean these participants are already aware of the various aspects of giftedness, more so than the average foster parent. However, these foster parents may also provide unique insights into the characteristics and experiences of children with gifts and talents, and their educational needs.

Last, states' curriculum for foster parent training was gathered from each state's foster parent website. Some states may not have updated their websites with current curriculum or requirements, and the information provided may not encompass all required or provided training opportunities.

Future Directions

Future research is needed into the perceptions of foster parents from diverse racial, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds, as they relate to giftedness. Additionally, studies about the strengths and talents of children in foster care should be conducted. It is important that this research is presented without giving the impression that successful foster children are rare, and with broadened definitions of success.

Not only is there a lack of data about perceptions and experiences of children in foster care with gifts and talents; but there is also simply a lack of data about foster children and foster parents themselves. Data indicating the prevalence of children in foster care who are identified as gifted or high ability should be collected. Accordingly, studies about how schools can identify

and serve more children in foster care for gifted education and meet their academic needs should be conducted.

In this study, I sought information about what trainings foster parents required to help them feel more prepared to support the strengths, talents, and abilities of the foster children in their care. Future research is needed into effective methods for training foster parents and what training topics and methods can best help foster parents in their advocacy efforts.

Conclusion

Foster children have strengths, talents, abilities, and gifts. Just like all children, these should be recognized, encouraged, and developed. Members of the foster child's support system—foster parents, teachers, therapists, case workers—should be equipped to help foster children realize and use their gifts. Supporting the nearly 500,000 children in foster care and finding ways to help them express their talents should be a goal of foster parents, teachers, and the foster care system as a whole.

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APPENDIX A

Foster Parent Perceptions Survey (IRB #2021-94)

Thank you for your participation in our survey. It is greatly appreciated.

The purpose of this survey is to gain a sense of what foster parents believe about giftedness, abilities, strengths, and talents. I will also be using this study to aid local foster care systems in the services provided to their constituents and meet the needs of their students and family members. This survey should take approximately 30 minutes. Upon completion of the survey, you will be entered in a drawing to win one (1) of five (5) gift cards to Amazon.com, worth \$10 each. You will also be asked if you are willing to participate in a follow-up interview about your perceptions.

Please complete the survey below. If you have more than one foster child currently in your care, please complete the survey with information regarding a foster child who receives gifted education services or programming. If none of the foster children in your care receive these services, complete the survey with information regarding your oldest foster child.

All identifying information will be removed from your responses. Your information will not be released or shared with any outside parties. Thank you again for your participation.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Alissa Cress: apsalaza@purdue.edu

Foster Parent Demographics:

Foster Parent 1:

Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ Non-binary ☐ Transgender ☐ Other
☐ Prefer not to say

Race: ☐ American Indian / Alaskan Native ☐ White/Non-Hispanic ☐ Hispanic
☐ Black/Non-Hispanic ☐ Asian ☐ Two or more races
☐ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander ☐ Other

Foster Parent(s) Education: ☐ 8th grade ☐ Some high school ☐ High school graduate
☐ Some college ☐ Associate's Degree ☐ Bachelor's degree
☐ Some postgraduate ☐ Master's degree ☐ Ph.D. degree ☐ Professional degree

Household Income/year: ☐ \$10,000 or less ☐ \$10,000-15,000 ☐ \$15,000-25,000
☐ \$25,000-50,000 ☐ \$50,000-75,000 ☐ \$75,000 or more

Place of residence [List State]: _____

Are you currently a licensed foster parent? (Yes/No). If yes, in what state(s) do you hold your license? _____

If yes, how long have you been a licensed foster parent (in years)? _____

If there is another licensed foster parent living with you (e.g., spouse, partner, sibling, parent, etc.), please answer the following demographic questions about them (Foster Parent 2). If not, please skip to the next section.

Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ Non-binary ☐ Transgender ☐ Other
☐ Prefer not to say

Race: ☐ American Indian / Alaskan Native ☐ White/Non-Hispanic ☐ Hispanic
☐ Black/Non-Hispanic ☐ Asian ☐ Two or more races
☐ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander ☐ Other

Foster Parent(s) Education: ☐ 8th grade ☐ Some high school ☐ High school graduate
☐ Some college ☐ Associate's Degree ☐ Bachelor's degree
☐ Some postgraduate ☐ Master's degree ☐ Ph.D. degree ☐ Professional degree

Are you currently a licensed foster parent? (Yes/No). If yes, in what state(s) do you hold an active license? _____

If yes, how long have you been a licensed foster parent (in years)?

Please read the following descriptions of the various forms of foster parenting. Which of the following best defines the type of foster care you provide for your foster children?

Type	Definition
Respite Care Provider	Individual(s) who take care of foster children to give foster parents a short time off, sometimes on a scheduled basis
Emergency Care Provider	Individual(s) on call who foster children on a short-term basis as needed
Kinship Care Provider	Family relative of foster children who care for foster children (e.g., grandparents, aunts/uncles, siblings, cousins, etc.)
Traditional Foster Parent	Primary caregiver of foster children for a temporary timespan
Foster-to-Adopt Foster Parent	Individual(s) who foster children with the intent to adopt them permanently into their families
Other	Please explain

Family members: How many children (Ages 0-18) live in your home?

How many foster children (Ages 0-18) live in your home? _____

How many, if any, of the children in your home (foster or not) are identified as gifted?

Foster Child Demographics:

For the following section, please consider the **foster child who receives gifted education services or programming**. If none of the foster children in your care receive these services, complete this section with information **regarding the oldest foster child in your care**.

Age (in years, at the time of this survey): _____ Grade Level as of Spring 2021:

Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ Non-binary ☐ Transgender ☐ Other
 ☐ Prefer not to say

Race: ☐ American Indian / Alaskan Native ☐ White/Non-Hispanic ☐ Hispanic
 ☐ Black/Non-Hispanic ☐ Asian ☐ Two or more races
 ☐ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander ☐ Other

Current School Type: Public School (in-person, virtual, or hybrid) Private School (in-person, virtual, or hybrid) Home School Home School Co-Op
 Other (Please explain.)

How long has this child been in your care? _____

Is your child currently enrolled in a high ability or advanced program in their school? ☐ Yes
 ☐ No

If yes, how many years has your child participated in high ability or advanced programming?

Is your child involved in academic, athletic or other extracurricular programs, including academic enrichment camps (Saturday, Summer, or online)? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, please list the title of the program below.

Would you describe your foster child as gifted (talented; high ability)? ☐ Yes ☐ No

In the next section, please think about children in foster care *in general*, (not only the foster children in your care).

1. How would you define giftedness?

2. When you think about a “typical” gifted child, what characteristics come to mind?

3. Do you think foster children are different than other children academically?



Not at all

Not very much

Neutral

A little bit

Very much so

Please explain. _____

4. Do you think foster children are different than other children in other ways?



Not at all

Not very much

Neutral

A little bit

Very much so

Please explain. _____

5. Do you think a foster child’s educational experience is different than the experiences of other children?



Not at all

Not very much

Neutral

A little bit

Very much so

Please explain. _____

6. Do foster children’s abilities, strengths, and talents affect foster parents?



Not at all

Not very much

Neutral

A little bit

Very much so

Please explain. _____

In the following section, please consider *your own experiences* as a foster parent.

7. What needs do you have as a parent of a foster child?

8. Specifically, what needs do you have related to your foster child's academics, strengths, gifts, and talents?

9. What recommendations would you make for your foster child's school/school corporation to best meet your needs as a parent of a foster child? A gifted child (if applicable)?

In this last section, please consider the *pre-service training* you received in order to obtain your license to foster, and the *in-service training* you have received since becoming a foster parent.

10. *Prior to becoming a licensed foster parent*, did you receive any training about foster children's strengths, talents, or abilities? (Yes/No) If yes, describe this training.

11. *Prior to becoming a licensed foster parent*, did you receive any training about foster children's education? (Yes/No) If yes, describe this training.

12. *After becoming a licensed foster parent*, have you received any training about foster children's strengths, talents, or abilities? (Yes/No) If yes, describe this training.

13. *After becoming a licensed foster parent*, have you received any training about foster children's education? (Yes/No) If yes, describe this training.

Thank you for your participation in this survey. Your responses have been recorded. Please enter your **email address** below. This information will *not* be distributed. It is only used to reduce duplicate responses, and to contact you for the gift card drawing and/or follow-up interview.

Would you like to be entered to win one (1) of five (5) Amazon.com gift cards, worth \$10 each? (Yes/No)

Are you willing to be contacted for a follow-up interview? These interviews will be conducted virtually (phone, Zoom, Skype) and last approximately 30 to 60 minutes. Interviewees will receive a gift card for Amazon.com, worth \$15 each, as compensation for their time. (Yes/No)

If you have any comments, questions, or concerns about this survey, please enter them below, or email Alissa Cress (apsalaza@purdue.edu).

APPENDIX B

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Background:

1. How many foster children are currently in your care?
2. How many foster children have been in your care throughout your experience as a foster parent? How long did they stay in your care, on average?
3. How would you describe their experiences in school?
4. Do you think their experiences in school were different because they were in foster care? (Academically, socially, with teachers, etc.) How so?
5. Have you had any foster children formally identified as gifted? By their school, a counselor, a psychologist, or having qualified for any advanced programs (e.g., accelerated placement, high ability courses, extracurricular clubs/programs)

Strengths, Gifts, and Talents:

6. Have you had any foster children you think are smart or intelligent? Tell me about them.
7. What does giftedness mean to you? What does it mean to be “gifted”?
8. Do you think children in foster care can be gifted? Explain.
9. Do you think children in foster care can be identified for gifted or high ability programs in school? Explain.
10. Do you think what giftedness looks like would be different for children in foster care, compared to children not in foster care? Explain.
11. Do you think there is anything about foster children’s experiences that might help them academically? Explain.
12. Do you think there is anything about foster children’s experiences that might hinder them academically? Explain.

Suggestions:

13. If you were to talk to a new foster parent, what would you tell them about working with their child's educational system?
14. If you were to talk to foster child(ren)'s school and teachers, what would you want them to know about working with foster children?
15. Tell me about your experience with the training required for your license to foster (pre-service and in-service).
 - a. Was there anything you liked about the training?
 - b. If you were to modify the training required for foster parents, is there anything you would change? Anything to remove or include?