An Assessment of Foster Parent Training in North Carolina

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The effectiveness with which the child welfare system recruits, selects, trains, and supports foster families matters a great deal. The system's failure in any one of these tasks has the potential to increase the risk of maltreatment in foster care (Rosenthal, 1991; Poertner, et al., 1999; Ryan, et al., 1987; CWLA, 2001), placement instability (USDHHS, 2007), and other negative child, family, and system outcomes.

Accordingly, in State Fiscal Year 2010-11, the NC Division of Social Services, the entity that oversees North Carolina's foster parent training system, asked the Family and Children's Resource Program within the Jordan Institute for Families at the UNC-Chapel Hill School of Social Work to help it assess foster parent training in our state and explore ways it could be strengthened. To do this we posed the following questions:

While North Carolina has much to be proud of in its current foster care training system, there is room for improvement, especially with regard to in-service training.

- What does North Carolina's current foster parent training system look like?
- How satisfied are stakeholders with the current system?
- What guidance does research give us with regard to foster parent training?
- What results does our current foster parent training system produce?
- What would improve North Carolina's system of training foster parents?

In our search for answers we reviewed the research literature on foster parent training, studied other states' approaches to foster parent training, examined North Carolina outcome and administrative data, consulted foster parents and child-placing agencies in our state using surveys, focus groups, and telephone interviews, and interviewed the Division's MAPP/GPS trainers.

Key Findings

Pre-Service Training. North Carolina's foster parent training system focuses most of its resources on pre-service training. *Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting* (MAPP/GPS) is the pre-service curriculum used by the majority of child placing agencies.

- <u>Satisfaction with Pre-Service Training</u>. Although they are generally satisfied with MAPP, foster parents and staff from child-placing agencies believe the course needs updates and its content needs to be expanded. Specifically, there is concern among stakeholders that MAPP does not meet the needs of kinship caregivers, nor does it paint a sufficiently realistic picture of children in foster care.
- <u>Effectiveness of Pre-Service Training</u>. There is little empirical evidence the foster parent pre-service training used most often in North Carolina is effective: "although several studies have been conducted to test its effectiveness, none have found MAPP to produce the desired results" (Piescher, et al., 2008). However, there is little evidence other existing foster parent pre-service training curricula (e.g., PRIDE) would be more effective.
- <u>Options for Strengthening Pre-Service Training</u>: In terms of research studies, national norms, stakeholder input, or child or administrative outcomes, there appear to be few compelling reasons to take the major step of switching from MAPP/GPS to another pre-service curriculum.

Still, at some point in the future—possibly the near future—the Children's Alliance of Kansas will discontinue MAPP/GPS in favor of PS-MAPP (Gibson, 2011). When MAPP/GPS is discontinued, if North Carolina adopts PS-MAPP, it would likely face a dramatic increase in annually recurring costs associated with foster parent pre-service training. As North Carolina anticipates the discontinuation of MAPP/GPS it has several options, including the following:

1. Switch to PS-MAPP
2. Attempt to purchase MAPP curricula outright and make needed updates/changes
3. Switch to PRIDE
4. Adopt another state's curriculum
5. Develop new North Carolina pre-service curriculum

We believe that if the decision is made to move away from MAPP/GPS, options 2 and 5 above may be most attractive. For detailed discussion of all options, please see the full report.

In-Service Training. There is no single course or set of courses commonly used by child-placing agencies in North Carolina to provide in-service training.

- <u>Satisfaction and Effectiveness Measures for In-Service Training</u>. Most foster parents and child-placing agency staff report that it is not difficult for foster parents to obtain the 10 hours of in-service training required each year. However, training content and methods by which in-service training is delivered varies from agency to agency. This level of variability across North Carolina's 225 child-placing agencies means it is not possible to reach a conclusion about satisfaction with or the effectiveness of in-service training for foster parents in our state.

- <u>Options for Strengthening In-Service Training</u>. In-service training is the weakest area of North Carolina's foster parent training system. The methodical, ongoing professional development of licensed foster parents has the potential to meaningfully impact child well-being and other outcomes. Yet in-service training receives relatively little attention in our state. Children and families, foster parents, and child welfare agencies could benefit if North Carolina changed its approach to foster parent in-service training by doing one or more of the following:

    1. Provide more in-service training resources that child-placing agencies can use with foster parents.
    2. Increase availability of online foster parent training.
    3. Require and support statewide use of foster parent development plans.
    4. Centrally track foster parent training and related outcomes on an ongoing basis to better guide and assess the effectiveness of the training system.
    5. Promote/require coaching. On its own, classroom-based in-service training cannot bring about the skill development and practice change we would like to see in foster parents. Increasing use of *in vivo* coaching (i.e., coaching of foster parents in their homes) would be an important and, the research suggests, effective way to develop foster parents and support child placements.

For a detailed discussion of these options, please see the full report.

This assessment describes fundamental strengths of North Carolina's current infrastructure for foster parent training, but it also highlights the need for a more holistic and comprehensive approach to the continuum of foster parent development needs: from screening and preparation before licensing through post-placement training and coaching. While North Carolina has much to be proud of in its current foster care training system, it has an important opportunity at this juncture to move forward in making improvements to better meet the needs of children and families.

An Assessment of Foster Parent Training in North Carolina

Introduction

Since they spend more time than anyone with children in foster care, foster parents and kinship caregivers affect virtually all aspects of children's lives, including their physical health, behavior, mental and emotional well-being, education, and their connection to family, culture, and community. Because their role is so pivotal, foster parents and kinship caregivers can have a profound impact on children's safety, well-being, and permanence.

Given all this, the effectiveness with which the child welfare system recruits, selects, trains, and supports resource families matters a great deal. The system's failure in any one of these tasks has the potential to increase the risk of maltreatment in foster care (Rosenthal, 1991; Poertner, et al., 1999; Ryan, et al., 1987; CWLA, 2001), placement instability (USDHHS, 2007), and other negative child, family, and system outcomes. Accordingly, in State Fiscal Year 2010-11, the entity that oversees North Carolina's foster parent training system, the NC Division of Social Services, asked the Family and Children's Resource Program within the Jordan Institute for Families at the UNC-Chapel Hill School of Social Work to help it assess foster parent training in our state and explore ways it could be strengthened. The results of this assessment can be found below.

Summary of Methodology

To assess the effectiveness of North Carolina's foster parent training system and to identify ways it might be improved, we reviewed the research literature on foster parent training, studied other states' approaches to foster parent training, and consulted North Carolina outcome and administrative data. The annotated bibliography created as part of this literature review can be found in Appendix A. To learn about the current training system, faculty from UNC also reached out to child welfare staff from public and private agencies, foster parents, and other stakeholders to obtain quantitative and qualitative data through surveys, focus groups, and telephone interviews. Instruments used in these information gathering efforts can be found in Appendices B-D.

Phase 1: Surveys. In the first phase of data collection, we administered surveys (online for agency staff, and both online and through a paper survey in *Fostering Perspectives* for foster parents). Agencies were contacted by the NC Division of Social Services in September 2010 and encouraged to participate in the agency survey. The response rate for this survey was good: one or more people from 58% of private agencies and 71% of public agencies completed the survey. Based on the percentage of licensed child-placing agencies that responded to this survey, we can generalize findings to the state as a whole with some confidence.

North Carolina's 7,600+ foster parents were invited to participate in the foster parent survey when they received the November 2010 issue of the newsletter *Fostering Perspectives*; in December members of the NC Foster and Adoptive Parents Association also received an email invitation from the Association's president. The response rate to the foster parent survey was low: less than 3% of the state's foster parents responded. In addition to analysis of quantitative data from surveys, written responses to questions were grouped by theme and related comments were tallied to assess frequency of expressed opinion.

Phase 2: Focus Groups and Phone Interviews. In the second phase of data collection, focus groups were conducted with a county foster parent association, with a group of the Division's staff development trainers with expertise in foster parent training, and with two groups of public and private agency associations from different parts of the state. As there is no existing public/private agency association in the eastern part of the state, project staff conducted phone interviews with selected agencies in the east. To select agencies for phone interviews, project staff reviewed the list of public and private agencies that responded to the survey and, with Division input, selected several non-respondents who were then invited to participate in a phone interview. One of the two private agencies contacted did not respond; all three public agencies accepted the invitation to participate in phone interviews. Focus groups and interviews were summarized and assessed for common themes. In addition to analysis of quantitative data from surveys, written responses to questions were grouped by theme and related comments were tallied to assess frequency of expressed opinion.

Limitations. Since less than 3% of the state's foster parents responded to the foster parent survey, results of that survey cannot be generalized statewide: we do not and cannot know the extent to which the sampling frame represents the population of North Carolina foster parents. Similarly, while focus group discussions did provide additional qualitative information for this assessment, the extent to which the expressed opinions can be generalized outside of these groups may be limited.

I. How effective is North Carolina's current system of training foster parents?

To assess the effectiveness of North Carolina's current approach to training foster parents we asked the following questions:

      1a. What does NC's current foster parent training system look like?
      1b. How satisfied are stakeholders with our current system?
      1c. What guidance does research give us with regard to foster parent training?
      1d. What results does our current foster parent training system produce?

1a. What does NC's current foster parent training system look like?

The diagram below depicts North Carolina's current system for training foster parents.

North Carolina's Current Foster Parent Training System
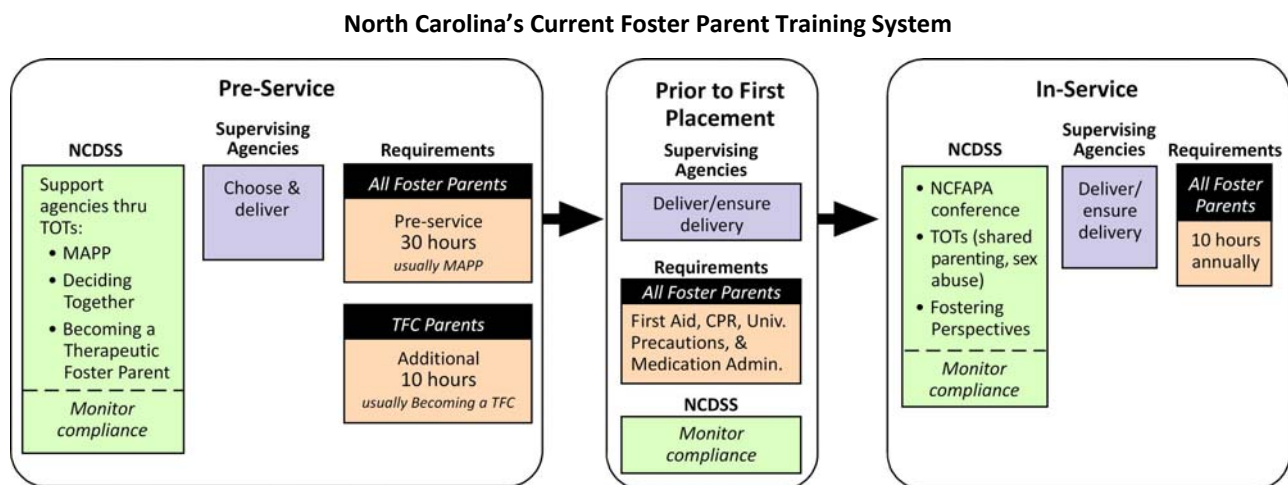
In North Carolina the system for training resource families (foster parents, kinship caregivers, and adoptive parents) is a partnership between the NC Division of Social Services and public and private child-placing agencies.

- The **NC Division of Social Services** supervises the child welfare system in North Carolina. It is responsible for setting policy, licensing foster parents (it licensed 1,176 new foster homes in SFY 2009-10), and licensing, regulating, and supporting child-placing agencies. The Division supports child-placing agencies in a number of ways, including by making foster parent pre-service and in-service training courses available through free train-the-trainer (TOT) events each year, by sponsoring the NC Foster and Adoptive Parent Association's annual conference, and by providing written training resources such as the biannual newsletter *Fostering Perspectives*. The table below describes the number of times the Division provided foster parent training related TOTs in a recent three-year period.

Foster Parent Courses: Division-Sponsored TOTs, Jan. 1, 2008 – Dec. 31, 2010

Courses	2008	2009	2010	Total Events
Pre-Service TOTs				
MAPP/GPS	9	9	11	29
Deciding Together	4	1[☆]	7	12
Becoming a Therapeutic Foster Parent	on-demand	on-demand	on-demand	Opened 9/1/10
In-Service TOTs				
Fostering and Adopting the Child Who Has Been Sexually Abused	4	1[☆]	0	5
Shared Parenting	6	6	5	17
Total	23	17	23	63

The Division monitors compliance with foster parent training requirements as a normal part of processing agency licensing action requests (i.e., new licenses and renewals), and through review of agency files conducted during periodic visits to child-placing agencies by Division field staff.

Foster parent training-related costs borne by the Division include: funding NCDSS staff development trainers who certify child-placing agency staff to teach certain foster parent training courses, and purchasing materials for the certification courses. Federal dollars are a primary source for these expenditures. In a review of the states, the National Council on Adoption (Zappala, 2007) found that in 2005, North Carolina spent between 21.24% and 21.34% of available federal dollars on foster and adoptive parent recruitment and training services, the greatest percentage of available federal dollars spent by any state that year.[*]

- **Child-placing agencies**—also called "supervising agencies"—are responsible for recruiting, selecting, training, and supporting foster parents. In January 2011 there were 225 child-placing agencies in North Carolina (100 public and 125 private). In June 2010 these agencies supervised North Carolina's 7,684 foster homes (3,684 family foster homes and 4,000 therapeutic foster homes) (NCDSS, 2011; NCDSS, 2010b).

Child-placing agencies are responsible for providing foster parents with the training they need to fulfill licensure requirements as well as the training, coaching, and support they must

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[☆] Number of training events reduced due to budget cuts and travel restrictions.

[*] In 2005 North Carolina was the only state to spend more than ten percent of available funds on these services. Four states spent between five and ten percent of available funds on parent recruitment and training; 37 states spent less than five percent; and ten states reported spending no federal dollars on parent recruitment and training (Zappala, 2007).

have to meet the needs of the children in their homes. Agencies must document in the foster parent record the type of training the foster parent has completed pursuant to the administrative rules (10A NCAC 70E .1117). Foster parent training-related costs borne by child-placing agencies include: providing agency or contract staff to offer required training to applicants and licensed foster parents, and providing notebooks and other materials for pre-service and in-service training events.

Pre-Service Training. North Carolina policy and administrative rules (10A NCAC 70E) stipulate that before they are licensed, all prospective foster parents must receive 30 hours of pre-service training. According to NCDSS staff development trainers interviewed as part of this assessment, the primary purpose of foster parent pre-service training is to provide basic information about foster care and the children in foster care so the applicant and the child-placing agency can make an informed, mutual decision about whether the applicant is an appropriate candidate for licensure. In North Carolina, the rules require pre-service training for foster parents to address these topics:

- General orientation to foster care
- Communication skills
- Understanding dynamics of the foster care and adoption process
- Separation and loss
- Attachment and trust

- Child development
- Behavior management
- Working with birth families and maintaining connections
- Lifebook preparation
- Planned moves and the impact of disruptions

- The impact of placement on foster and adoptive families
- Teamwork to achieve permanence
- Cultural sensitivity
- Confidentiality
- Health and safety

Although agencies are free to choose the pre-service course they use to meet these requirements, surveys and focus groups conducted as part of this assessment revealed that the majority use *Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting* (MAPP/GPS): 97% of the public agencies responding to the agency survey reported they used MAPP/GPS most often when delivering pre-service training. Private agencies (69%) also reported they used MAPP most often. *Deciding Together*, a version of MAPP that child welfare staff can deliver one-on-one with applicants for licensing, is the second most commonly used pre-service training, although statewide it is used relatively infrequently when compared with MAPP.

Of the 183 individuals responding to the agency survey, only 11 (representing 7 private agencies) indicated that their agency uses a pre-service curriculum other than MAPP/GPS or *Deciding Together*. These other pre-service curricula, followed by the number of individuals who said their agencies use them, were as follows: KidsPeace/Together Facing the Challenge (3) [*]; Pressley Ridge (1); Professional Parenting (1); TAPP, a "combination of MAPP, Boystown, and Together Facing the Challenge," (1); and Teaching Family Model for Foster and Adoptive Families (1).

Based on responses to the agency survey, the pre-service training MAPP/GPS was offered an average of 2.5 times per year by public child-placing agencies (with a range from 'none' to 'seven' times); on average, private agencies offered MAPP/GPS four times annually. Most public and private agencies offered foster parent pre-service 1 to 4 times in the past 12 months.

Of those responding to the agency survey, 65% of public agency respondents and 64% of private agency respondents said their agency had enough pre-service trainers. This need for additional

35% of agency survey respondents said their agency did not have enough foster parent pre-service trainers.

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[*] Note: May represent responses from workers from the same agency.

trainers may be due to a variety of factors, including turnover within agencies and the relatively large number of new child-placing agencies in North Carolina at the present time. Despite the need for additional trainers, agencies do not seem to be delivering MAPP as an event co-trained by a foster parent/child welfare professional team, as the course designers intended: just 22% of private agency staff and 14% of public agency staff say foster parents help deliver pre-service in their agency.

That MAPP/GPS is the most commonly used foster parent pre-service course in North Carolina is not surprising: North Carolina was one of two states that piloted the curriculum in the mid-1980s (Pasztor, 2009; Children's Alliance of Kansas, n.d.), and the NC Division of Social Services has been offering free courses to prepare child-placing agencies to offer MAPP to prospective foster and adoptive parents since that time. This state fiscal year (SFY 2010-11) the Division will offer 10 free MAPP certification courses to child-placing agencies through the state's regional child welfare training centers. In the past three years (January 1, 2008 - December 31, 2010) 927 people registered for the Division's MAPP/GPS train-the-trainer course. Private agency staff made up 56% of those who registered. Of those who registered, 458 (49%) completed the training and became certified MAPP leaders. The size of this gap between registrations and completions is consistent with other Division-sponsored courses. As the table below indicates, a variety of factors contribute to this gap.

Registrations Received for the Division's MAPP/GPS TOT, SFY 2008-2010

Agency	Enrolled	Attended	No Show	Event Not Held	Registrant Cancelled	Waiting List	Event Full	Prerequisite Not Met	Ineligible	Total Registrations
Public	268	201	12	55	69	18	21	13	15	**404**
Private	356	283	23	50	47	35	43	26	16	**523**
Total	**624**	**484**	**35**	**105**	**116**	**53**	**64**	**39**	**31**	**927**

It should be noted that the version of MAPP/GPS North Carolina uses is not the most current. Sometime after 2001 Child Welfare Institute, which developed MAPP, revised the curriculum to update it and better align it with the outcomes associated with the federal Child and Family Services Review (Children's Alliance of Kansas, n.d.). Additional discussion of this revised curriculum, which is called PS-MAPP *(Partnering for Safety and Permanence - Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting)*, can be found in Section 1c below.

Pre-Service Training for Therapeutic Foster Parents. In addition to the 30 hours of pre-service training required for all foster parents, agencies that supervise therapeutic foster parents must provide them with an additional 10 hours of specific training in behavioral mental health treatment services, which is not limited to but must include the following: (1) role of the therapeutic foster parent; (2) safety planning; and (3) managing behaviors. Although agencies are free to choose the pre-service course they use to meet these requirements, surveys and focus group findings suggest the majority use *Becoming a Therapeutic Foster Parent*, a 10-hour course developed by the Division of Social Services to cover these required topics. A free train-the-trainer course that prepares staff from public and private agencies to offer *Becoming a Therapeutic Foster Parent* to therapeutic foster care applicants has been available since 2008; this course is currently available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week as a free, on-demand, self-paced online course through the Division's online learning portal, www.ncswlearn.org.

Of the 79 professionals from therapeutic foster care agencies who responded to the agency survey, only 11 (6%) indicated their agency uses a pre-service curriculum other than *Becoming a Therapeutic Foster Parent*. These curricula, followed by the number of individuals who said their agencies use them, were as follows: *Together Facing the Challenge* (3); CARE (1); Community Resources (1); Professional

Parenting (1); TAPP, a "combination of MAPP, Boystown, and Together Facing the Challenge," (1); Pressley Ridge (1); combination of *Becoming a Therapeutic Foster Parent* and *Together Facing the Challenge* (2). *

Pre-Placement Training for Foster Parents. Before a foster child is placed with the foster family, supervising agencies must ensure that foster parents receive training in First Aid, CPR, universal precautions, and medication administration. Supervising agencies deliver or arrange this required training. Although not explicitly stated in rule or policy, it seems that this pre-placement training is required to ensure that foster parents have the knowledge and skills needed to ensure the safety and physical well-being of themselves and the children in their care.
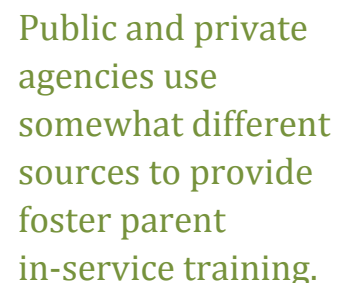
In-Service Training for Foster Parents. North Carolina policy and administrative rule (10A NCAC 70E) stipulate that after foster parents are licensed, supervising agencies must ensure they receive 10 hours of in-service training every year. Foster parents must have 20 hours of in-service training to be relicensed. Although not explicitly stated in rule or policy, it seems that in-service training is required to ensure that foster parents have the knowledge and skills needed to ensure the safety, well-being, and permanence of children in their care.

North Carolina's rules state that in-service training may be child-specific or may concern issues relevant to the general population of children in foster care. Relevant training may be provided by a community college, a licensed child-placing agency, or other departments of state or county government. Upon approval by the supervising agency, such training can count toward meeting the foster parent's annual 10-hour in-service training requirement.

Therapeutic foster parents, like all foster parents, must receive 10 hours of in-training per year. However, in their first year of licensure supervising agencies must ensure therapeutic foster parents receive training on the following topics:

- Dynamics of emotionally disturbed and substance abusing youth and families
- Symptoms of substance abuse
- Needs of emotionally disturbed and substance abusing youth in family settings
- Development of the person-centered plan/child and family plan
- Medication administration
- Crisis intervention

Responses to the agency survey suggest that public and private agencies turn to somewhat different resources to provide foster parent in-service training. Respondents from public agencies (79%) were much more likely than respondents from private agencies (55%) to offer credit to foster parents for attending the annual NCFAPA conference. Similarly, 88% of respondents from public agencies gave credit when foster parents read educational materials or watched educational videos, compared with 70% of respondents from private agencies. Respondents from private agencies were more likely to encourage foster parents to learn through online courses.

> Public and private agencies use somewhat different sources to provide foster parent in-service training.

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* Note: these numbers may represent responses from workers from the same agency.

Foster parents we surveyed said they had obtained in-service training credit in the following ways:

- Attended training events led/sponsored by our agency (80%)
- Read educational publications (68%). Foster parent comments indicate that commonly read publications are books and *Fostering Perspectives*, a Division-sponsored newsletter mailed to foster parents twice a year.
- Attended workshops offered by other organizations (58%)
- Participated in annual NCFAPA conference (52%). Foster parent focus group participants also identified this NCDSS-sponsored event as an important in-service training resource. In addition, NCDSS trainers reported they contribute to this conference by delivering workshops.
- Watched educational videos (44%)
- Attended online trainings (e.g., Fosterclub.com) (29%)
- Other (10%). Responses included attending other conferences, listening to Love and Logic CDs, learning from the child's therapist.

1b. How satisfied are stakeholders with our current system?

Through surveys, focus groups, and telephone interviews, we asked foster parents, child welfare staff, and other stakeholders how satisfied they were with the pre-service and in-service training their agency provided to foster parents.

PRE-SERVICE TRAINING

Stakeholder Satisfaction with Foster Parent Pre-service Training
There appears to be relatively high satisfaction among the stakeholders we consulted with the primary pre-service course their agency uses; for most stakeholders this is MAPP/GPS.

> Most stakeholders are satisfied with the pre-service training their agency uses.

General Satisfaction. Among survey respondents, 70% of those from public agencies, 77% of those from private agencies, and 81% of foster parents rated themselves as either "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with their agency's primary foster parent pre-service course. In focus groups, professionals from child-placing agencies identified far more things that "work well" in foster parent pre-service than things that didn't work well.

Explanations of overall satisfaction with MAPP included the curriculum's ability to cultivate a sense of community and group support for participants. Agency focus groups participants also appreciated the way MAPP's flexibility—it can be delivered once a week for ten weeks, twice a week for five weeks, or through all-day Saturday classes—could be used to meet the needs of applicants and maximize agency resources. Others appreciated the way MAPP meets the needs of different learning styles. Agency survey respondents think pre-service is a good basic foundation that gives good examples of why children come into care. Survey respondents' concerns about the need to update MAPP (see below) were often followed by additional comments indicating they thought much of the curriculum is good.

Twenty-six percent of agency survey respondents were less than satisfied with their agency's primary foster parent pre-service course. Of these, nearly all (88%) used MAPP/GPS. Reasons for their dissatisfaction with MAPP included what was seen as insufficient time spent preparing applicants for the day-to-day reality of fostering ("need more role playing of managing behaviors with rewards and consequences and praise"); a belief the curriculum needs to be updated; and lack of adequate

screening/assessment tools. Some agency focus group participants were also concerned MAPP is not designed for kinship caregivers and offers this population little to relate to.

Reasons for dissatisfaction among agency survey respondents who use *Deciding Together* were similar, but also included regret that "foster parents miss out interaction and role plays" of MAPP and concern applicants have difficulty in retaining what they learn.

Selection. Most stakeholders believe the current foster parent pre-service training used by their agency supports the mutual selection process (i.e., helps foster parent applicants decide whether fostering was right for them, and helps agencies decide whether applicants are suitable for licensure). In the surveys, 83% of the public agency respondents, 84% of the private agency respondents, and 85% of foster parents said their agency's pre-service course was "useful" or "very useful" in assisting the mutual selection process. About the selection process, one foster parent survey respondent wrote: "It made my husband and [me] ask ourselves a lot of hard questions, questions that definitely need to be asked when entering into fostering." Agency staff noted repeatedly during focus groups that the group setting and associated activities gives agency staff more information about prospective foster parents than would be learned in individual sessions.

> Most responding agencies believe the current pre-service training supports mutual selection.

In their focus group, NCDSS staff development MAPP trainers unanimously agreed that when MAPP is delivered in a way that curriculum developers intended, it effectively supports the mutual selection process. Foster parents and agency staff participating in focus groups did not entirely agree with the Division trainers on this point. The most commonly mentioned concern among agency staff and foster parents was that the curriculum doesn't provide a realistic picture of the challenges of fostering. In particular, participants noted a lack of emphasis on teens in care and related behavioral challenges, and minimal information about working with birth parents.

A minority of agency survey respondents did not think pre-service training aids selection. Criticisms included: MAPP does not always facilitate the information-sharing needed to evaluate an individual based on the 12 skills; MAPP's group setting allows couples to mask their motivations; "has no real component that helps the family objectively decide if fostering is right for them;" pre-service "does not provide a way to capture and test for the emotional and mental well being of prospective foster parents and how this may impact their ability to provide care or to meet diverse cultural needs of children in care."

Preparation. Most stakeholders believe the current foster parent pre-service training used by their agency effectively prepares applicants to care for children in foster care. Among survey respondents, 71% from public agencies, 77% from private agencies, and 74% of foster parents said their agency's pre-service course was "effective" or "very effective" at preparing foster parents to care for children in foster care.

Among the 26% of foster parent survey respondents who were unsatisfied with the level of preparation provided by pre-service, three in ten thought the training did not prepare them for the "type of child coming into home." One in five thought pre-service did not prepare them "for how DSS foster care system works" (e.g., court process, laws protect parents more than the kids, working with social workers). One in four wanted the training to be more realistic and practical (e.g., "reality impact," present actual scenarios, "too theoretical," "needs more training in behavior modification"). Other

noteworthy foster parent comments include: "there was too much time between the training and actual placement," and the training was "out of date." These concerns were also mentioned in the foster parent focus group.

Of the professionals responding to the agency survey, 26% raised similar concerns about pre-service's ability to adequately prepare applicants to care for children in foster care. Among this 26%:

- One in seven said they thought the curriculum needs to be updated ("policies and procedures are different, the North Carolina child welfare system has changed to be more family-focused which further outdates the material, and there is too much emphasis on fostering to adopt vs. fostering as a temporary placement").
- Half said the pre-service does not address the daily experiences of foster parents ("there are not a lot of practical use tools for dealing w/ behavior, scheduling...").

Among those dissatisfied with the extent to which pre-service prepares applicants to care for children in foster care, both foster parents (one in eight) and child welfare professionals (one in five) expressed the belief that although pre-service provides important information, "experience is the best teacher."

On at least two topics, the opinions of foster parents and child welfare professionals diverged. Very few professionals responding to the agency survey were concerned about pre-service's ability to prepare foster parents "for how DSS foster care system works." On the other hand, of the agency survey respondents who said pre-service was less than satisfactory in preparing foster parents, 14% thought attitudes/beliefs of foster parents were not realistic ("no matter what we say the foster parents continue to have a different view of fostering;" "they feel all a child needs is love"). No foster parent surveyed shared this opinion.

Therapeutic Foster Parent Pre-Service Training. The surveys, focus groups, and other data collection efforts revealed very little information about stakeholders' satisfaction with the additional 10 hours of pre-service training provided to therapeutic foster parents.

Priority Topics for Pre-Service Training. During surveys we asked stakeholders which topics were most important to include in foster parent pre-service training. The table below reflects their responses:

Pre-Service: Survey Respondent Training Priorities

Public Agency Staff	Private Agency Staff	Foster Parents from Public Agencies	Foster Parents from Private Agencies
1. Managing children's behaviors	1. Understanding their own family's strengths and needs in relation to fostering	1. Managing children's behaviors	1. Managing Children's behaviors
2. Shared parenting	2. Managing children's behaviors	2. Understanding their own family's strengths and needs in relation to fostering	2. Deciding whether fostering is right for them
3. Deciding whether fostering is right for them at this time	3. Deciding whether fostering is right for them at this time	3. Deciding whether fostering is right for them at this time	3. Understanding their own family's strengths and needs in relation to fostering
4. Understanding their own family's strengths and needs in relation to fostering	4. Ensuring children's safety	4. Ensuring children's safety	4. Ensuring children's safety
5. Supporting the child's permanency plan	5. Shared parenting	5. Implementing shared parenting/maintaining connections	5. Supporting the child's permanency plan

Stakeholder Suggestions for Improving Foster Parent Pre-Service

The following ideas for improving North Carolina's foster parent training system emerged from the surveys and focus groups conducted as part of this assessment.

MAPP Content-Related Suggestions. Stakeholders suggest the following changes would improve the effectiveness of the MAPP/GPS curriculum:

1. Update MAPP. Content should be more in line with the way NC's system works today (MRS, family focused, fostering as a temporary placement, facts about the GAL program, CFT and agency review meetings, court involvement, understanding the child welfare system).
   - Agency staff also suggested that the Division provide updated material for delivering MAPP/GPS materials, such as PowerPoint slides, visual aids, etc.
2. Expand MAPP content in specific topic areas. Suggestions include:
   - Adjust the course so it better meets the needs of kin who take the course. Of the 8,826 children in foster care in our state on November 30, 2010, 23.63% (n=2,086) were placed with relatives (Duncan, et al., 2010).
   - Add more realistic case examples, particularly focusing on teens.
   - Expand cultural diversity piece (address MEPA and IEPA, sexual orientation, disabilities).[*]
   - Emphasize shared parenting throughout.
   - Update to reflect types of issues children face today.
   - Explain how visitation affects children.

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[*] This idea for changing/improving MAPP was also suggested via end-of-course evaluations by some of those who became certified MAPP leaders between January 1, 2008 through December 31, 2009. Training evaluation data from 2010 is not available at this time.

- Increase focus on realistic behavioral challenges foster parents will face. Providing case scenarios with realistic behavioral challenges can help prospective foster parents make an informed decision about whether fostering is right for them.

Delivery-Related Suggestions. Stakeholders suggest the foster parent pre-service training would be improved if the following steps were taken:

1. Deliver MAPP as intended:
   - Deliver it co-led by foster parent and agency co-trainers. Foster parents, supervising agencies, and NCDSS staff agreed MAPP would be more effective if this happened. Stakeholders advised that to do this the system would need to *increase the number of foster parents certified to train MAPP.*
   - Adhere more closely to the curriculum as written. Supervising agency and NCDSS staff suggested that MAPP would be more effective if those who taught it at the agency level adhered more closely to the curriculum as it is designed. Stakeholders advised that for this to happen, *MAPP trainers need additional support from their agencies.*
     - Agency and foster parent focus group participants also expressed that foster parents need help from more than a single licensing worker to understand how the DSS and court systems work. It's also important that the messages given in training are consistent with the way foster parents are treated by the agency.
2. Reduce the time between MAPP and the first placement. Foster parents and NCDSS staff expressed the opinion that pre-service training would be more effective if the span of time between completing MAPP and the first placement in the foster home could be reduced.
3. Increase MAPP's alignment with the licensing process. Some supervising agency staff suggested changing MAPP (i.e., the homework) and/or the Foster Home License Application (DSS-5016) to better align with each other so they could transfer answers from one to the other.
4. Increase NCDSS support for MAPP leaders. Agency and NCDSS staff agreed that ongoing support for trainers, as previously provided through the MAPP/GPS UNITE program, is very helpful to ensure model fidelity and enhanced trainer skill development.

Therapeutic Foster Parent Pre-Service Training Suggestions. The small number of comments in survey and focus groups about therapeutic foster parent pre-service training yielded few recommendations. The ones we received included: strengthening *Becoming a Therapeutic Foster Parent* curriculum in terms of therapeutic interactions, de-escalation, working with children who had experienced sexual and physical trauma, providing family-based treatment to children with mental health diagnoses, incorporating crisis planning, more depth on behavior management, more current case studies, adding vicarious trauma (for the foster parents), and setting up the home for foster parent/child/animal safety.

TRAINING PRIOR TO THE FIRST PLACEMENT

In our assessment we did not ask stakeholders specifically about this component of North Carolina's foster parent training system, but focus groups and surveys did yield some relevant input. A few agencies mentioned ways they make CPR, medication administration, and other required training accessible to foster parents before a first placement. For example one agency worker interviewed described how the agency incorporates some of this training in the last day of pre-service class (a

Saturday), and offers CPR free of charge between two weeks to 30 days after the completion of pre-service training.

<u>In-service Training</u>

Through focus groups and surveys, stakeholders shared their opinions about the foster parent in-service training provided in North Carolina.

Stakeholder Satisfaction with In-service Training

Unlike pre-service, which most often takes the form of MAPP, there is no single course or set of courses that are commonly used by child-placing agencies in North Carolina to provide in-service training. Despite this lack, obtaining the required in-service training is not a challenge: most survey respondents (74% of foster parents and 69% of child welfare professionals) agreed or strongly agreed it is easy for foster parents to get the in-service training they need.

Barriers to In-service Training. Thirty-one percent of agency survey respondents and 23% of foster parent survey respondents thought it was less than easy for foster parents to obtain in-service training. The most common barrier noted by foster parents was time/scheduling difficulties; other barriers identified by foster parents included the need to provide child care, distance, and insufficient advance notice of training events.

The most common barriers to foster parent participation in in-service training noted by agency survey respondents were "[foster parents'] work schedule" and "child care." In addition, some respondents from public agencies also cited limited access due to rural locations. A minority believed foster parent behaviors and attitudes were a barrier (e.g., "not willing," "not accountable," "wait until last minute").

Areas for Improvement. In focus groups foster parents and agency staff named a number of ways in which they believe the NC Division of Social Services could more meaningfully support foster parent in-service training, such as:

- Providing in-service curricula and handouts that can be used by agencies
- Endorsing or providing online in-service training courses
- Offering local classroom training across the state through Division staff or outside experts
- Providing a review or refresher of pre-service after parents have started fostering
- Give more guidance on what qualifies as in-service training
- Offer foster parent pre-service training online. A minority of stakeholders asked that at least some of foster parent training be made available online; this would make it possible for applicants to review material and/or learn material if they miss a class.

Foster parents and agency staff identified the annual conference held by the NC Foster and Adoptive Parent Association as an important in-service training resource. NCDSS staff also noted their involvement in this in-service training event.

Stakeholder Suggestions for Improving In-Service Training

Priority Topics for In-Service Training. During surveys and focus groups we asked stakeholders which topics were most important to include in foster parent in-service training. There was strong agreement (89% of private agency staff respondents, 92% of public agency staff respondents, and 91% of foster parent respondents) that behavior management is the number one priority for in-service training for

foster parents. This is not surprising, given what we know about the behavior-related needs of youth in care (sources cited in Price, et al., 2008) and the fact that behavior management strategies are one of the key variables related to positive outcomes for youth in care (sources cited in Murray, et al., 2010). Additional discussion of behavioral training can be found in 1c and Section II below.

Aside from the consensus about the importance and need for behavioral management and grief, separation, and loss training, there were notable differences among stakeholder groups with regard to training priorities.

In-Service: Survey Respondent Training Priorities

Public Agency Staff	Private Agency Staff	Foster Parents from Public Agencies	Foster Parents from Private Agencies
1. Behavior management	1. Behavior Management	1. Behavior management	1. Behavior management
2. Grief, separation, and loss	2. Grief, separation, and loss	2. Grief, separation, and loss	2. Grief, separation, and loss
3. Shared parenting/maintaining connections	3. Mental Health	3. Visits between children and birth parents	3. Mental Health
4. Mental health	4. Shared parenting/maintaining connections	4. Shared parenting/maintaining connections	4. Sexualized behavior
5. Sexualized behavior	5. Sexualized behavior	5. Mental health	5. Health and medical issues

Shared parenting training, which is seen as very important by the Division of Social Services (based on staff input and review of policy) was rated as a priority by more public agency staff (61%) than private agency staff (39%). Less than half of foster parents (40%) identified it as a top priority for in-service training. These differing values are reflected by the difference between the number of registrations the Division has received in the last three years (2008-2010) from public and private child welfare professionals for the course *Shared Parenting*. Of the 435 registrations received, 76% were from public agencies and 24% were from private agencies.

Managing children's visits with their parents was rated as a priority by more foster parents (44%) than public agency staff (31%). Few private agency staff (8%) saw this topic as a priority. These findings regarding shared parenting and visitation suggest that one consideration for the Division's oversight of private child-placing agencies is to ensure that all agencies provide sufficient attention to reunification efforts and maintaining birth family connections in their training and supervision of staff and foster families.

Some of the feedback about pre-service training above may have implications for improving in-service training. Agencies do not always have control over the time that elapses between the completion of pre-service training and the placement of a child. For at least some agencies, foster parent retention of what was learned in pre-service is a concern. We also know that 25% of foster parent survey respondents were unsatisfied with the level of preparation provided by pre-service. Given all this, agencies must be prepared to provide remedial/refresher training at or very soon after the time of placement on topics from the pre-service training and new topics specific to the child and the learning needs of new foster parents.

Respondents from private agencies were less likely to see shared parenting and visits as priority in-service training topics.

Coaching. An issue identified in the agency and foster parent surveys is that classroom training can never fully prepare applicants to care for a child in foster care ("My experience is that until they have a child with problems/issues placed in their home, most foster parents do not fully grasp the full scope of foster parenting"). Foster parent focus group participants said that although pre-service training helped prepare them, they would have benefited from coaching from staff upon placement of a child. There is evidence to suggest that this is true, especially with regard to behavior management and other specific, concrete parenting skills. As Murray and colleagues (2010) note, studies have shown that when it comes to producing changes in practice, traditional didactic training is ineffective (Dixon, et al., 1999). New approaches to parenting should be taught and practiced in a step-wise fashion (Torrey et al. 2005; Chamberlain et al. 2008), giving learners a chance to practice new techniques at a time (Newhouse, et al., 2005). This cannot be done with occasional, didactic training. Training should be followed-up by regular coaching, ideally coaching in the foster parent's home. Coaching of this kind is something that Murray and colleagues (2010) rarely saw in their recent work with 15 North Carolina therapeutic foster care agencies, "even in the more mature, higher quality agencies."

1c. What guidance does research give us with regard to foster parent training?

National Beliefs and Practices

Foster parent training has been around since the late 1960s (Turner, et al., 2007). Over the years the field of child welfare wholeheartedly embraced the idea of foster parent training as an essential part of serving children and families. Today the vast majority of states require foster parent pre-service training; most also require some in-service training (Dorsey, et al., 2008; Grimm, 2003). About half the states require a specific curriculum by statute; nearly all specified programs are MAPP or PRIDE (*Parent Resources for Information, Development, and Education*) (Dorsey, et al., 2008). The most recent round of the federal CFSRs show the foster parent pre-service training courses in use by the states:

Foster Parent Pre-Service Training Curricula Used by the States

Course	States using
PRIDE	18
State-created	12
MAPP/GPS	10
Split between PRIDE & MAPP	4
PATH	2
FAKT	1
IMPACT	1
Stars	1

Source: Children's Alliance of Kansas, 2010

Similarities between the major pre-service training programs suggest general agreement among many agencies and caregivers about the topics to be included in initial preparation of foster parents (Grimm, 2003).

Is Foster Parent Training Worthwhile?

Today foster parent training is widely seen as an important factor contributing to successful foster care outcomes. Many associate it with enhanced foster parent attitudes and skills, reduced child behavior problems, improved agency-foster parent relationships, and reduced foster parent turnover. Lack of training is also tied by some to placement disruption and other negative outcomes (sources cited in

Turner, et al., 2007). Early research on foster parent training programs supported these beliefs. For example, in their study "Is Foster-Parent Training Worthwhile?" Boyd and Remy (1978) concluded foster parent training helped to reduce the incidence of children having to leave foster homes, made it more likely for children to have a good outcome in the foster home, and caused foster parents to be more likely to continue in the job.

However, research in recent years has undermined these findings. In their review of the literature, Turner and colleagues (2007) conclude that "training interventions evaluated to date appear to have very little effect on outcomes relating to looked-after children, assessed in relation to psychological functioning, extent of behavioural problems and interpersonal functioning. Results relating to foster carer(s) outcomes also show no evidence of effectiveness in measures of behavioural management skills, attitudes and psychological functioning." After conducting a meta-analysis of the literature, Dorsey and colleagues (2008) found that, "At present, there is remarkably little empirical evidence for the type of training that foster parents receive." Nash and Flynn (2009), who used cross-sectional data to explore the relationship between foster parent training and child outcomes, found that overall training was unrelated to the child outcomes they studied.

> Recent research casts doubt on the value of most foster parent training.

This shift in our understanding of the value of foster parent training is related to the current focus on evidence-based practice. Evidence-based practice (EBP) is "a decision-making process that integrates the best available research evidence with family and professional wisdom and values" (Buysse, 2007). Researchers and academics contribute to this process by using rigorous scientific standards to determine whether specific practices, interventions, and programs can be linked to specific outcomes (Piescher, 2008). For example, guided by an advisory group and a national scientific panel, the California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare (www.cebc4cw.org) assesses the strength of practices based on the research evidence supporting them and rates them using this scale:

California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare: Scientific Rating Scale

Well-Supported ← → Concerning

1 2 3 4 5
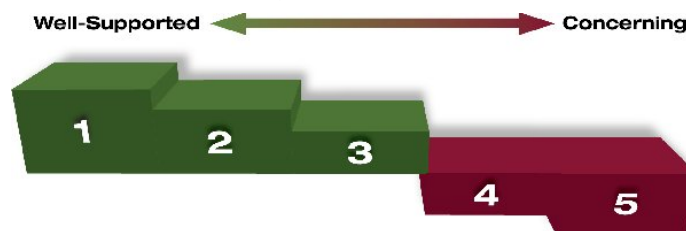
1. **Well-Supported by Research Evidence**
2. **Supported by Research Evidence**
3. **Promising Research Evidence**
4. **Evidence Fails to Demonstrate Effect**
5. **Concerning Practice**
NR. **Not Able to be Rated**

To be endorsed as fully evidence-based, a curriculum or other intervention must have been evaluated in at least two rigorous randomized controlled trials in different usual care or practice settings and found to be superior to an appropriate comparison practice. To date none of the foster parent training programs reviewed by the Clearinghouse have received the stronger evidence-based ratings of "well-

supported" or "supported." Three—none of them pre-service courses—have received the more modest, less confident EBP rating of "promising."

This is not surprising. Due to the many variables at play, it is extremely difficult to prove an educational program causes a specific outcome. Typically, educational programs and training courses are evaluated in terms of four levels or questions: (1) Was the learner satisfied with the experience? (2) Was there knowledge gained? (3) Did the learner apply what was learned (e.g., on the job)? (4) What impact did participation in the learning event have on the work product/outcome? (Guskey, 2000). In the absence of scientific experimental evidence, those seeking to evaluate educational programs must rely on expert review of the curriculum, testimonies of learners and clients, etc. (Guskey, 2000; Parry & Berdie, 1999).

Pre-Service Training

Viewing foster parent pre-service training courses through an evidence-based lens has led researchers to question their value. The three pre-service courses reviewed by the California Clearinghouse—PRIDE, PS-MAPP, and Maine's Fundamentals of Foster and Adoptive Parenting—all received a rating of NR, "Not Able to be Rated." This means "the practice does not have any published, peer-reviewed study utilizing some form of control (e.g., untreated group, placebo group, matched wait list) that has established the practice's benefit over the placebo, or found it to be comparable to or better than an appropriate comparison practice" (CEBPCW, 2010). A rating of NR means that from a scientific standpoint, there is not enough evidence to say reach a conclusion about their effectiveness.

Other researchers have reached similar conclusions about foster parent pre-service training. Dorsey and colleagues (2008) comment that although MAPP and PRIDE include content that would appear to support the screening and training prospective foster parents, they pay relatively little attention "to specifics of parent management training and to formalized follow up, consultation, and support that seem to be crucial to evidence-based TFC, and indeed, to other parent-training approaches (e.g., Chaffin et al., 2004; Chamberlain & Mihalic, 1998)."

PRIDE and MAPP

Since PRIDE is the most commonly used foster parent pre-service course in the country and MAPP/GPS is used by most child-placing agencies in North Carolina, each is worthy of further consideration and description in this report. *Parent Resources for Information, Development, and Education* (PRIDE) was developed in the early 1990s by the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, Child Welfare League of America (CWLA), and others for foster parents in Illinois. PRIDE and MAPP/GPS have many things in common (e.g., the training for foster parent applicants is approximately the same length, they cover many of the same topics, each has a mutual selection component, etc.). While admitting that they oversimplify things, Dorsey and colleagues (2008) say that the difference between the two courses is that "MAPP makes sure that foster parents know what they're getting into" while "PRIDE makes sure they grasp underlying values and associated competencies." The difference appears to be more profound, however.

Although Dorsey and colleagues (2008) concluded that PRIDE and MAPP are similar in that there is "virtually no empirical support" for either course, PRIDE has fared slightly better than MAPP in recent studies. Recent studies by Christenson and McMurtry have associated the curriculum with increased foster parent knowledge (2007) and concluded that the course's lessons stay with the participants well after they have completed the program (2009).

Because PRIDE is much less familiar to most child welfare professionals in North Carolina compared to MAPP/GPS, it seems worthwhile to provide some explanation of PRIDE content and philosophy, Based on an assortment of documents provided in December 2005 by Mick Polowy, a professional development specialist with CWLA, PRIDE has characteristics that set it apart from MAPP and which may explain why it is used by more states than any other foster parent pre-service. Briefly, PRIDE offers:

- A continuum. Unlike MAPP/GPS, PRIDE has a 14-step process to develop and support resource families. After licensure, agencies can purchase and provide Foster PRIDE Core, advanced and specialized training, and other supports.
- A Family Development Plan (FDP) that identifies the individual learning needs of each applicant and licensed foster parent. This is a written plan describing a foster family's competencies, annual training goals, methods for reaching those goals, and how to determine if goals have been met.
- A pre-service course for kinship caregivers. *A Tradition of Caring* is a nine-session curriculum, providing kinship caregivers with 27 hours of valuable information and support related to kinship care. During the course of this program, each participant develops a comprehensive individualized action plan for accessing needed resources and meeting identified family needs.
- Many in-service courses. The multi-module Foster PRIDE Core offers in-service training for new and experienced foster parents on a variety of topics, including discipline, child development, sexuality, etc. Advanced and specialized training modules are also available; these provide knowledge and skills to meet the needs of specific populations and include titles such as Preparing Youth for Successful Adulthood; Working Together to Improve the Educational Outcomes for Youth, and Caring for Children Who Have Experienced Domestic Violence.
- Computer-based in-service learning options. The multi-module Foster PRIDE Core is available as an interactive, CD-ROM based training that features dramatizations, role-playing exercises, and internal assessment tools. The Foster PRIDE Digital Curriculum can be used as a supplement to classroom training or an "anytime, anywhere" distance learning option for foster parents.

Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting (MAPP) was introduced in 1986 by the Child Welfare Institute as a model program for the preparation and selection of foster and adoptive families. It was piloted/developed in Massachusetts and North Carolina (Pasztor, 2009). MAPP offers a 30-hour, 10 meeting format to teach 12 key skills necessary for successful foster and/or adoptive parenting.

What have researchers learned about MAPP? Piescher and colleagues (2008) note: "although several studies have been conducted to test its effectiveness, none have found MAPP to produce the desired results (Lee & Holland, 1991; Puddy & Jackson, 2003; and Rhodes, Orme, Cox, & Buehler, 2003). Additionally, families with psychosocial problems and less resources express greater likelihood of not continuing foster care after completing this pre-service training (Rhodes et al., 2003)." Others express concern that MAPP's one 3-hour session on behavior management may not provide adequate training in dealing with child behaviors (sources cited in Van Camp, et al., 2008).

In March 2009, Children's Alliance of Kansas purchased the copyright to MAPP from Child Welfare Institute. (Child Welfare Institute, which developed MAPP, no longer exists.) In a January 2011 telephone conversation, Denise Gibson, Training Director at Children's Alliance of Kansas, explained that sometime in the next few years her organization will stop offering and supporting MAPP/GPS; at that point, they will encourage those currently using MAPP/GPS to switch over to a newer version of the curriculum PS-MAPP. PS-MAPP is a version of MAPP that has been updated to better align it with the outcomes associated with the federal Child and Family Services Review (Children's Alliance of Kansas, n.d.). However, like MAPP/GPS, PRIDE, and other pre-service courses, at present PS-MAPP also lacks empirical evidence to support its effectiveness.

Based on available information, as the table below illustrates, North Carolina would face a sizeable increase in annual foster parent pre-service training expenses if it chose to transition from MAPP/GPS to another curriculum:

Comparing the Cost of Different Pre-Service Courses: Estimates for NC

Curriculum	Estimated Cost Per Trainer Notebook	Number of Trainer Notebooks Needed Per Year	Estimated Annual Cost
MAPP/GPS *(currently using)*	$152 (leader's guide + implementation guide)	155 *(Average number of MAPP TOT graduates, January 1, 2008 thru December 31, 2010)*	$23,560
PS-MAPP	$799 (leader's kit)		$123,845*
PRIDE	$730 (leader's package deal)		$113,150*

Sources: Children's Alliance of Kansas, 2010; CWLA, 2011

* This does not factor in costs related to adopting a new curriculum, which would likely include training of NCDSS trainers to teach the TOT and statewide implementation costs.

In-Service Training

Contrary to the conclusion reached by Turner and colleagues (2007), research has found that some foster parent in-service training courses do produce desired outcomes. Since a great many children in foster care have behavioral challenges (Leathers, 2002; Brandenburg, Friedman, & Silver, 1990; Offord, et al., 1987; Saxe, Cross, & Silverman, 1988; sources cited in Dorsey, et al., 2008; sources cited in Price, et al., 2008), in the past ten years or so many researchers and training providers have focused their attention on in-service training interventions that teach foster parents behavior management skills. Piescher and colleagues (2008) have identified several training programs, most notably the Incredible Years and Triple P-Positive Parenting Program (PPP), that scored highly on their EBP rating scale.

Keeping Foster Parents Trained and Supported (KEEP), a modified version of the Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care intervention, is another promising in-service training course. KEEP provides training and support for foster parents of children ages 5–11 in regular foster care. An evaluation conducted by Price and colleagues (2009) found that KEEP is effective in reducing child behavior problems; there is also evidence that KEEP increases the chances of a positive change of placement (e.g. child reunited with biological parents) and mitigates the negative risk-enhancing effect of a history of multiple placements.

Together Facing the Challenge is a promising in-service intervention focused on therapeutic foster care. Developed and piloted in North Carolina by Farmer, Murray, and colleagues, this training/ coaching/organizational development intervention is designed to (1) cultivate supportive relationships between TFC agency staff and foster parents; (2) teach effective behavior management techniques to foster parents; and (3) cultivate supportive relationships between foster parents and the children in their homes.

Web/computer-based in-service training also shows promise. The California Clearinghouse and Piescher and colleagues (2008) both see some evidence to support the effectiveness of Foster Parent College, which offers training to foster parents both online and through DVD. For example, a preliminary study suggests the course "Anger Outburst" helps foster parents develop increased knowledge and confidence. Other topics available through Foster Parent College include dealing with serious child behavior problems, strengthening family relationships, and behavior management for children diagnosed with mental illnesses. Parenting Wisely (PAW), a self-administered, highly interactive CD-ROM-based program, teaches parents and children (aged 9-18) skills to improve their relationships and

decrease conflict through support and behavior management. According to Piescher and colleagues, Parenting Wisely is associated with the development and maintenance of effective foster parent knowledge and skills as well as improved child behavior.
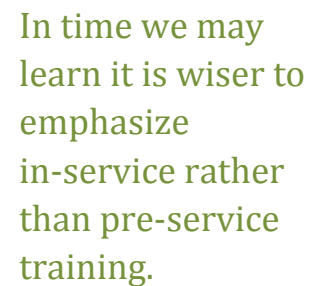
Discussion

There are foster parent <u>in-service</u> training courses that, when implemented with fidelity, produce positive outcomes. However, achieving and sustaining fidelity to these training models may be difficult for North Carolina child-placing agencies, since these models tend to be more intensive (e.g., KEEP requires a 90-minute group per week plus a 10-minute call with each parent per week over a course of 16 weeks), and/or tailored to specific populations (e.g., Incredible Years targets parents of children aged 4-8), and/or rely on high levels of support and coaching, and individualized training from agencies. Still, the early signs of success from *Together Facing the Challenge* (Farmer, 2009) are promising.

With regard to pre-service training, however, the field is in an in-between time. We must wait until further studies are done and the body of evidence about what is effective expands. Of course, states and agencies don't have the option of sitting back until we know more. They must have a way—today—of ensuring that children have high quality foster families to meet their needs.

Based on support for the effectiveness of behavioral training and the lack of support for pre-service training, Dorsey and colleagues (2008) hypothesize that when they have more evidence, states and agencies may conclude it is wiser to shift some of the time and resources they are investing in pre-service to in-service training.

> In time we may learn it is wiser to emphasize in-service rather than pre-service training.

Some states have not waited. Wisconsin now requires an abbreviated, online pre-service training (6 hours prior to licensure for kinship and traditional family foster care), followed by a "foundation" training similar in length and content to MAPP, followed by an "ongoing" (i.e., in-service) requirement training. However, since Wisconsin's new approach to foster parent training went into effect in January 2011, it is too soon to say how well it works. Wisconsin's approach is not radically different from what North Carolina is doing currently, but it shifts much of the required training to after licensure. Potential advantages of this approach: increases agencies' ability to recruit, pre-service train, and license resource families—agencies are no longer limited to offering pre-service just 1-3 times a year; may increase foster parent learning/retention of learning, since they will be getting much of their training at a time when they may have children in their home, which would give them incentive to learn and an opportunity to apply what they are learning. Definite and potential cons: does not allow the same amount of time for the agency to get to know the applicants; foster parent applicants do not learn in a group context; such an approach may not adequately prepare those who become licensed, especially those who receive placements soon after licensure; may increase need/pressure on agencies to provide "foundation" training soon after licensing and on an ongoing basis throughout the year.

1d. What results does our current foster parent training system produce?

The CFSR

One high-profile assessment of North Carolina's foster parent training system is the rating provided by the federal Child and Family Services Review (CFSR). In both the 2001 and 2007 CFSR, North Carolina's foster parent training was rated as a strength. In 2007, the review described North Carolina's training program for foster parents and other caregivers to be "of very high quality" (USDHHS, 2007). While this is good news, an analysis by Grimm (2003) questions the quality of the CFSR process for rating foster parent training in the states, based in part on the fact that some states were rated highly but had very low requirements for training. At the time of Grimm's review, North Carolina was one of only 10 states that required 30 hours of pre-service training. North Carolina's 10 hour per year in-service requirement is in the middle of the 4-20 hour per year range across the country. A number of states have a higher requirement than North Carolina for in-service training during the first year of fostering.

Training's Connection to Outcomes

Given the wide range of case-specific and systemic factors that influence what happens to children and foster families across the state, it's difficult to measure the effect of foster parent training on child and family or administrative outcomes. In fact, with the exception of an evaluation of the KEEP behavior-management curriculum (Price et al., 2009), researchers have not been able to measure an effect of specific foster parent training curricula on child outcomes (CEBCCW, 2010; Christensen & McMurtry, 2007; Dorsey et al., 2008; Lee &Holland, 1991; Turner et al., 2007, among others). However, we know that the degree to which foster parents are prepared and supported in caring for children does have an impact on the experiences of those children. Certain outcomes—such as maltreatment in foster care and placement stability—are clearly linked to training goals of realistic foster parent assessment and improved skills, attitudes, and knowledge. Other outcomes—such as length of time in care and success of reunification —can be at least theoretically linked to how well the foster parent training system reinforces such priorities as reasonable efforts for reunification, timely permanency, and shared parenting. We also know that training can increase foster parents' feelings of competency (Christensen & McMurtry, 2007; Treacy & Fisher, 1993), positive attitudes towards children with behavioral problems (Runyan & Fullerton, 1991) and, in some cases, their parenting skills (Piescher, et al., 2008). Any attempt to make decisions about our foster parent training system, then, should consider where North Carolina is at present and where we would like to see improvement on both child and administrative outcomes.

Child and Family Outcomes

Child and family outcomes are those that relate to the safety, well-being, and permanence of individual children and their families.

1. **Maltreatment in foster care**. North Carolina and the federal government use the following to measure the incidence of maltreatment in foster care: "Among all the children in foster care during the 12 month reporting period, what percentage of this total DOES NOT have a substantiated report of abuse and/or neglect where the perpetrator was a foster parent or facility staff member." In SFY 2009-10, the most recent year for which we have complete data, 99.86% of all North Carolina children in foster care met this standard. Put another way, in this same time period, 19 out of 14,072 North Carolina children experienced maltreatment while in foster care (Duncan, et al., 2011). Our state's performance on this measure has surpassed the

federal standard, which is 94.6%, every year since 2000-2001 (USDHHS, 2010; Duncan et al., 2011).

   That said, recent information from the NC Division of Social Services indicates maltreatment in foster care and revocations of foster parent licenses due to serious rule violations is a growing concern. In the 11 months stretching from Jan. 1-Dec. 2, 2010, there were 29 revocations (26 for maltreatment of foster children) and 22 pending revocations (19 for maltreatment of foster children) (NCDSS, 2011).

2. **Placement Stability**. After addressing data quality concerns, North Carolina has surpassed the federal standard for placement stability for the last seven years. The following measure is used: "Of all children served in foster care during the 12 month reporting period, how many experienced **two or fewer** foster care placements?" During SFY 2009-10, North Carolina achieved this standard for 88% of those in care for less than 12 months; 69% of those in care between 12 and 24 months; and 38% of those in care longer than 24 months (Duncan, et al., 2011). It should be noted that meeting this standard still leaves many children experiencing a troubling number of moves. North Carolina's 2007 CFSR review also suggested that, in the majority of cases, placement changes might have been avoided if agencies had intervened to support foster families in managing children's challenging behaviors (USDHHS, 2007).

3. **Length of Stay in Care**. Over the last five years, children in North Carolina have, on average, spent longer in foster care than their counterparts in other states. During SFY 2009-10, children discharged from foster care to reunification spent an average of 9.3 months in foster care, compared to the national median of 6.5 months. A similar measurement of children discharged to reunification within 12 months is also above the national median in North Carolina. In fiscal year 2009-10, only 58% of children discharged to reunification achieved this standard, compared to the national median of 70% (Duncan et al., 2011).

Process/Administrative Outcomes

For the purposes of this assessment, we define process/administrative outcomes as those that relate to North Carolina's system for selecting, training, and retaining foster parents.

4. **Foster Parent Retention**. Nationally, turnover among foster parents is reported to range from 30 to 50% in some agencies (Christian, 2002). Turnover among newly licensed foster parents is especially high: recent studies of three states found that the average length of service for foster families was only 8 to 14 months (Gibbs, 2005; Gibbs & Wildfire, 2007). Turnover among foster parents is certainly an issue in North Carolina: although the system added 1,176 new foster homes in SFY 09-10, the total number of licensed foster homes actually declined slightly (NCDSS, 2010a). High foster parent turnover creates ongoing demands for agency staff to recruit, train and license additional resource families, and can undermine placement stability and other child and family outcomes.

> Most respondents from child-placing agencies say pre-service supports the mutual assessment process.

5. **Selection of Foster Parents**. Does the foster parent pre-service training used in North Carolina help select high quality applicants for foster care licensure? Most child-placing agencies that participated in this assessment believe it does: 82% of

survey respondents from public agencies and 93% of respondents from private agencies said their pre-service course was "useful" or "very useful" when it came to the mutual assessment process.

NCDSS training staff agreed that MAPP/GPS, the most commonly used pre-service course, can be an excellent foster parent selection tool. The problem, they believe, is not MAPP but child welfare agencies' divergence from the MAPP training as written. NCDSS training staff concern with lack of fidelity is based on comments from participants (e.g., one said she had attended MAPP in her agency and had loved the videos, although there are no videos on MAPP/GPS) and participant responses on evaluations completed at the end of the MAPP TOT.

In general, those graduating from the Division's MAPP TOT are optimistic about their ability to be faithful to the MAPP training model when they return to their agencies. Of those who attended the Division's MAPP TOT classes between January 1, 2008 and January 31, 2010, 93.4% said they would be supported at work to use what they learned and 99.6% said they intended to use what they learn on the job.

However, evidence of lack of fidelity to the MAPP curriculum can be found in the fact that, although MAPP and the Division's MAPP certification trainers strongly advocate that the course be co-trained by a foster parent/child welfare professional team, just 14% of private agency staff and 22% of public agency staff say foster parents help deliver pre-service in their agency.

Staff members in the Division's Regulatory and Licensing Services Unit are concerned about the selection process based on the high rate of foster care licensure applications they must return. Out of a batch of 96 therapeutic foster home applications it recently received, 35 were approved (36%) and 61 were returned (64%) to the child-placing agency. Return numbers were similar for family foster home applications: from a batch of 30 applications, 13 (43%) were approved and 17 (57%) were returned. NCDSS staff report that although many of these applications were returned for procedural errors (e.g., failure to complete all required fields on a form), others were returned for reasons directly related to the selection process (e.g., agency failed to document or explain why an applicant with significant health challenges had the capacity to be an effective caregiver, or to explain criminal misdemeanors).

Competition among agencies may be influencing selection decisions. The number of private child-placing agencies has surged recently. (For example, in April 2007 North Carolina had 82 private child-placing agencies; today there are 125, a 52% increase.) In this context, agencies face increased competition for foster parents. It is possible that a focus on this competition may be causing individual licensing staff or some agencies to be less selective than is appropriate. Agency survey results indicate that applicants at private agencies are much more likely to become licensed after starting pre-service training: nearly two thirds of private agency workers said between 41 and 100% of applicants become licensed. Just over one third of respondents from public agencies answered this way.

Oversight of Foster Parent Training

In North Carolina, the NC Division of Social Services and the state's public and private child-placing agencies are jointly responsible for ensuring that foster parents meet training requirements. As part of their foster care programs, most supervising agencies offer pre-service and in-service training on a regular basis. Licensing staff in supervising agencies also regularly ensure foster parents receive required
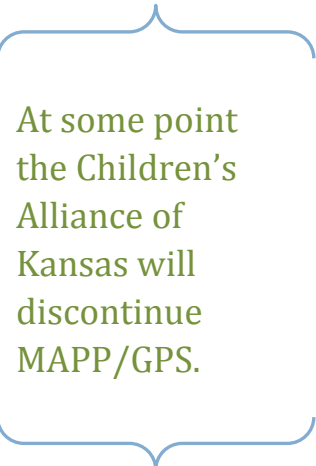
training as part of licensure and relicensure. In turn, the Division of Social Services assesses how well each agency monitors foster parent training when it reviews requests for licensure and relicensure, as well as through site visits to child-placing agencies. Although it sometimes identifies instances of foster parents who have not had mandatory training, because foster parent training information is contained in each individual foster parent's file in their supervising agency, the current system of oversight cannot provide administrators with statewide data on foster parent training compliance or help them identify and respond to training needs.

II. What would improve North Carolina's system of training foster parents?

The sections above describe North Carolina's current system for training foster parents, share the views of stakeholders, and relate current research on foster parent training. In this section we draw on this information to identify and explore various options as our state considers how best to improve its system for training foster parents and kinship care providers.

Pre-Service Training

In North Carolina's foster parent training system most of the time, energy, and resources are devoted to pre-service training. Among stakeholders there is general satisfaction with pre-service. Clearly, updates to MAPP are needed, but in terms of research studies, national norms, stakeholder input, or child or administrative outcomes, there appear to be few compelling reasons to take the major step of switching from MAPP/GPS to another pre-service curriculum. Still, at some point in the future—possibly the near future—the Children's Alliance of Kansas will discontinue MAPP/GPS in favor of PS-MAPP (Gibson, 2011). When this happens North Carolina will have several options, which are described below:

> At some point the Children's Alliance of Kansas will discontinue MAPP/GPS.

1. **Switch to PS-MAPP**. Since it is more recent, PS-MAPP might satisfy stakeholders who find MAPP/GPS outdated. As indicated earlier in this report, transitioning to PS-MAPP would likely bring a dramatic increase in costs associated with foster parent pre-service training; these costs recur annually. Switching to PS-MAPP would also likely bring some disruption as foster parent trainers across the state "upgrade" to the new version. There is no empirical evidence this curriculum is effective.

2. **Purchase MAPP curricula outright and make needed updates/changes.** North Carolina might be able to purchase the rights to MAPP/GPS from Children's Alliance of Kansas. The cost of this is unknown. It would, however, be a one-time expense. Once North Carolina owned the rights, by itself or in collaboration with partners the Division of Social Services could modify the curriculum as it saw fit. Statewide implementation of this new "state created" foster parent pre-service course could be achieved through webinar or 1-day classroom training on updates for current MAPP trainers; certification of new trainers could remain relatively unchanged. Unless the Division built in a multi-year evaluation, there would be no empirical evidence about the effectiveness of this "state-created" curriculum.

3. **Switch to PRIDE**. Like switching to PS-MAPP, switching to PRIDE would likely involve significant and ongoing increase in costs. Additionally, the challenge of "rolling out" PRIDE to the state's foster parent trainers would likely be greater than for PS-MAPP, since PS-MAPP has much in common with MAPP/GPS. On the plus side, the PRIDE pre-service is part of a larger continuum

of training resources that includes a process for creating foster parent development plans, numerous in-service modules, and a course for kinship caregivers. Of course, these additional resources would bring with them additional costs.

4. **Adopt another state's curriculum**. If it did additional research and negotiated well, North Carolina might be able to purchase or obtain for free one of the approximately 12 "state-created" foster parent pre-service curricula. The benefits of this would depend on the curriculum in question. The challenges and cons would likely be similar to those of switching to PRIDE or PS-MAPP.

5. **Develop new NC pre-service curriculum**. North Carolina might opt to create its own pre-service training "from scratch." This option would bring with it a longer timeframe (for development) when compared to selecting an existing curriculum. Initial costs would be substantial, but with minimal ongoing annual costs for printing and revisions. If it pursues this route, North Carolina should seriously consider how new technologies could be used to provide greater flexibility to the pre-service training and selection process. It may wish to explore the suggestion of Dorsey and colleagues (2008) and decrease the emphasis on pre-service training while increasing the focus and resources dedicated to in-service training. It would be important to learn as much as possible from Wisconsin and any other states pursuing similar foster parent training approaches. A drawback of this option is that it would take a number of years and significant funding to develop a new curriculum and then evaluate whether it has a measurable effect on foster parent or child outcomes. On the plus side, the curriculum could be developed based on the current state of research on relevant topics such as placement disruption, developmental needs of children in care, contributing factors to child maltreatment, foster parent retention, etc.

Options to Consider If/When MAPP/GPS Is Discontinued

Option	Research-Based Support?	Practice-Based Support (Response to stakeholder feedback)?	Cost/Issues re: Curriculum Material (155 TOT graduates annually)	Cost/issues re: Implementation (Train-the-Trainer certification, etc.)
1. Switch to PS-MAPP	No	Yes	$123,845 per year Ongoing expense	Maintain current TOT process and certifications with webinar or 1-day classroom training on updates for current MAPP trainers
2. Attempt to purchase MAPP outright and make needed updates/changes	No	Yes	? One-time only expense	Maintain current TOT process and certifications with webinar or 1-day classroom training on updates for current MAPP trainers
3. Switch to PRIDE	Yes	Yes	$113,150 per year Ongoing Expense	Need to roll-out TOT certification for all pre-service trainers in the state
4. Switch to a state-created pre-service course	No	?	?	Need to roll-out TOT certification for all pre-service trainers in the state
5. Develop an original NC pre-service curriculum	Yes and No	Yes	Substantial up-front development costs; Minimal ongoing costs printing and revision	Need to roll-out TOT certification for all pre-service trainers in the state.

There are a number of unknowns in these estimates, but we believe that if the decision is made to move away from MAPP/GPS, options 2 and 5 above may be the most attractive.

Prior to the First Placement
Currently training for foster parents prior to the first placement focuses on providing practical, hands-on training that equips foster parents to address specific, common health and safety needs (CPR, medical administration, universal precautions, etc.). This assessment did not find a compelling reason to alter this component of the state's foster parent training system.

In-Service Training
This is the weakest area of North Carolina's foster parent training system. The deliberate, ongoing professional development of licensed foster parents has the potential to meaningfully impact child well-being and other outcomes. Yet the ongoing development of foster parents receives, at best, inconsistent attention in our state. We believe that the experience of Murray and colleagues (2010) is representative and illustrates this issue. In their recent work with 15 therapeutic foster care agencies in North Carolina, they observed that although TFC foster parents received "extensive" pre-service training, "once a child was placed in the home . . . the system of training seemed to break down. Agencies varied greatly in the frequency and content of on-going training offered to treatment parents, and most of the sites reported low attendance rates even when it was offered."

Children and families, foster parents, and child welfare agencies could benefit if North Carolina changed its approach to foster parent in-service training by doing one or more of the following:

1. Provide more training resources child-placing agencies can use with foster parents. Ideally, these training resources will be multi-faceted and include lecture-based information, instructional videos or demonstration of new practices, practical examples, and opportunities for practice with behavioral feedback (Murray, 2010). These courses should address topics such as behavior management and grief and loss training, and could include TOTs and courses child-placing agencies can implement without guidance. On its own or in collaboration with existing partners (e.g., universities, NC Foster and Adoptive Parent Association) the Division could also develop/sponsor regionally-available training based on the current state of research on relevant topics such as placement disruption, developmental needs of children in care, contributing factors to child maltreatment, foster parent retention, etc.

2. Increase availability of online foster parent training. There is a limit to the amount of didactic training that foster parents—especially those who are employed and care for multiple children—can attend. Ongoing professional development of foster parents could be enhanced if the state endorsed and recommended existing online foster parent training resources (e.g., Foster Parent College). The Division could either sponsor (fund) the training or communicate the expectation that agencies or foster parents themselves pay for it; costs for many online courses range from $8-$35 per person. An additional or alternative option would be to work with current providers of online training for NC child welfare staff to modify these courses and make them available to foster parents; topic areas that could be made available relatively quickly include child mental health and child development. On its own or in collaboration with existing partners (e.g., universities, NC Foster and Adoptive Parent Association) the Division could also

begin sponsoring webinars on topics identified by research and by foster parents and other stakeholders as important.

3. <u>Require and support statewide use of foster parent development plans</u>. Agencies should be required to partner with licensed foster parents to create individualized plans to ensure each foster parent thoughtfully and deliberately grows as a helping professional.

4. <u>Centrally track foster parent training</u>. The state would be better equipped to guide and assess the effectiveness of the training system if it regularly gathered and analyzed data that would permit it to answer questions such as the following:
   o Are there enough foster parents in a specific community? Data needed to answer this question:
     ▪ How many of the county's children are in foster care?
     ▪ How many of these children are placed in the county?
     ▪ How many foster parents are located in the county?
     ▪ Which agencies supervise those parents?
     ▪ How many of these foster parents are currently caring for a child?
   o Describe the type/frequency of in-service provided to foster parents
   o How long are families fostering? (length of service)
   o Explore relationship between type/frequency of in-service provided and:
     ▪ Foster parent retention
     ▪ Placement stability
     ▪ Maltreatment in foster care
     ▪ Length of stay in foster care

   If North Carolina were able to answer questions such as these on an ongoing basis, it would be better able to assess the effectiveness of its foster parent training system.

5. <u>Promote/require coaching</u>. Increasing use of *in vivo* coaching (i.e., coaching of foster parents in their homes) would be an effective way to develop foster parent skills and support placements. To meaningfully introduce this practice the Division would need to train agency staff (placement, CPS, and licensing workers) to do *in vivo* coaching of foster parents. It would also be important to make it clear to licensed foster parents and foster parent applicants that they should expect regular, ongoing coaching as a part of their professional development throughout their careers. There are at least three courses on offer in North Carolina right now that teach coaching to child welfare staff: *Together Facing the Challenge*, *Coaching in the Kitchen,* and *Staying Power! A Supervisor's Guide to Coaching and Developing Child Welfare Staff*.

Suggestions for Strengthening In-Service Training

Option	Research-Based Support?	Practice-Based Support (Response to stakeholder feedback)?	Cost/Issues re: Curriculum Material	Cost/issues re: Implementation
1. Provide in-service curriculum materials for agency use AND/OR provide additional in-service TOT training	Yes and No*	Yes	Up-front development costs; can be decreased by revising current courses for child welfare social workers	Use current communication methods to inform agencies Use existing training infrastructure
2. Online foster parent training	Yes and No*	Yes	Due to range of options, difficult to generalize about cost	Use current communication methods to inform agencies Use existing training infrastructure (e.g., ncswlearn.org)
3. Require foster parent development plans	Yes and No*	No	None	Change Licensing Rules
4. Centrally track foster parent training	No	No	?	?
5. Recommend or require child-specific coaching for foster parents based on children in the home, to supplement classroom or on-line training	Yes	Yes	None	Integrate into current training for placement social workers and supervisors and other best practice TA provided to counties. Need to revise Licensing rules if required

System Redesign

North Carolina's current system of training foster parents emphasizes pre-service training. Based on empirical support for the effectiveness of behavioral training and the lack of support for pre-service training, Dorsey and colleagues (2008) hypothesize that when they have more evidence, states and agencies may conclude it is wiser to shift some of the time and resources they are investing in pre-service to in-service training.

As mentioned above, some states have not waited. Wisconsin now requires an abbreviated, online pre-service training (6 hours prior to licensure for kinship and traditional family foster care), followed by a "foundation" training similar in length and content to MAPP, followed by an "ongoing" (i.e., in-service) requirement training. Wisconsin's approach is not radically different from what North Carolina is doing currently, but it shifts much of the required training to after licensure.

North Carolina should watch what happens in Wisconsin and any other states that take this approach and, if the evidence supports it, follow suit.

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* As noted in the pre-service section, for some training interventions it would take a number of years and significant funding to evaluate whether the interventions improve foster parent or child outcomes. However, the specific training resources could be developed and adapted based on the current state of research evidence on relevant topics such as placement disruption, developmental needs of children in care, contributing factors to child maltreatment, foster parent retention, etc.

Possible Redesign of NC's Foster Parent Training System

Option	Research-Based Support?	Practice-Based Support (Response to stakeholder feedback)?	Cost/Issues re: Curriculum Material	Cost/issues re: Implementation
Revise NC foster parent training into 3-tier system: a. **Mutual assessment with shorter pre-service training** b. **Behaviorally-based foundation training and coaching for first year** c. **Advanced training and coaching thereafter**	Yes and No	Yes	Substantial up-front development costs; Minimal ongoing costs for printing and revision	Need to roll-out TOT certification for all pre-service trainers in the state. Need to revise licensing rules.

While stakeholder input and current research suggest the need for some improvements to North Carolina's foster parent training system, there is not a clear evidence-based path forward that will ensure improved outcomes. Given the evolving nature of outcomes-based research on foster parent training, it seems wise for North Carolina to focus on improvements to the training infrastructure which would accommodate various curricula that might emerge over time as most effective. The in-service training system in particular could be developed to include recommended content areas, a training database, transition to more online training, and behaviorally-based coaching to meet the needs of North Carolina's foster parents and their children in care.

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Zappala, M. (2007, Sept.). Parent recruitment and training: A crucial, neglected child welfare strategy. *Adoption Advocate, No. 6*. Accessed August 26, 2010 from <https://www.adoptioncouncil.org/publications/adoption-advocate-no6.html>.

Foster Parent Training: Annotated Bibliography
Family and Children's Resource Program, Jordan Institute for Families
UNC-CH School of Social Work
January 2011

Antle, B. & Barbee, A. (2003). Training transfer: Variables that predict and maximize transfer. Louisville, KY: National Resource Center on Child Welfare Training and Evaluation. Accessed August 26, 2010 from <http://www.kentcareteam.org/documents/monographfiles/Trainingtransferfinal.pdf>.

Report from the National Resource Center on Child Welfare Training and Evaluation at Univ. Kentucky concisely summarizes literature on training evaluation and transfer and then focuses on findings from Antle's dissertation. Recommends training refresher courses and training reinforcement specialists, a technique borrowed from law enforcement in which new employees shadow "field training specialists" for 3 months; specialists teach behavioral anchors and provide written assessments to employee and employee's supervisor. Also emphasizes importance of collecting data needed to evaluate training at all levels, including transfer to the job. Recommendations for "refresher" courses at odds with findings of van Camp et al., whose 2008 study found "booster" training was not particularly effective.

Boyd, L. H., & Remy, L. L. (1978). "Is foster-parent training worthwhile?" *Social Service Review, 52,* 275-296. *

In a carefully controlled study, it was found that foster parent training helped to reduce the incidence of children having to leave foster homes, made it more likely for children to have a good outcome in the foster home, and caused foster parents to be more likely to continue in the job. The article discusses how these findings can affect work with high-risk children and children in short-term, long-term, and recurrent placements. [Findings at odds with more recent studies reviewed by Dorsey et al., 2008; Nash, 2009, etc.]

Buysse, V. (2007). Evidence-based practice: Recognizing different ways of knowing. *Early Developments, 11*(1), 4-5. Accessed Nov. 09, 2010 from <www.fpg.unc.edu/assets/products/ed11_1.pdf >.

Proposes the following definition of evidence-based practice for the early childhood field: "a decision-making process that integrates the best available research evidence with family and professional wisdom and values." Author sees EBP as a process that "attempts to balance an emphasis on research knowledge by acknowledging the importance of 'professional wisdom' based on 'experiential learning, situated in practice, and influenced by one's personal beliefs and values, as well as those of the families and communities served in early childhood programs.' The following passage is probably equally true for the field of child welfare: "It is safe to say that the early childhood field is at an early stage in understanding evidence-based practice and its implications for practice."

California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare. (2010). *Resource parent recruitment and training*. San Diego, CA: Chadwick Center for Children and Families. Accessed December 1, 2010 from <http://www.cebc4cw.org/search/topical-area/23>

The CEBC rates various interventions on a 3-point scale based on empirical support for their efficacy, from 1, representing the strongest scientific evidence of efficacy, to 3. Of the training interventions reviewed in CEBC's "Resource Parent Recruitment and Training" category, two received a scientific rating of 3: Foster Parent College and KEEP. CEBC gave PS-MAPP and PRIDE, the two most commonly used foster parent pre-service curricula, a scientific rating of NR (Not Able to Be Rated) due to a lack of sufficient high quality studies demonstrating efficacy.

Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare. (2009). *Children in treatment foster care: Using agency data to study cross-system child outcomes.* **Minn-LInK No. 6. Accessed August 26, 2010 from <http://www.cehd.umn.edu/ssw/cascw/attributes/PDF/minnlink/BriefNo6.pdf>.**

University of Minnesota researchers used statewide Minn-LInK Project data and administrative data from one Minnesota TFC agency to explore a number of cross-system child outcomes. Findings shed light on the prevalence of different diagnoses (adjustment disorder, conduct disorder, RAD/ODD, ADHD) in children and on school attendance rates, special education eligibility, and child welfare involvement. Authors make recommendations for TFC agency data systems and data collection practices. Little direct relevance for foster parent training.

Chamberlain, P., Moreland, S. & Reid, K. (1992). Enhanced service and stipends for foster parents: effects on retention rates and outcomes for children. *Child Welfare, 71,* **387-401.***

This study shows that of three groups of foster parents (those given extra money and extra training, those given extra money, and those given normal amounts of money and training), the ones who received both extra money and extra training were much less likely to leave the system. Parents who received extra training also got additional support from the agency.

Christenson, B., & McMurtry, J. (2007). A comparative evaluation of preservice training of kinship and nonkinship foster/adoptive families. *Child Welfare: Journal of Policy, Practice, and Program, 86*(2), 125-140.

A study of the effectiveness of Foster PRIDE/Adopt PRIDE in Idaho in 2004-2005. PRIDE participants (n = 228 prospective foster/adoptive parents; high percentage of kinship families) completed a pre and posttest survey based on the PRIDE training competencies. Authors conclude PRIDE is an effective training and resource family development program. Study limitations include "lack of replication to date outside of Idaho, inability to generalize results to larger, more diverse states, and lack of long-term longitudinal evaluation of the PRIDE program outcomes over time."

Christenson, B., & McMurtry, J. (2009). A Longitudinal Evaluation of the Preservice Training and Retention of Kinship and Nonkinship Foster/Adoptive Families One and a Half Years After Training. Child Welfare; Jul/Aug2009, Vol. 88 Issue 4, p5-22.

Study explores how well participants retain what they learn in PRIDE. Follow-up study to Christenson and McMurtry (2007). Knowledge tests administered to 114 participants before PRIDE, at graduation, and 18 months later. Study period: 2003-2004. Results: found significant difference in pre-post and pre-post/post competence and foster/adoptive parent retention (80.39% retention rate at 18 months). Author conclusions: PRIDE's lessons stay with program graduates. Findings are in stark contrast to Van Camp's study of BASP.

Dorsey, S., Farmer, E.M., Barth, R.P, Greene, K.M., Reid, J., & Landsverk, J. (2008). Current status and evidence base of training for foster and treatment foster parents. Children and Youth Services Review, 30, 1403-1416.

Respected researchers rigorously review the research literature to assess the utility of foster parent training. Based on findings from studies that meet high scientific standards, they conclude that "At present, there is remarkably little empirical evidence for the type of training that foster parents receive. MAPP and PRIDE, the two most widely used training curricula, have virtually no empirical support" and the "evidence base is not yet strong enough to truly guide practice in the area of foster parent training." Based on existing evidence, they suggest that the most promising way to build foster parent skills is to deliver the training AFTER the child is placed in the home, and to combine the training with coaching and skill implementation feedback. They speculate that as it develops, the research may eventually endorse reducing the amount of hours required for pre-service training, "allowing more time to be spent on skills-based training once foster parents have a youth placed in their home" (p. 1414).

Florida Office of Inspector General. (2008, October). Lack of data makes it difficult to assess foster parent training. Tallahassee, FL: Florida Department of Children and Families. Accessed August 26, 2010 from <http://centerforchildwelfare.fmhi.usf.edu/kb/FlPerformance/OIG_Rpt-FP_Training10-08pdf.pdf >.

Florida's Office of the Inspector General conducted an internal audit that focused on MAPP training as administered by community-based care (CBC) and sub-contracted providers. Period under review: 2006-07. Findings and recommendations: (1) the size, cost, and effectiveness of Florida's MAPP training cannot be determined due to poor documentation/data quality; (2) consolidated (delivery of MAPP in less than 10 weeks) training should be monitored. Florida's MAPP providers recommended developing a tool for assessing the effectiveness of MAPP, presenting more realistic experiences to prospective foster parents, examining pre-service training used in other states, and placing greater emphasis on behavior management. Report seems to indicate Florida is taking steps to offer MAPP booster sessions every two years, make MAPP available to kin caregivers, and add to relicensure process an evaluation the family is asked to complete that focuses on each of MAPP's objectives (the 12 skills).

Grimm, B. (2003). Foster parent training: What the CFS reviews do and don't tell us. Youth Law News. Accessed August 26, 2010 from <http://www.youthlaw.org/fileadmin/ncyl/youthlaw/publications/yln/2003/issue_2/03_yln_2_grimm_cfs_rev_3.pdf>.

Senior attorney with the National Center for Youth Law specializing in child welfare explores what the first round of federal Child and Family Services Reviews reveals about foster parent training. Reviewed data from the 34 states that had completed the CFSR process in 2001 and 2002. Foster parent training rated as a strength in 27 states (79% of those reviewed). However, little data to support these high marks. Some states rated highly had very low requirements for training. Few states know if training requirements are being satisfied. States that do collect information usually collect very limited data and/or data of poor quality. Even when requirements are not rigorous they are not being met. Only a few states require foster parents to have an individualized training plan (Ohio, Michigan). Common pre-service courses (MAPP, PRIDE, IHS) address similar content. In California and Iowa, foster parent training is provided through the community college system (p. 15). In Tennessee and New Hampshire, state universities contract to provide the training. Suggests collecting accurate data identifying the frequency and nature of disabilities and chronic conditions among state foster care populations and using this information to guide plans for foster parent training.

Jacobs, M. (1980). "Foster Parent Training: an Opportunity for Skills Enrichment and Empowerment." Child Welfare, 59, 614-624.*

Describes a foster parent training model that addresses the isolation and powerlessness many foster parents feel by stressing foster parent empowerment. This is taught in addition to the usual foster parent training, which stresses building knowledge and skills.

Lee, J.H., & Holland, T.P. (1991). "Evaluating the Effectiveness of Foster Parent Training." Research on Social Work Practice, 1, 162-174.*

Evaluates a specially designed foster parent training program and finds no difference between foster parents who went through this program and a control group. This is at odds with earlier studies; reasons are offered based on the design and other details of the study, and on the training program itself.

Murray, M. M., Southerland, D., Farmer, E. M. & Ballentine, K. (2010). Enhancing and adapting treatment foster care: Lessons learned in trying to change practice. Journal of Child and Family Studies, 19, 393-403.

Of the 3,500 therapeutic foster care (TFC) agencies in the U.S., about 50 adhere to the evidence-based model of TFC developed by Chamberlain, et al. The remaining agencies offer non-evidence based, "usual care" TFC. This paper describes the pilot in North Carolina of *Together Facing the Challenge*, a training/coaching/organizational development intervention designed to (1) cultivate supportive relationships between TFC agency staff and foster parents; (2) teach effective behavior management techniques to foster parents; and (3) cultivate supportive relationships between foster parents and the

children in their homes. Authors explore what they learned about facilitating practice change in existing organizations, especially related to engagement, roles and responsibilities, culture, and coaching.

Nash, J. J. & Flynn, R. J. (n.d.). The relationship between foster parent training and outcomes for looked after children in Canada [presentation]. Ottowa, Canada: Centre for Research on Educational and Community Services. Accessed August 26, 2010 from <www.socialsciences.uottawa.ca/crecs/eng/documents/Impact-08-09-16.pdf>.

Doctoral student's slide presentation focusing on links between foster parent training and child outcomes. One of the most commonly used types of training in her study is LAC (Looking After Children), which is Canadian (Looking after children: a practitioner's guide, 2007, by Raymond A. Lemay & Hayat Ghazal). Anticipated finding mild, positive association. Found the opposite: foster parents who received more types of training reported the child in their care to have more total difficulties. Training was mildly associated with less positive child outcomes. Interpretation: training sensitizes foster parents, making them better detectors and reporters of difficulties. Implications for practice: be sure to build in content about the need to focus on positive behavior and adverse consequences of focusing too much on the negative. Author is consistent with other studies (Dorsey, et al., etc.) in concluding "Overall, cross-sectionally, it seems that foster parent training doesn't have a lot to do with child outcomes."

Nash, J., & Flynn, R. (2009). Foster-parent training and foster-child outcomes: An exploratory cross-sectional analysis. Vulnerable Children and Youth Studies, 4(2), 128-134.

[This study is a fuller presentation of the findings shared in Nash & Flynn, 2008.] Canadian study used cross-sectional data from a larger outcome-monitoring project to explore links between foster parent training and child outcomes. Sample=603 foster children, aged 10-17 years, and their foster (93%) or kinship parents (7%). The foster or kinship parents received an average of about two types of training (range 0-5). Two major findings: (1) overall, training was unrelated to child outcomes studied, which authors note is consistent with the sparse literature available on training and outcomes; (2) increased training was associated with more identification of child behavioral difficulties, which suggests a 'sensitizing effect' is created with increased training.

Noble, L.S., & Euster, S.D. (1981). "Foster Parent Input: a Crucial Element in Training." Child Welfare, 60, 35-42.*

Through input from foster parents, a foster parent training curriculum and the agency's teaching methods were tested and revised. The study finds that foster parent involvement in designing the training program is crucial if it is to be effective.

Norgard, K.E., & Mayhall, P.D. (1982). "Everybody Counts: the Foster Family Institute." Child Welfare, 61, (23) 9-246.*

Describes one program that consulted foster parents in developing a training program for them, with special attention to cultural differences. A wide range of services and trainings were then offered to foster families, which the agency found to be both cost-effective and successful at engaging and educating foster families.

Pasztor, E. M. (2009). Confessions of a Foster Parent Trainer. Fostering Families Today, (July/August 2009), 16-21.

The author, who has 40 years experience in foster parent training, reflects on what has changed in the field, what has not, and what the future holds. Pasztor, who contributed to the development of both MAPP and PRIDE, the two most commonly used foster parent pre-service training courses in the US today, concludes that while progress has been made, much work remains. Concludes with a list of recommendations for assessing and increasing the impact of foster parent training on the child welfare system.

Piescher, K. N. (2008). Evidence-based practice in foster parent training and support: Implications for treatment foster care providers [quick reference guide]. Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare, University of Minnesota School of Social Work. Accessed August 26, 2010 from <http://www.cehd.umn.edu/ssw/cascw/attributes/PDF/publications/Quick%20Reference%20Guide%20Final.pdf>.

A companion to a review by CASCW within the University of Minnesota School of Social Work (Piescher, et al., 2008). Defines EBP as a process of posing a question, searching for and evaluating evidence, and applying the evidence within a client- or policy-specific context (Regehr, Stern, & Shlonsky, 2007). See Buysse, 2007 for somewhat different definition of EBP. Excludes consideration of training modalities/programs which have not been linked to specific outcomes. On this basis, PRIDE is included (rated as an "emerging practice" the lowest score on the EBP scale they use) and MAPP is not. General conclusion is that the "training programs outlined in the report are most useful in creating positive changes in parenting knowledge, attitudes, self-efficacy, behaviors, skills, and to a lesser extent, child behaviors." Speculates that use of effective training programs in TFC may lead to increased treatment foster parent satisfaction, licensing rates, retention, and placement stability and permanency for TFC youth" (p. 5).

Piescher, K. N., Schmidt, M. & LaLiberte, T. (2008, October). Evidence-based practice in foster parent training and support: Implications for treatment foster care providers. Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare, University of Minnesota School of Social Work. Accessed Nov. 09, 2010 from <www.cehd.umn.edu/ssw/cascw/attributes/PDF/EBP/EBPFPTrainingSupportComplete.pdf>.

This lengthy review by CASCW at the University of Minnesota School of Social Work evaluates pre-service and in-service training as well as foster parent support approaches (e.g., providing benefits) and selection/support inventories. Covers many courses/models, but not always in great depth. Differs from Dorsey et al., Turner et al., and others in general endorsing the efficacy (works in tightly controlled context) and effectiveness (works in real world) of some current programs. Although it rates MAPP as an "emerging practice" authors note that no studies conducted to date "have found MAPP to produce the desired results (Lee & Holland, 1991; Puddy & Jackson, 2003; and Rhodes, Orme, Cox, & Buehler, 2003). Additionally, families with psychosocial problems and less resources express greater likelihood of not continuing foster care after completing this pre-service training (Rhodes et al., 2003)." However, many of the pre-service and in-service training models the authors support (e.g., Parent-Child Interaction Therapy, Incredible Years, Triple P-Positive Parenting Program) seem far beyond the capacity of most agencies to implement, especially public agencies. Believe computer-based (Parenting Wisely) and web-based (Foster Parent) training for foster parents hold promise. Rates Casey Foster Family Assessments (CHAP and CFAI) as an "Emerging Practice" that "could be quite valuable to treatment foster agencies as a means of assessing 1) the support that foster parents need, and 2) likely sources of support."

Price, J. M., Chamberlain, P., Landsverk, J., Reid, J., Leve, L., & Laurent, H. (2008). Effects of a foster parent training intervention on placement changes of children in foster care. Child Maltreatment, 13, 64-75.

Study assessed whether use of KEEP curriculum with representative sample of foster parents (700 San Diego families—34% kinship, 66% nonrelative—with children aged 5-12; study conducted 1999-2004) would affect placement stability. KEEP is a parent management training model. In this study, they used paraprofessionals (trained in a 5-day TOT) to lead small groups of foster parents (3-10 ppl per group) for 16 weeks of training, supervision, and support in behavior management methods. (KEEP sounds similar to portions of *Becoming a Therapeutic Foster Parent*, and to what Maureen Murray offers in *Together Facing the Challenge*.) Assumptions guiding study: (1) children's externalizing behaviors significantly contribute to negative (e.g., disruption) placement moves and detract from positive placement (reunification, placement with relative, adoption) moves; (2) children with history of placement disruptions are more likely to have additional negative moves. Study found that using KEEP increased

chances of positive exit from care and mitigated the risk-enhancing effect of a history of multiple (especially 4+) placements. Based on this study, agencies may wish to consider: "targeting KEEP or similar interventions to caretakers of children with high levels of externalizing behaviors AND those with a history of placement instability." Nash & Flynn, 2009, call this "the only randomized study to date that provides positive evidence in favor of foster parent training."

Price, J., Chamberlain, P., Landsverk, J., Reid, J. (2009). KEEP foster-parent training intervention: model description and effectiveness. Child & Family Social Work; May2009, Vol. 14 Issue 2, p233-242.

Authors report on initial findings from an assessment of the effectiveness of Keeping Foster Parents Trained and Supported (KEEP), a modified version of the Oregon Social Learning Center's Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care. KEEP=training and support for children ages 5–11 in regular foster care. Tested the intervention in 2 phases, one with the development team supervising the first cohort of interventionists; the other set of interventionists had no direct contact with developers. Participants in the intervention group received 16 weeks of training, supervision, and support in behavior management methods. Intervention groups consisted of 3 to 10 foster parents and were conducted by a trained facilitator and co-facilitator team. Authors conclude that KEEP leads to changes in parenting behavior, which in turn reduces child behavior problems. Effect was strongest for children with higher levels of initial behavior problems. "There is also evidence that the KEEP foster-parent training intervention increases the chances of a positive change of placement (e.g. child reunited with biological parents) and mitigates the negative risk-enhancing effect of a history of multiple placements. Children in the KEEP intervention group were nearly twice as likely to experience a positive exit. Impressive study of a promising intervention.

Runyan, A., & Fullerton, S. (1981). "Foster Care Provider Training: a Preventive Program." Children and Youth Services Review, 3, 127-141.*

This study finds that foster parent training is effective in improving foster parents' attitudes toward children, children's behavior, and the relationship between the foster parents and the agency.

Simon, R.D., & Simon, D.K. (1982). "The Effect of Foster Parent Selection and Training on Service Delivery." Child Welfare, 61, 515-524.*

Contrary to the fear that more training would discourage potential foster parents, it was found that the number of licensed foster homes increased when more training was offered. Training also increased the foster parents' workload and caused them to be matched with more difficult children, as well as ensuring a lower rate of placement disruption.

Treacy, E.C., & Fisher, C.B. (1993). "Foster Parenting the Sexually Abused: A Family Life Education Program." Journal of Child Sexual Abuse, 2, 47-63. (Compiled for the National Resource Center for Permanency Planning by Annie Avery, August 1995). *

Shows that special training helps parents feel more competent and be more at ease with children's sexual development and sexualized behavior.

Turner, W., Macdonald, G. & Dennis, J.A. (2007). Behavioural and cognitive behavioural training interventions for assisting foster carers in the management of difficult behaviour. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews, Issue 1. Art. No.: CD003760. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD003760.pub3.

This rigorous review of the literature by British researchers attempted to determine what impact behavioral and cognitive behavioral training for foster parents (e.g., the incredible years, an early version of KEEP, ABC, and others) had on children, foster parents, and agency outcomes. Because of high standards for studies to be included in this review, only 6 studies were selected; most had small sample sizes. Findings were consistent with those of Dorsey et al., 2008. Conclusion: "Training interventions evaluated to date appear to have very little effect on outcomes relating to looked-after children, assessed in relation to psychological functioning, extent of behavioural problems and interpersonal

functioning. Results relating to foster carer(s) outcomes also show no evidence of effectiveness in measures of behavioural management skills, attitudes and psychological functioning."

Van Camp, C., Vollmer, T.R., Goh, H., Whitehouse, C., Reyes, J.R., Montgomery, J., & Borrero, J. (2008). Behavioral parent training in child welfare: Evaluations of skills acquisition. Research on Social Work Practice, 18, 377-391.

Study attempted to reach conclusions about training evaluation Levels II (Pre/Post Test, measuring whether participants know more after the training than before) and Level III (Implementation, measuring whether participants use what they learned) for "the only statewide behavioral parent training program of its kind" (p. 387)—Florida's Behavior Analysis Services Program (BASP). Rationale for BASP: MAPP training (which Florida requires) spends an inadequate amount of time (only 3 hours) on behavior management. BASP includes 30-hour in-class training, plus chance to opt-in to in-home work with behavior analyst (1x/week for up to 20 weeks), plus access to 24/7 behavior analyst hotline. Period under study: 2001 and 2002. Author conclusion: BASP increases parenting skills.

Van Camp, C.M., Montgomery, J.L., Vollmer, T.R., Kosarek, J.A., Happe, S., Burgos, V., & Marizolillo, A. (2008). Behavioral parent training in child welfare: Effects of booster training. Research on Social Work Practice, 18, 392-400.

Study attempts (a) to assess skill maintenance 8 to 35.5 months following an initial 30-hr behavioral training program (Florida's BASP) for foster parents and (b) to evaluate whether a 6-hr booster training would raise caregivers' skill performance to levels similar to those observed during posttests of the initial training. Sample size was quite small: n=8. Many participants did not show long-term maintenance after the 30 hours of initial behavioral training. Much variability in training effectiveness based on student profile—some graduated from the initial training with low levels of learning, and so the "booster" was remedial for them. Others knew a lot prior to the initial training, so it and the booster were too long and too basic for them. Results suggest "a more individualized approach to parent training may be necessary to provide necessary and sufficient training in the most cost-effective manner" (p. 399). Study cast doubt on the efficacy of in-home behavioral analyst (p. 399).

Zappala, M. (2007, Sept.). Parent recruitment and training: A crucial, neglected child welfare strategy. Adoption Advocate, No. 6. Accessed August 26, 2010 from <https://www.adoptioncouncil.org/publications/adoption-advocate-no6.html>.

Alarmed by the rising number of youth aging out of foster care, the National Council for Adoption explored why more children aren't adopted out of foster care in 2005. Partial answer: states are not spending as much as they should on recruitment and training of foster and adoptive parents. Concludes 1.2 percent to 1.3 percent of available federal funds on parent recruitment and training services. North Carolina comes out smelling like a rose: among all 50 states, NC spends the highest percentage of available federal resources (21.24% -- 21.34%, or $122,396,000 -- $122,987,000) on foster parent recruitment and training.

Survey of Public and Private Agency Staff

To learn about North Carolina's foster parent training system, faculty from UNC administered an online survey to child welfare supervisors and foster home licensing social workers from public and licensed private child-placing agencies across the state. Agencies were contacted via email by the NC Division of Social Services in early September 2010 and encouraged to participate in the agency survey. On October 15, 2011 the Division issued a reminder to agencies about the survey. The deadline to complete the survey was October 20, 2011.

The response rate for this survey was good: one or more people from 58% (72/125) of private agencies and 71% (n=71/100) of public agencies completed the survey. Of the 186 survey respondents:

- 57% (104 of 183) were from that provide traditional family foster care <u>only</u>.

- 14% (25 of 183) were from 20 private agencies that provide therapeutic foster care <u>only</u>.

- All four public agencies that provide therapeutic foster care completed the survey.

- 30% (54 of 183) were from agencies that provide <u>both</u> therapeutic and traditional family foster care.

Based on the percentage of licensed child-placing agencies that responded to this survey, we can generalize findings to the state as a whole with some confidence. It should be noted, however, that a cluster of 15 county DSS agencies eastern North Carolina did not respond to the survey. The reason for this non-participation is not known.

Agency Survey Instrument

Survey on Foster Parent Training

The NC Division of Social Services is currently evaluating training for foster parents in North Carolina. Your feedback is extremely important because it will help us better understand the foster parent training practices and support needs of North Carolina's child-placing agencies. Please complete this survey by Wednesday, October 20, 2010. Thank you

1. What is the name of your agency?

2. Which kind of foster parents does your agency supervise?
   a. Traditional family foster care
   b. Therapeutic foster care
   c. Both therapeutic and family foster car

Pre-Service Training
Please answer the following questions about your agency's current pre-service training for foster parents.

3. How many times in the past 12 months has your agency used **MAPP/GPS** to deliver foster parent pre-service training?

4. How many times in the past 12 months has your agency used **Deciding Together** to deliver foster parent pre-service training?

5. If in the past 12 months your agency has used **another course** to deliver foster parent pre-service training, please indicate the name of that course and the number of times it was offered:

6. Of these courses, which one does your agency use <u>most often</u> for the 30-hours of pre-service?
    a. MAPP/GPS
    b. *Deciding Together*
    c. PRIDE
    d. Other. Please provide name:

7. How useful is the pre-service training your agency uses <u>most often</u> when it comes to the mutual assessment process (i.e., screening people in and out as foster parents)?
    Not at all useful   Somewhat Useful   Useful   Very useful

8. How useful is the pre-service training your agency uses <u>most often</u> when it comes to helping participants decide whether fostering/adopting is right for them?
    Not at all useful   Somewhat Useful   Useful   Very useful

9. How effective is the pre-service training your agency uses <u>most often</u> at preparing foster parents to care for children in foster care?
    Not at all effective   Somewhat Effective   Effective   Very Effective

    If response is "Not at all effective" or "Somewhat Effective," question appears:
    a. Why did you say the foster parent pre-service training your agency uses most often is less than effective? [open ended]

10. Overall, how satisfied are you with the pre-service training your agency uses <u>most often</u>?
    Very Dissatisfied
    Dissatisfied
    Somewhat Dissatisfied
    Somewhat Satisfied
    Satisfied
    Very Satisfied
    If response is NOT "satisfied" or "very satisfied," question appears:
    a. Please explain your answer: [open ended]

11. How does your agency provide the additional 10 hours of pre-service required for therapeutic foster parents?
    a. The curriculum *Becoming a Therapeutic Foster Parent*
    b. Other curriculum. Please provide name:
    c. Not applicable: Our agency does not supervise therapeutic foster parents

12. Of those who attended the first session of pre-service in the past year, what percentage actually became licensed?
    a. 0-20%
    b. 21-40%

c. 41-60%
d. 61-80%
e. 81-100%

13. Who conducts pre-service foster parent training for your agency? (select all that apply)
    a. Agency staff
    b. Foster parents
    c. Other. Please explain:

14. Does your agency have enough pre-service trainers?
    a. Yes
    b. No
    c. Don't know

15. In your opinion, what are the five (5) most important topics/elements of a foster parent pre-service training?
    a. Deciding whether fostering is right for them at this time
    b. Ensuring children's safety
    c. Understanding their own family's strengths and needs in relation to fostering
    d. Supporting the child's permanency plan
    e. Helping a child develop or maintain contact/attachment with birth family
    f. Shared parenting
    g. Managing children's behaviors
    h. Cultural competence
    i. Other: (please list)

In-Service Training
16. Who conducts in-service foster parent training for your agency? (select all that apply)
    a. Agency staff
    b. Foster parents
    c. Other. Please explain:

17. For which of the following does your agency give foster parents in-service training credit? (select all that apply)
    a. Attending training events led/sponsored by our agency
    b. Attending workshops offered by other organizations
    c. Attending online training
    d. Participating in annual NCFAPA Conference
    e. Watching educational videos
    f. Reading educational publications
    g. Other: (please explain)

18. Most foster parents supervised by my agency find it easy to obtain the in-service training they need.
    Strongly Disagree
    Disagree
    Somewhat Disagree
    Somewhat Agree

Agree

Strongly Agree

If response is NOT "agree" or "strongly agree," question appears:
   a. Why do some of the foster parents supervised by your agency experience difficulty obtaining in-service training? [open ended]

19. In your opinion, what are <u>the five (5) most important</u> topics for foster parent in-service training?
   a. Behavior management
   b. Cultural competency
   c. Grief, separation, and loss
   d. Health/medical issues
   e. Mental health
   f. Sexualized behavior
   g. Shared parenting/maintaining connections
   h. Substance abuse
   i. Teaching independent living skills
   j. Visits
   k. Working with the schools
   l. Other. Please explain:

20. Which of the following strategies has your agency used to encourage foster parents to attend in-service training? (check all that apply)
   a. Use foster parent input to determine training topics
   b. Offer child care
   c. Offer refreshments/meals
   d. Use foster parents as co-trainers
   e. Reimburse travel expenses
   f. Make it practical & useful
   g. Link board rate increases to training attendance
   h. Other. Please explain:

21. Please share with us any additional comments you may have about in-service or pre-service training for North Carolina's foster parents:

Thank you very much for your time!

Survey of Foster Parents

To learn about the current NC Foster Parent's training system, faculty from UNC reached out to licensed foster parents supervised by public and private agencies in the state. We administered the survey both online and through a paper survey. North Carolina's 7,200+ foster parents were invited to participate in the foster parent survey when they received the November 2010 issue of the newsletter *Fostering Perspectives*; in December members of the NC Foster and Adoptive Parents Association also received an email invitation from the Association's president. Foster parents were given two possible ways to complete the survey: 1) take the survey online by the URL address listed on the newsletter or) to complete the survey printed on the last page of the newsletter and mail it to UNC. The initial deadline for survey completion was December 10, 2010 and then extended to December 15, 2010.

To encourage foster parent to take the survey, a chance to win $100 award was offered to any foster parent licensed in NC who were willing to share their full name and mailing address. Sixty nine foster parents provided identification, and one foster parent received the $100 award.

The extent to which the findings from data collected can be generalized statewide is limited. First, we do not and cannot know the extent to which the sampling frame represents the population of North Carolina foster parents. Second, the response rate to the foster parent survey was low: less than 3% of the state's foster parents responded.

Demographic Profile of Foster Parent Survey Respondents

- 185 NC foster parents took the survey.

- 96% (178 of 185) of those who took the survey answered all questions. 157 took the online survey and 21 the paper survey.

- Almost half (49.7% - 92 of 185) provide traditional family foster care, 32.4% (60 of 185) provide therapeutic foster care, and 17.3% (32 of 185) provide both therapeutic and traditional foster care.

- 50.8% (94 of 185) of the foster parents are supervised by private agencies; 47.6% (88/185) are supervised by public agencies.
  - The majority of the traditional foster parents (85%) are supervised by public agencies.
  - The majority of the therapeutic foster parents (92%) are supervised by private agencies.

- Length of service among foster parents responding to the survey is spread evenly among the 4 of the 5 intervals (1-2, 3-5, 6-10, and 10+ years). A very small percentage of respondents (5.9% - 11/185) had been licensed for less than a year.

- Out of 185 respondents, 40% have fostered a total of 1-5 children in the time that they have been foster parents.

Foster Parent Survey Instrument

Tell us what you think about foster parent training in NC!

The Division of Social Services is surveying licensed North Carolina foster parents to help it evaluate training for foster parents. Your feedback is extremely important because it will help us better understand the training experiences and needs of North Carolina's foster families. If more than one foster parent lives in your home, we hope each one will complete a survey. There are two ways to complete the survey:

- Take the survey online by going to [INSERT URL]

- OR, you can complete the survey below and mail it Mellicent Blythe, Jordan Institute for Families, UNC-CH School of Social Work, CB# 3550, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3550.

A Chance to Win $100 Award

We will award $100 to one (1) randomly selected survey respondent. For a chance to win, you must be a foster parent licensed in NC and you must share the following information:

First Name: _____ Last Name: _____

Address: _____

E-mail: _____

If you would prefer not to share this information with us, we hope you will still complete the survey—your participation is very important.

 (Note: **only licensed NC foster parents are eligible to complete this survey**.) Please complete this survey by **DECEMBER 10, 2010**. Thank you.

1. What kind of foster care are you licensed to provide? (check one)
    - ❑ Traditional family foster care
    - ❑ Therapeutic foster care
    - ❑ Both therapeutic and family foster care

2. What kind of agency do you work for? (check one)
    - ❑ Private child-placing agency ❑ County DSS

3. How long have you been a licensed foster parent?
    - ❑ Less than 1 year
    - ❑ 1-2 years
    - ❑ 3-5 years
    - ❑ 6-10 years
    - ❑ More than 10 years

4. How many foster children have you cared for in your time as a licensed foster parent?
    - ❑ None
    - ❑ 1-5
    - ❑ 6-10
    - ❑ 11-19
    - ❑ 20+

Pre-Service Training

Please answer the following questions about the training you received **before** becoming a licensed foster parent (pre-service training).

5. What foster parent pre-service training did you receive?
   - ❑ MAPP/GPS
   - ❑ *Deciding Together*
   - ❑ PRIDE
   - ❑ Other. Please provide name:

6. How useful was the pre-service training in helping you decide whether fostering was right for you?

❑	❑	❑	❑
Not at all useful	Somewhat useful	Useful	Very useful

7. How effective was the pre-service training at preparing you to care for children in foster care?

❑	❑	❑	❑
Not at all effective	Somewhat effective	Effective	Very effective

   If you answered "Not at all effective" or "Somewhat Effective," why did you find the foster parent pre-service training less than effective?

8. Overall, how satisfied were you with the pre-service training you received?

❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Very dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Satisfied	Very satisfied

   If you did NOT respond "satisfied" or "very satisfied," please explain why you were less than satisfied with the pre-service training:

9. If you are licensed to provide therapeutic foster care, what training did you receive for the **additional 10 hours of <u>pre-service</u>** required for therapeutic foster parents?
   - ❑ Not applicable: I do not provide therapeutic foster care
   - ❑ The curriculum *Becoming a Therapeutic Foster Parent*
   - ❑ Other curriculum. Please provide name:
   - ❑ I don't know

10. In your opinion, what are the five (5) <u>most important</u> topics that should be part of foster parent pre-service training?
    - ❑ Deciding whether fostering is right for them at this time
    - ❑ Ensuring children's safety
    - ❑ Understanding their own family's strengths and needs in relation to fostering
    - ❑ Supporting the child's permanency plan
    - ❑ Helping a child develop or maintain contact/attachment with birth family
    - ❑ Implementing shared parenting/maintaining connections
    - ❑ Managing children's behaviors
    - ❑ Developing cultural competence
    - ❑ Other. Please list:

In-Service Training

Please answer the following questions about foster parent **in-service** training (the additional 10 hours of training required each year **after** you are licensed).

11. Which of these have you done for in-service training credit? (check all that apply)
    - ❑ Attended training events led/sponsored by our agency
    - ❑ Attended workshops offered by other organizations
    - ❑ Attended online training
    - ❑ Participated in annual NCFAPA Conference
    - ❑ Read educational publications
    - ❑ Watched educational videos
    - ❑ Other. Please list:

12. I find it easy to obtain the in-service training that I need.

❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree

    If you did NOT respond "agree" or "strongly agree" please explain why you do not find it easy to obtain in-service training:

13. In your opinion, what are the five (5) <u>most important</u> topics for foster parent in-service training?
    - ❑ Behavior management
    - ❑ Cultural competence
    - ❑ Grief, separation, and loss
    - ❑ Health/medical issues
    - ❑ Mental health
    - ❑ Sexualized behavior
    - ❑ Shared parenting/maintaining connections
    - ❑ Substance abuse
    - ❑ Teaching independent living skills
    - ❑ Visits between children and birth parents
    - ❑ Working with the schools
    - ❑ Other. Please list:

14. Which of the following strategies has your agency used to encourage foster parents to attend in-service training? (check all that apply)
    - ❑ Made it practical & useful
    - ❑ Offered child care
    - ❑ Offered financial or other incentives
    - ❑ Offered refreshments/meals
    - ❑ Reimbursed travel expenses
    - ❑ Used foster parents as co-trainers
    - ❑ Used foster parent input to determine training topics
    - ❑ Other. Please list:

15. Please share with us any additional comments you may have about in-service or pre-service training for North Carolina's foster parents:

Focus Groups

SUMMARY

To gain insight from different perspectives about the strengths and needs of foster parent training in North Carolina, UNC faculty facilitated separate guided discussions with three main stakeholders—foster parents, agency staff, and the Division's staff development trainers for MAPP/GPS. Project staff wanted to conduct focus groups with staff from public and private agencies from various part of the state. As such, we coordinated focus groups with pre-existing public-private agency associations in the western and central part of the state. Because no such association exists in the eastern part of the state, project staff conducted phone interviews with individual staff from public and private agencies in the east that had not participated in the survey.

PROCEDURES

For all focus groups, the facilitator used open-ended questions developed from the surveys to prompt conversation, while a note-taker transcribed comments. These in-person meetings lasted an hour to an hour-and-a-half. The agency and foster parent focus groups took place with advance permission during regularly scheduled member meetings. Any Division staff attending the agency meetings exited prior to the focus group so as to allow free expression of opinion. As explained to participants, information for this report was summarized without identifiers, in order to ensure confidentiality.

LIMITATIONS

Important to note is that while discussions did provide additional qualitative information for this assessment, the extent to which the expressed opinions can be generalized outside of these groups may be limited. For instance, the foster parent focus group included 23 participants from the same county—all licensed by the local DSS and having self-selected into the county's foster parent association. Among the agency focus groups and interviews, a combined total of 23 private and public agencies were represented. Obviously, this represents a small number of foster parents and agencies from within the state, so responses are not generalizable statewide. However, the information from these groups can augment what surveys revealed, keeping in mind that participation and responses may reflect intrinsic biases or characteristics within the respondent groups that would not necessarily be consistent with those of non-participants. The focus groups and phone interviews, coupled with surveys, attempted to reach a broad range of stakeholders, but there may be characteristics of respondents that made them more likely to participate than others.

D1.   One Focus Group with Trainers from the NC DSS Staff Development Unit

PROCEDURES

Project staff conducted one meeting in Raleigh on January 20, 2011 with four Division trainers (two by phone call-in) who provide MAPP/GPS train-the-trainer for the State. Each trainer reported having at least nine years of experience in foster parent training. All four are MAPP-certified leaders and/or trainers.

SUMMARY OF FOCUS GROUP

All four trainers firmly expressed support for MAPP/GPS as an effective pre-service curriculum. Trainers emphasized that MAPP/GPS purposefully focuses on the mutual selection process, rather than skills-building as in-service would provide, and that there is a disconnect in what caseworkers think MAPP leaders are teaching. Trainers reported that the agencies that use MAPP/GPS the way it's intended succeed in mutual selection, but they're in the minority. Lack of model fidelity may be compromising people's decisions in selection. To address this, support from the agencies in how MAPP/GPS is delivered could be improved. When directors, supervisors or other staff attend Mini-MAPP they learn what is actually taught in MAPP and are able to better support trainers. Other highlights include:

- Private agencies increasingly attend MAPP/GPS training and benefit from topics such as shared parenting and grief and loss that they may have missed in their agency-sponsored training.
- Training on child sexual abuse is very important, and interest in attending training is high.
- MAPP/GPS for kinship caregivers works best when done separately. The information is almost exactly the same, but additional topics are needed (ie. relationships among family members).

Suggestions for what the State can do to support pre-service and in-service:

- Support for MAPP-certified trainers is a priority. Division trainers suggest reinstating MAPP Unite or other means of communication, ongoing professional development, and support. This could be facilitated in an online synchronous manner. MAPP leaders would benefit from having access to online handouts they can download for use in in-service training.
- Include foster and adoptive parents on an advisory committee for on-going communication about their needs and ideas when cuts to programs and services are under consideration.
- Keep support high for the State-level partnership of MAPP Leaders.
- As MAPP-GPS is being phased out over time, the State could explore purchasing the curriculum and modifying it for NC use, considering the higher cost of PS-MAPP.
- Continue to encourage agencies to use foster parents as trainers. This empowers foster parents and invites their leadership.
- Give attention to closing the gap between MAPP/GPS completion and a foster parent's first foster child placement (6 months to a year is too long for foster parents to wait to use what they learned in training).
- Focus on alignment of agency licensing workers and agency MAPP/GPS trainers in their approaches, so that the message and way of working with families is consistently family-friendly.
- Explore how to best support kinship caregivers in training.
- Agencies have expressed wishes that the State send Division trainers to train foster parents in developing life books.

D2. *Two Focus Groups with Public and Private Agencies*

PROCEDURES

Project staff conducted focus groups with the Recruiter's Network, which met in Rowan County, and with the Western Area Foster Care Association (WAFCA) which met at the Division's Black Mountain office, both in December 2010. In addition to meeting with these existing associations that drew primarily from the Western and Central parts of the state, project staff conducted phone interviews with staff of several public and private agencies in the Eastern part of the State that had not participated in the agency survey. Participants in the two focus groups and the phone interviews included 26 County DSS staff, representing 15 DSS agencies, and 10 private agency staff, representing 8 agencies.

SUMMARY OF FOCUS GROUP

Of those who reported using a curriculum other than MAPP/GPS, eight use Deciding Together and one uses Professional Parenting, through Appalachian Family Innovations. Agencies see connections between foster parent training and outcomes, including fewer child placement disruptions, increased trust-building and foster parent retention, greater appreciation throughout the agency of foster families, more empathy for birth families among foster families, and increased foster parent confidence with more training and coaching.

Pre-service: The most frequently mentioned strengths of agency pre-service training were:
- It creates community

- The time frame for training is versatile

- It starts the assessment/screening

- It addresses different learning styles

The most frequently mentioned drawbacks were:
- The curriculum is outdated, particularly in light of MRS
- Relative caregivers have little they can relate to

Suggestions for additional state support for pre-service include:
- Provide updated ways of delivering the information (develop slides, add visual aids)
- Align foster parent information from paperwork (MAPP/GPS) to fit with what the state requests on the licensure application
- Increase availability of Fostering the Sexualized Child class
- Offer a trainer support group like UNITE

To improve how well pre-service helps in selecting/screening, respondents suggested:
- Give more realistic scenarios about children in care, especially including examples with teens
- Emphasize shared parenting from the beginning

In-service: Agencies stated that they try to use flexibility in scheduling in-service training to accommodate needs of parents, but they are not reaching all parents who need it. Barriers include child care, foster parent schedules, and understaffed agencies/lack of funds. Suggestions for additional state support for in-service include:
- Offer on-line training from the State
- Develop an engaging in-service curriculum

- Offer a review of pre-service (refresher) for foster parents after parents have started fostering
- Provide written "mailable" in-service training materials

D3.   One Focus Group with Foster Parents

PROCEDURES
Project staff conducted a focus group at the close of the business portion of one county's foster parent association meeting. To avoid data duplication, project staff requested that any who had answered the survey withhold participation from the focus group. Participation included twenty-three foster parents all licensed through their local DSS agency. All but one had been trained in MAPP/GPS (one had received training in another state).

Participants reported the following levels of experience in fostering:

Length of foster parenting:	Number of foster children cared for as a foster parent:
Less than 1 year (0)	None (0)
1-2 years (6)	1-5 (10)
3-5 years (9)	6-10 (6)
6-10 years (6)	11-19 (0)
More than 10 years (2)	20+ (7)

SUMMARY OF FOCUS GROUP
Pre-service
Respondents felt that in hindsight, pre-service training helped prepare them to care for children in foster care, but felt they would have benefited from coaching from staff upon placement of a child in order to understand the court process and benefits like WIC.

They suggested topics as a priority for pre-service training: the court process, understanding services and the DSS process, questions to ask when you get the call for a placement, alternative behavior techniques, the relationship between the child's worker and the foster parents' worker, training for all of the special needs children (ADD, ADHD, PTSD, etc.), and commonly used acronyms and what each means (RAD, PTSD, etc.).

In-service
Foster parents noted diverse types of learning activities they use for credit including: the annual NCFAPA conference, Fostering Perspectives, Parents as Teachers, fosterclub.com, and the post-adoptive services conference. For the two who noted there were challenges to obtaining in-service credit, these barriers included "finding it," and "scheduling."

Other general suggestions for training included increasing opportunities for foster parents to interact with each other to create community and share helpful information (such as through a buddy system), and for agency workers to come to MAPP/GPS training to tell about different resources, as well as providing a simple list of agency services within MAPP/GPS classes. One overall recommendation for in-service was that "the State should provide the training to us if they require it. That's what the military does when they want those of us in the service to get trained—Uncle Sam gives us the training."

D4. *Combined focus group feedback about the <u>most important topics</u> that should be part of foster parent <u>in-service</u> training:*

Recruiter's Network
Discipline
Shared parenting
Sexualized behavior
Domestic violence or substance abuse
Partnership with agency
Advocating for children in school
Grief and loss for foster parents and children
Court protocol

WAFCA
Sexual abuse
Reactive Attachment Disorder
Physical abuse
Autism
Behavioral—aggression
Setting boundaries with relatives
Basic safety standards

Agency Interviews
Dealing with Difficult behaviors
Child sexual abuse
Transracial Adoptions (incl. hair care)
Parenting teens
Meeting educational needs of youth in care
Helping transitions to independence
Internet safety

Foster Parents
Medical condition basics that are common in children, such as lice, reflux, asthma, signs of when to seek assistance, taking temperature, ringworm
The D's—PTSD, etc.
Schizophrenia
Understanding types of abuse and impact—(need a refresher now that you're in real life with the children)
What to expect with a baby
A MAPP class for parents who already have kids
Information about agency services

Division MAPP Trainers
Life Book development
Fostering the Sexualized Child

Visitation

Good communication

Burnout protection –how to take care of selves while taking care of children

Shared parenting

Helping children move

Any topic in MAPP could be expanded into a pre-service

Attachment and loss

D5. Agency Focus Group Question Template

Goal: To gather input from foster parents about the strengths and needs of North Carolina's foster parent training system

Format: Attendees at the _____County Foster Parent Association's January, 2011 meeting will participate as a focus group on foster parent pre-service and in-service training, to supplement feedback received from the on-line and paper survey of foster parents throughout the state. The focus group will last approximately one hour. There will be one facilitator and one note-taker.

Explain confidentiality for participants and how information will be presented to the Division.

Also, If any among the foster parents completed the survey we sent out, give them the opportunity to excuse themselves.

Ask for a show of hands:
   1. What type of agency do you work for?
               o   Private child-placing agency
               o   County department of social services

   2. How long have you been a licensed foster parent?
               o   Less than 1 year
               o   1-2 years
               o   3-5 years
               o   6-10 years
               o   More than 10 years

   3. How many foster children have you cared for in your time as a licensed foster parent?
               o   None
               o   1-5
               o   6-10
               o   11-19
               o   20+

Pre-Service Questions:
1.   What foster parent pre-service training did you receive? (other than MAPP)

2.   How effective was the pre-service training in preparing you to care for children in foster care? (Elicit explanations)

3.   How satisfied were you with the pre-service training you received? (Elicit explanations)

4.   If you are licensed to provide therapeutic foster care, what training did you receive for the additional 10 hours of pre-service required for therapeutic foster parents?

5.   In your opinion, what are the most important topics that should be part of foster parent pre-service training?

In-Service Questions:
6.   What types of learning activities have you done for in-service training credit?
7.   What makes it easy or challenging to obtain the in-service credit you need?
8.   In your opinion, what are the most important topics that should be part of foster parent in-service training?

9.   What types of strategies has your agency used to encourage foster parents to attend in-service training?

Final Question
11.   Please share any additional comments you may have about pre-service or in-service….

D6. *Foster Parent Focus Group Question Template*

Goal: To gather input from foster care professionals about the strengths and needs of North Carolina's foster parent training system

Format: 1) Working through the Western Area Foster Care Association and the Recruiters' Network, social workers from public and private child placing agencies will be invited to participate in a focus group on foster parent pre-service and in-service training. Focus groups will last approximately one hour. There will be one facilitator and one note-taker.

2) As there is not an existing public-private agency association in the eastern part of NC, structured phone interviews will be conducted with child welfare social workers from a select number of private and public agencies in that region of the state.

Pre-Service Questions:
1.   What pre-service curriculum does your agency use?[if not MAPP/GPS]

2.   What works well in your agency pre-service training?

3.   What does not work well in your agency pre-service training?

4.   What additional supports could the state provide to support pre-service training?

5.   Pre-service training is designed to help with selection as well as preparation. What could be done to improve how well your current pre-service helps in selecting/screening foster parent applicants?

            Issues to capture/possible follow-up questions regarding pre-service:
            How is the length? Too long, too short, about right
            How is flexibility of delivery/design?
            Effort and resources agency required to provide pre-service?

In-Service Questions:
6.   Does the in-service training most foster parents receive improve their ability to provide care for children -- is it relevant, accessible, timely, effective?
7.   What would help improve any of those factors?
8.   What are the barriers to effective in-service training for foster parents?
9.   What can the state do to help with this?
10.   What delivery methods appeal to you or do you think would effective for foster parents from your agency?

Final Question
What connection do you see between the foster parent training (pre-service and in-service you provide and the outcomes your agency experiences? (e.g., foster parent retention, maltreatment in foster care, placement stability, length of stay in care, rates of reunification and/or adoption)

D7. NCDSS Staff Development Focus Group Question Template

Goal: To gather input from Staff Development's MAPP Trainers about the strengths and needs of North Carolina's foster parent training system.

Format: Meeting in Raleigh on January 20, 2011 with four staff (two by home). Discussion will last approximately one hour. There will be one facilitator and one note-taker.

Explain confidentiality for participants and how information will be presented in the final report to the Division.

1. How long have you been in foster parent training?

2. What courses related to foster parent training do you teach?
   - MAPP TOT/certification
   - Deciding Together
   - Fostering and Adopting the Child Who Has Been Sexually Abused
   - Shared Parenting
   - LINKS 101
   - Other?

Pre-Service Questions:
Based on your experience and what you hear from the field:

3. **Selection**. How useful is MAPP/GPS (and/or Deciding Together) in helping applicants decide whether fostering is right for them? (*Elicit explanations*)

4. **Preparation**. How effective is MAPP/GPS (and/or Deciding Together) in preparing families to care for children in foster care? (*Elicit explanations*)

5. **Private Agencies**. In recent years there has been a surge in the number of private agencies training and supervising foster parents (both traditional family foster care and therapeutic foster care). How well do you think MAPP/GPS (and/or Deciding Together) works for private agencies?

6. **MAPP/GPS Strengths**. What are the strengths of MAPP/GPS (and/or Deciding Together)?

7. **MAPP/GPS Needs**. What aspects of MAPP/GPS (and/or Deciding Together) could be improved, and how?

8. **NC's Overall Strengths**. In your opinion, what are North Carolina's strengths with regard to how it supports agency efforts to select and train foster parents, adoptive parents, and kinship caregivers?

9. **NC's Overall Areas for Improvement**. In your opinion, what could North Carolina do to strengthen the way it supports agency efforts to select and train foster parents, adoptive parents, and kinship caregivers?

In-Service Questions:
10. **NC's Overall Strengths**. In your opinion, what are North Carolina's strengths with regard to the in-service/ongoing training provided to foster parents and kinship caregivers?

11. **NC's Overall Areas for Improvement**. In your opinion, what could North Carolina do to strengthen the in-service/ongoing training provided to foster parents and kinship caregivers?

Final Question
12. Please share any additional comments you may have about foster parent pre-service or in-service training….