

## Clark University and UMass Amherst “Teachers and Adopted Children” Survey: Key Findings, Topline Results, and Recommendations

*Prepared by Abbie E. Goldberg & Harold D. Grotevant<sup>1</sup>*

Abbie Goldberg (Clark University) and Harold Grotevant (University of Massachusetts Amherst), in collaboration with the Rudd Program at UMass Amherst, launched a survey of teachers’ experiences with adopted children April 6 2021 – May 15, 2021. Responses were gathered from **207 K-12 teachers, paraprofessionals, and other school professionals**, including 63 elementary school teachers (30.4%), 74 secondary school teachers (35.7%), 46 special education teachers (22.3%), and 39 (19%) programming/support staff (e.g., afterschool program teacher; librarian). A broad representation of grade levels and subject matter areas was achieved; over 40 responses were received from teachers at each grade level, K-12. **Primary focus was teachers’ experiences with and perspectives on adopted children and families**, but the survey also addressed COVID-19-related stressors and concerns.

### Key Findings/Executive Summary

- About three-quarters of participants felt that their school at least somewhat emphasized or acknowledged family diversity. Yet only about half felt that teachers and staff were at least somewhat trained to recognize the role of trauma or attachment history in children’s behavioral issues, with slightly more (almost 60%) agreeing that teachers were at least somewhat adept at modifying assignments to be inclusive of diverse families. Teachers were split in how constrained they felt in terms of how they taught about issues such as family diversity, adoption, and race/racism, with about one-third feeling at least somewhat constrained, and over half feeling not very or not at all constrained.
- A unique aspect of the sample concerns their personal connections to adoption: in particular, 23% were adoptive parents themselves. **Notably, only 15% of the sample reported having received any teacher training or professional development about adoption.** A total of 30% of teachers estimated that they had taught between 0-5 adopted children in their career, with 40% estimating that they had taught 6-15 adopted children in their career, and about 15% estimating that they had taught 16-30 adopted children in their career. One-fifth believed that they were not, to their knowledge, teaching any adopted children during the current school year.
- Teachers most often learned a child was adopted from the child themselves, followed by the parents. Sometimes they learned the information in the context of a child’s emotional or behavioral difficulties or their specialized education plan. Less than 50% of respondents said that their school/teachers sent out a form asking for child background information (where a

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parent, if they wanted, could indicate information about their children's adoptive status or history), and, notably, more than one-third were unsure if such a form was sent. Likewise, **45% of respondents had at some point wanted to know more about a child's adoptive status or history but were unsure of how or who to ask.**

- Two-thirds of teachers viewed adopted children as being more likely than non-adopted children to have emotional difficulties, and more than half believed that adopted children were more likely to have peer/social problems and to struggle with identity issues. About one-third believed that adopted children were more likely to have developmental delays, to have an IEP, and to have poor academic performance. While such beliefs dovetail with some research findings (e.g., adopted children are overrepresented in special education, and may have lower academic performance overall), there is significant variability among adopted children in educational outcomes, such that children with more pre-adoption adversity tend to fare more poorly, and children whose parents report high levels of parent involvement and/or socioeconomic resources tend to fare well.<sup>1</sup>
- Teachers described a range of modifications or adjustments they made in their language and teaching to better meet the needs of adopted children and families. Most commonly (70%) they described purposeful and/or inclusive language choices, with 56% noting efforts to be more inclusive and sensitive in assignments, 46% noting attention to adoption inclusivity in books and materials, 45% noting an adoption-aware or trauma-informed approach to discipline, and 35% noting an adoption-aware approach to curriculum. They described a range of assignments and school-related topics that presented issues for adopted children, including those related to immigration, identity, family history, genes/environment, and loss/grief.
- Most teachers were enthusiastic about parents' involvement and advocacy in relation to their children, and welcomed their input, but a few pointed out that parents themselves lacked a trauma-informed perspective which sometimes interfered with their ability to best meet the needs of their children, highlighting the need for teacher and parent training in adoption.
- Significantly, in the realm of teacher training, few participants learned about adoption issues (e.g., child characteristics/challenges; inclusion in curricula) in teacher training or professional development (between 12-20% in all areas except for trauma), with between one-third and two-thirds indicating that they learned about these issues "on the job," with another 30-50% saying that they had never learned about these issues. Likewise, **just 2.4% said that they felt "very prepared" by their education/training to work with adopted students and families**, with 24% feeling somewhat prepared. When referring to how prepared they felt currently, one-third felt very prepared, and just over 40% felt somewhat prepared, echoing the finding that most teachers felt that they had gained much of what they knew about adoption "on the job." Chi square analyses showed teachers who were the parents of adopted children were somewhat more likely ( $\chi^2(1, 189 = 2.50, p = .086)$ ) to feel somewhat or very prepared currently.
- In turn, **70-85% of teachers agreed that learning about issues such as common challenges among adopted children, adopted children's educational needs and challenges, developing curricula with awareness of adopted children, and the role of trauma in adopted children's behavior, would be "very helpful" to new teachers.** Yet they also endorsed barriers to learning about adoption for teachers and teachers-in-training, most notably lack of prioritization (e.g., by the schools that they were employed within; by their training programs; by state accreditation agencies) and/or competing demands for professional development topics.

## Table of Contents

Key Findings/Executive Summary .....	1
Background .....	5
Survey Development and Methodology .....	5
I. Demographics .....	6
II. School and Teaching Basics.....	8
Table 2.1. Years Teaching.....	8
Table 2.2. Type of School Currently Teaching At .....	8
Table 2.3. Racial Diversity .....	8
Table 2.4. Type of Teaching Position .....	9
Table 2.5. Grades Taught .....	9
Table 2.6. What Do You Teach .....	10
III. School Attitudes, Practices, and Resources Related to Family Diversity.....	11
Table 3.1. School Competence Surrounding Family Diversity .....	11
<i>Figure 3.1. School Competence Surrounding Family Diversity</i> .....	12
Table 3.2. Autonomy and Teaching About Diversity .....	12
Table 3.3. School Resources Helpful to Adopted Children .....	13
<i>Figure 3.3. School Resources Helpful to Adopted Children</i> .....	13
IV. Personal Experience with Adoption.....	14
Table 4.1. Experiences with Adoption .....	14
Table 4.2. Number of Adopted Children Taught in My Career (Estimated) .....	14
Table 4.3. Number of Adopted Children Teaching This Year (To My Knowledge).....	14
V. Adoption, Disclosure, and Consultation .....	15
Table 5.1. How You Have Typically Found Out a Child Was Adopted? .....	15
Table 5.2. Do School/Teachers Send Out a Form Asking for Child Background Info? .....	15
Table 5.3. Wanted to Know More About a Child’s Adoption Status.....	16
Table 5.4. Have You Consulted With These School Professionals About Adopted Students? .....	17
<i>Figure 5.4. School Professionals Consulted With About Adopted Students</i> .....	17
VI. Perspectives on Adopted Children: Challenges and Strengths.....	19
Table 6.1. Adopted Versus Non-Adopted Children.....	19
VII. Teaching Modifications and Adopted Children/Families.....	20
Table 7.1 Teaching Modifications and Adopted Children/Families .....	20

VIII. Adoptive Parents, Advocacy, and Involvement .....	22
Table 8.1. Perception of Parents Who Advocate for their Adopted Children .....	22
IX. Adoption Preparation, Training, and Needs .....	23
Table 9.1. Adoption Preparation and Training.....	23
<i>Figure 9.1.</i> Adoption Preparation and Training .....	23
Table 9.2. Reflections on Knowledge about Adoption .....	24
Table 9.3. Learning About Adoption .....	25
Table 9.4. Needs as a Teacher.....	26
X. Learning Opportunities and Mechanisms.....	28
Table 10.1. Helpful Learning Opportunities for Teachers.....	28
Table 10.2. Best Mechanisms of Implementation .....	28
Table 10.3. Barriers to Learning Opportunities .....	28
XI. COVID-19, Teaching, and Vulnerable Populations.....	29
Table 11.1. The Impact of COVID-19 on Teaching .....	29
XII. Recommendations .....	30
XIII. Resources for K-12 Teachers on Adoption, Foster Care, & Family Diversity .....	32
XIV. References .....	36

## Background

- Little research has explored adoptive parents' experiences with teachers or schools, and existing work has primarily focused on parents with young children (e.g., preschool age).<sup>ii</sup> Almost no empirical research has examined the experiences or perspectives of teachers in relation to adopted children or adoptive parents<sup>iii</sup>, although some scholars and practitioners have authored overviews of issues related to schools and adoption, and provided guidance and suggestions to teachers and other professionals working with adopted children and families.<sup>iv</sup> Additionally, some organizations (e.g., Child Welfare Information Gateway; Adoptive Families) provide a variety of resources to parents regarding working with schools and teachers.
- Existing work on adoptive parents suggests that parents may encounter challenges related to teacher lack of awareness or insensitivity surrounding adoption, including making assumptions or drawing conclusions about children simply because they are adopted, as well as failing to account for children's adoption history in classroom assignments or curricula. This research also suggests that adoptive parents may be especially likely to be involved in their children's schooling, perhaps in part reflecting their higher levels of education/income (which tend to facilitate school involvement) but also reflecting their sensitivity and awareness of potential issues that their children may deal with at school (e.g., academic and behavioral issues). Some parents fear sharing their children's adoptive status with school officials or teachers, out of concern that such information may invite negative stereotyping or labeling (e.g., lacking nuanced knowledge of adoption, teachers may use children's adoptive status as a heuristic, anticipating or labeling behaviors in such a way that may be stigmatizing or unproductive).<sup>v</sup>
- Existing work on teachers suggests that they appear to receive little formal preparation or training related to adoption or adoptive families, and may feel ill-prepared to handle adoption-related issues as they arise. They often rely on other professionals and adoptive parents for input and guidance regarding the needs and experiences of adopted children.<sup>vi</sup>
- Thus, a key challenge seems to be that teachers may lack in-depth knowledge of adoptive families and adopted children, including the notable diversity within adoptive families (e.g., in terms of racial makeup, adoption route, pre-adoptive history, and other dimensions) and the complex and nuanced ways that adoption may manifest in children's and families' lives.<sup>vii</sup> In turn, teachers may be vulnerable to missteps (e.g., making inferences about adopted children based on limited information; not taking them into consideration when developing and executing curricula; relying on colleagues' advice which may not be evidence-based).

## Survey Development and Methodology

- Focus groups with teachers (7) and adoptive parents (6) informed the development of a survey aimed to understand teachers' experiences and knowledge related to adopted children and families to inform the development of professional educational materials for teachers aimed at enhancing adoption competence.
  - Teacher focus group participants included classroom teachers, paraprofessionals, and special education teachers, across a variety of grades and in public and private school settings. Parent focus group participants had children who (a) ranged in age from elementary to high school age, (b) were mostly of color, and (c) some of whom were

adopted from the child welfare system and some of whom were adopted privately and domestically.

- The survey instrument was also informed by research and practice documents aimed at teachers.<sup>2</sup>
- The survey instrument was reviewed by several individuals with expertise in areas complementary to the primary researchers, as well as by individuals who provide training and support to teachers and/or adoptive parents.
- The survey was hosted on the online platform Qualtrics and took about 25 minutes to complete (median duration = 27 minutes). It contained a variety of closed and open-ended questions. Participants were recruited widely, using personal and professional contacts, professional associations related to educators and teaching, and social media groups and listservs related to teachers and teaching.
- We report findings only from participants who completed most of the survey items ( $n = 207$ ). Namely, 193 completed 96-100% of the survey items, and 13 completed 64-95% of the survey items. We excluded partial responses (i.e., those that completed less than 64%, or two-thirds, of the survey) from 64 participants.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the full sample was 271 participants.
- Most (>80%) of the sample was teachers, and thus we refer to participants in this way (i.e., as teachers).

## Results

### I. Demographics

- Most of the sample was female (176, 85%), with 24 (11.6%) identifying as male, 6 (2.9%) identifying as nonbinary, and 1 (.5%) identifying as a trans man.
- Most of the sample was heterosexual (167, 80.7%), with smaller numbers of bisexual (13, 6.3%), queer (11, 5.3%), lesbian (6, 2.9%), and gay (5, 2.4%) participants.
- A total of 181 (87.4%) were white and 26 (12.6%) were of color. Participants could identify with multiple racial categories. A total of 185 (89.4%) identified as white, 8 (3.9%) identified as Asian, 5 (2.4%) identified as Hispanic, 4 (1.9%) as Latino/a/x, 5 (2.4%) as Black/African American, and three identified as something else (Cambodian, Jewish, Multiracial; 1.5%). Just 12 (5.8%) were between 21-25 years old; 54 (26.1%) were 26-35, 64 (30.9%) were 36-45, 46 (22.2%) were 46-55, and 31 (15.0%) were 55 or older.
- These characteristics of teachers (mostly white women, mostly in their 30s-40s) echo national statistics on elementary and secondary school teachers.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Questions concerning adopted children (e.g., common challenges) were in part informed by <https://qic-ag.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/QICAG-Education-Brochure-v041-final.pdf> and <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/adoption/adopt-parenting/school/>; Questions related to teaching credentials, types of teaching positions, and school characteristics were in part informed by [https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/ntps/pdf/2021/School\\_Questionnaire\\_2020\\_21.pdf](https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/ntps/pdf/2021/School_Questionnaire_2020_21.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> These 64 valid partial responses do not include those we eliminated based on evidence that they were fraudulent or “fake” responders (or possibly bots): namely, responses wherein only the “agree to participate” box was checked, but no valid responses were given; or, responses were given but in an illogical pattern and/or in impossibly short time frame (e.g., a duration of under 60 seconds).

<sup>4</sup> See <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/clr>

- Participants taught in 26 different states, with 7 (3.3%) teaching outside the U.S. The largest number of participants taught in MA (40, 19.3%), where the researchers resided, followed by CA (18), CT (10), PA (9), NY (7), MD (7), TN (6), OH (6), TX (5), Washington DC (5), WA (4), KY (3), IL (3), NJ (3), VA (3), WI (3), and 1-2 in AZ, CO, HI, ME, MI, MN, NC, NH, SC, and VT.
- Most were teaching in public schools (156, 75.4%), with 32 (15.5%) teaching in private schools and 19 (9.2%) indicating something else (e.g., religious, charter, early childhood). Most had more than 5 years of experience as teachers (169, 81.6%). Teachers indicated that they taught a median of 40 students a day ( $Mn = 55.8$ ,  $SD = 56$ ; *range* 0-400). They believed that they were teaching a median of 2 adopted children during the current school year (2020-2021;  $Mn = 2.5$ ,  $SD = 3.49$ ; *range* 0-25).
- Most participants had a master's degree (145, 70%), with 33 (15.9%) indicating that they had an educational specialist or professional diploma (at least 1 year beyond a master's level). Three participants (1.4%) had a vocational certificate. Eight (3.9%) had a doctorate (PhD/EdD/JD). The educational level of these teachers was generally higher than national statistics (58% of public elementary/secondary school teachers had a graduate degree in 2017-2018).<sup>5</sup>
- Teachers were surveyed during April-May 2021, during the COVID-19 pandemic. When asked about the 2020-2021 school year, and how the coronavirus had affected instruction at their school, 153 (73.9%) of the sample said that all or some of the classes normally taught in person moved to a distance learning format using online resources, either self-paced or real-time, 11 (5.3%) said that there was no change in how classes were taught because of the coronavirus pandemic, and 21 (10.1%) said something else (e.g., in-person with COVID safety protocols; smaller class sizes). A total of 22 (10.6%) did not respond to this question.
- Below we provide topline results for the sample of 207 respondents who responded to most of our survey items.

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<sup>5</sup> See <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/clr>

## II. School and Teaching Basics

The below tables summarize teaching data about our participants.

<b>Table 2.1. Years Teaching</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Under 1	7	3.4%
1-5	30	14.5%
6-10	40	19.3%
11+	129	62.3%
Missing	1	.5%
<i>Total</i>	<i>207</i>	<i>100%</i>

<b>Table 2.2. Type of School Currently Teaching At</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Public	156	75.4%
Private	32	15.5%
Special education	17	8.2%
Charter	11	5.3%
Boarding	2	1.0%
Career/technical/Vocational	2	1.0%
Therapeutic	2	1.0%
Magnet	1	.5%
Something else ( <i>examples given included: religious; online</i> )	7	3.4%

*Note. Participants could choose more than one category, so percents >100%.*

<b>Table 2.3. Racial Diversity</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Predominantly white	136	65.7%
Predominantly Black/African American	11	5.3%
Predominantly Latino/a/x	26	12.6%
Predominantly Asian	11	5.3%
Racially diverse (explain)	56	27.1%
Mixed/many races/ethnicities	15	
Mostly Latinx & white	5	
Mostly Black & white	5	
Mostly Latinx & Black	3	
Some other descriptor	28	
Something else	3	1.4%

*Note. Participants could choose more than one category, so percents >100%.*



<b>Table 2.4. Type of Teaching Position</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Regular Full-Time (FT) Teacher, Early Childhood Education	9	4.3%
Regular Part-Time (PT) Teacher, Early Childhood Education	2	1.0%
Regular FT Teacher, Elementary Education	58	28.0%
Regular PT Teacher, Elementary Education	5	2.4%
Regular FT Teacher, Secondary Education	69	33.3%
Regular PT Teacher, Secondary Education	5	2.4%
Regular FT Teacher, Special Education	44	21.3%
Regular PT Teacher, Special Education	2	1.0%
Other Leadership, Programming, or Support Staff Position (e.g., afterschool)	39	18.8%
Program director (e.g., music)	5	
Librarian	5	
Coach/tutor (e.g., math)	4	
Afterschool program supervisor	3	
EAL/ELA/ELL/ESL	3	
Gifted & Talented	3	
Something else (e.g., literacy specialist)	16	
Teacher aide	8	3.9%
Student teacher	1	.5%
Short-term substitute	4	1.9%

*Note. Participants could choose more than one category, so percents >100%.*

<b>Table 2.5. Grades Taught</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Preschool/Kindergarten	48	23.2%
First	45	21.7%
Second	53	25.6%
Third	47	22.7%
Fourth	57	27.5%
Fifth	55	26.6%
Sixth	48	23.2%
Seventh	43	20.8%
Eighth	49	23.7%
Ninth	57	27.5%
Tenth	55	26.6%
Eleventh	61	29.5%
Twelfth	57	27.5%

*Note. Participants could choose more than one category, so percents >100%.*

<b>Table 2.6. Teaching Area</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
General elementary	54	26.1%
Special education	60	29.0%
English/Language Arts	39	18.8%
Social Studies	21	10.1%
Math	24	11.6%
Science	23	11.1%
ESL/Bilingual Education	14	6.8%
Foreign Languages	12	5.8%
Music/art	11	5.3%
Career/technical education	7	3.4%
Physical education/health	6	2.9%
Computer science	3	1.4%
Early childhood education	13	6.3%
Something else	33	15.9%

*Note. Participants could indicate more than one teaching area/focus, so percents >100%.*

### III. School Attitudes, Practices, and Resources Related to Family Diversity

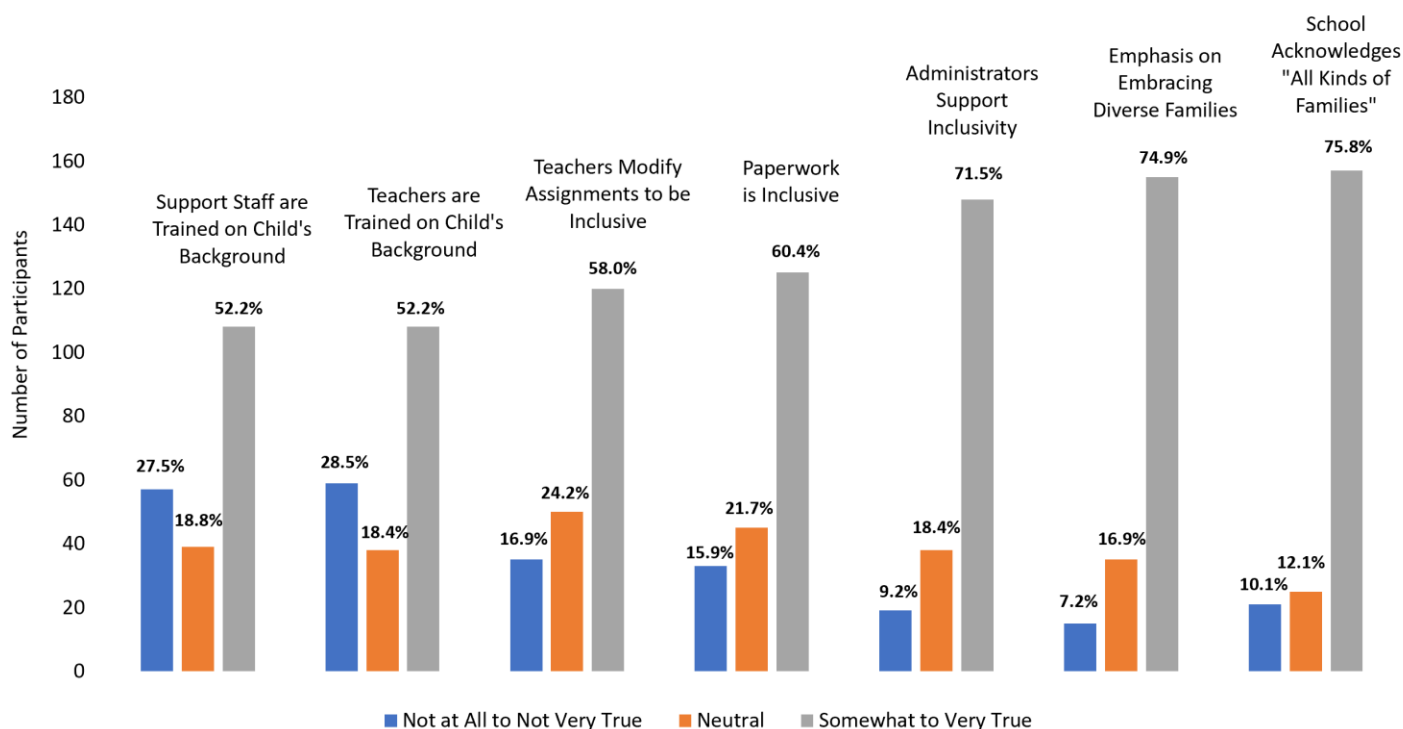
The following tables summarize data on participants’ reports of their school competence, practices, and resources related to family diversity and adoption specifically.

*To what extent are the following true about your school and teachers and staff at your school?*

**Table 3.1. School Competence Surrounding Family Diversity**

	Not at all true	Not very true	Neutral or Mixed	Somewhat True	Very True	Missing
There’s an emphasis on embracing diverse families	3 (1.4%)	12 (5.8%)	35 (16.9%)	61 (29.5%)	94 (45.4%)	2 (1.0%)
Paperwork is inclusive of diverse families	11 (5.3%)	22 (10.6%)	45 (21.7%)	56 (27.1%)	69 (33.3%)	4 (1.9%)
School acknowledges that there are “all kinds of families”	2 (1.0%)	19 (9.2%)	25 (12.1%)	70 (33.8%)	87 (42.0%)	4 (1.9%)
SUPPORT STAFF are trained to recognize when children’s trauma background, trauma history, or attachment issues may be impacting their behavior	17 (8.2%)	40 (19.3%)	39 (18.8%)	65 (31.4%)	43 (20.8%)	3 (1.4%)
TEACHERS are trained to recognize when children’s trauma background, trauma history, or attachment issues may be impacting their behavior	15 (7.2%)	44 (21.3%)	38 (18.4%)	63 (30.4%)	45 (21.7%)	2 (1.0%)
TEACHERS are adept at modifying assignments to be inclusive of diverse families (e.g., family tree assignment)	6 (2.9%)	27 (13.0%)	50 (24.2%)	80 (38.6%)	40 (19.3%)	4 (1.9%)
ADMINISTRATORS are supportive of teacher curricular and disciplinary modifications to be more inclusive of diverse families	4 (1.9%)	15 (7.2%)	38 (18.4%)	70 (33.8%)	78 (37.7%)	2 (1.0%)

**Figure 3.1. School Competence Surrounding Family Diversity**



**Table 3.2. Autonomy and Teaching About Diversity**

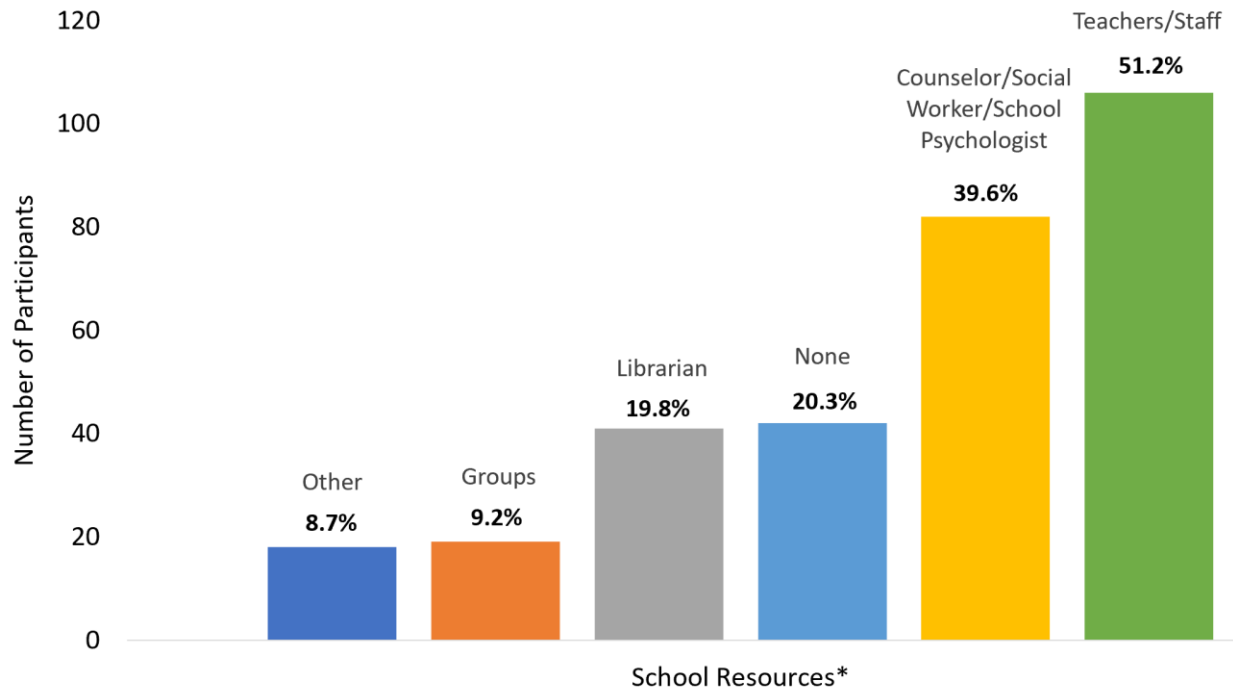
	None/ Not at all	Not very much	Neutral or Mixed	Some/ Somewhat	A great deal	Missing
How much <b>autonomy</b> do you have to teach about issues such as family diversity, adoption, and race/racism?	2 (1.0%)	19 (9.2%)	20 (9.7%)	69 (33.3%)	92 (44.4%)	5 (2.4%)
How much <b>encouragement</b> do you receive to teach about issues such as family diversity, adoption, and race/racism?	15 (7.2%)	26 (12.6%)	38 (18.4%)	70 (33.8%)	53 (25.6%)	5 (2.4%)
How <b>constrained</b> do you feel by your school with regard to how you teach about issues such as family diversity, adoption, and race/racism?	43 (20.8%)	60 (29.0%)	35 (16.9%)	48 (23.2%)	15 (7.2%)	6 (2.9%)

What resources at your school exist that are particularly great for adopted children?

Table 3.3. School Resources Helpful to Adopted Children	N	%
Adoption-savvy guidance counselor, social worker, or school psychologist	82	39.6%
Librarian who profiles adoption themed books	41	19.8%
Groups or activities that facilitate connections among adopted children/families	19	9.2%
Teachers/staff members willing to talk about their personal connections to adoption	106	51.2%
Other resources (examples named: a community of adoptive parents/families; an emphasis on trauma-informed and restorative teaching practices)	18	8.7%
None	42	20.3%

Note. Participants could choose more than one category, so percents >100%.

Figure 3.3. School Resources Helpful to Adopted Children



\*The percents are out of 207 participants, who could choose more than one category.

## IV. Personal Experience with Adoption

The following tables summarize participants' experiences with and exposure to adoption.

<b>Table 4.1. Experiences with Adoption</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
I am adopted	13	6.3%
My partner was adopted	7	3.4%
I have adopted children	48	23.2%
I placed a child for adoption	1	.5%
Members of my immediate family were adopted	17	8.2%
Members of my extended family were adopted	49	23.7%
I have friends/acquaintances who are adopted	108	52.2%
I have friends/acquaintances who adopted their children	112	54.1%
Teacher training or professional development about adoption	31	15.0%
Exposure to media/pop culture adoption content	73	35.3%
Something else	35	16.9%
I was/am a foster parent	3	
I have taught/worked with adopted children	13	
Other responses	19	
I have no experience with/exposure to adoption	5	2.4%

*Note. Participants could choose more than one category, so percents >100%.*

<b>Table 4.2. Number of Adopted Children Ever Taught (Estimated)</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
0-5	62	30.0%
6-10	54	26.1%
11-15	30	14.5%
16-20	18	8.7%
21-30	15	7.2%
31-40	5	2.4%
41-50	9	4.3%
51+	14	6.8%
<i>Total</i>	<i>207</i>	<i>100%</i>

<b>Table 4.3. Number of Adopted Children Teaching This Year (Known)</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
0	46	22.2%
1	52	25.1%
2	34	16.4%
3	24	11.6%
4	10	4.8%
5	18	8.7%
6-10	11	5.3%
11-20	3	1.4%
21-30	2	1.0%
Missing	7	3.4%
<i>Total</i>	<i>207</i>	<i>100%</i>

## V. Adoption, Disclosure, and Consultation

These tables summarize data related to participants' access to and context for learning information related to children's adoption, and consultation experiences related to adoption.

<b>Table 5.1. How You Have Typically Found Out a Child Was Adopted?</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Other teachers (e.g., informal discussion)	90	43.5%
Support staff (e.g., guidance/adjustment counselors)	72	34.8%
IEP/504	59	28.5%
Child themselves (said it)	134	64.7%
Child revealed it in an assignment (e.g., essay)	37	17.9%
Parents (in person/verbal)	123	59.4%
Parents (through email)	44	21.3%
Parents (in paperwork/the student's records)	71	34.3%
Discussion with parents, prompted by emotional/behavioral challenges	39	18.8%
Other ways	11	5.3%
School paperwork/permanent records	3	
I teach in a small community	2	
I don't remember	2	
Sometimes it is obvious (e.g., due to racial differences)	3	
Other students	1	
None of these (e.g., privacy rules prevent such sharing)	4	1.9%

*Note. Participants could choose more than one category, so percents >100%.*

<b>Table 5.2. Does School/Teachers Send Out Form Asking for Child Background Info?</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Yes	83	40.1%
No	46	22.2%
Not sure	77	37.2%
Missing	1	.5%
<i>Total</i>	<i>207</i>	<i>100%</i>

**How is information typically shared?** Teachers were asked how information about children's adoptive status/background was typically shared with teachers and support staff. They often responded that teachers send their own forms and thus have access to it that way. Alternatively, some said that it was shared by the school at the beginning of the school year, with teachers, or, on an "as needed basis" (e.g., in the context of a child's IEP). Many noted the lack of a formal system or structure in place for gathering and disseminating such information.

*"The school does not, but \*I\* have an open-ended question on both my parent contact sheet ("Anything else that would help me to know about teaching your student?") as well as a similar question on my student information form ("Anything else that you would like me to know about you right now / you can always add to this later")."*

*"Typically it's sent out by homeroom teachers rather than the school. Homeroom teachers will share with relevant service providers (ESL, SpEd, etc.) and sometimes with specialists (PE, art, etc.) but there is no formal information sharing system for it."*

<b>Table 5.3. Have you Ever Wanted to Know if a Child was Adopted/More About Their Adoptive History, but Weren't Sure How or Who to Ask?</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Yes	93	44.9%
No	112	54.1%
Missing	2	1.0%
<i>Total</i>	<i>207</i>	<i>100%</i>

***Why did you want to know more, and what interfered with you seeking out more information?***

Teachers were asked to elaborate on their response regarding whether or not they had ever desired more information about a child's adoptive background. Many noted that they wished for more information so that they could relate to children more effectively. Some noted that they themselves were adopted or had adopted children and felt that information about a child's adoptive status would allow them to form a more solid or meaningful connection (e.g., "because I am an adoptive parent, this is a way to connect with such a student").

Others noted the impact of trauma and/or negative early experiences on behavior and learning and indicated that knowledge of such experiences would help them to better educate and serve students ("Understanding how/when someone was adopted . . . can help a trauma-informed approach when needed"). A few felt that it would be useful to know a child's adoptive status and adoptive background because it would enable them to anticipate potential issues (e.g., "whether birthdays are loaded/hard for the child").

Many expressed concerns, however, about being seen as nosy or intrusive (e.g., they did not want to "pry" or violate boundaries), and/or voiced uncertainty about how to appropriately ask students, families, or colleagues to share such information. Some emphasized that they expected that if families wanted to share this information, they would ("I believe that if children/their parents want me to know more, they'll initiate that conversation"); in turn, they generally followed the lead of families and students. Ultimately, many voiced a tension between wanting to know whether a child was adopted and/or more about their adoptive background (sometimes out of curiosity, sometimes because they felt that it would enable them to better teach and support students) and wanting to respect boundaries and privacy and not alienate or offend families and/or students.

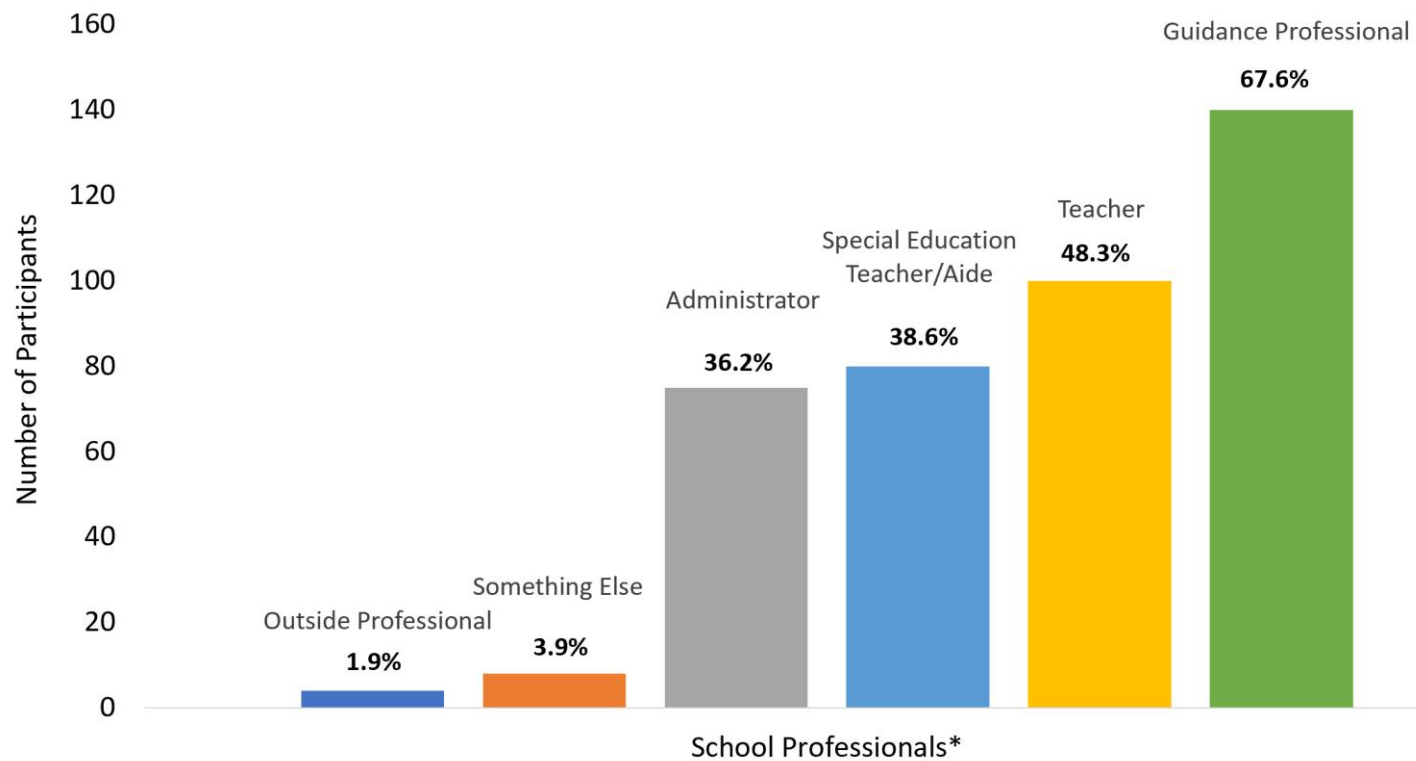
In a few cases, teachers said that their desire for information related to a child's adoptive background led them to "check in" with other teachers and/or support staff. A few teachers said that their students and families were generally very communicative and transparent ("Parents have been very open about sharing adoption history and family information often without being asked").



<b>Table 5.4. Have You Consulted With These School Professionals About Adopted Students?</b> <i>(e.g., re: trauma, learning issues, identity issues)</i>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Guidance professionals (social workers, school psychologist)	140	67.6%
Special education teachers/aides	80	38.6%
Administrators (e.g., principal)	75	36.2%
Teachers	100	48.3%
Outside professionals (community agencies; outside therapists)	4	1.9%
Something else	8	3.9%
Parents	2	
Teachers with knowledge of/connection to adoption	2	
Other	4	

Note. Participants could choose more than one category, so percents >100%.

**Figure 5.4. School Professionals Consulted With About Adopted Students**



\*The percents are out of 207 participants, who could choose more than one category.

**What was the nature of the consultation?** Teachers were asked what led to or prompted them to consult with professionals, teachers, and others about an adopted child or children. Many (20) specified issues related to trauma, sometimes noting that it was related to early adverse experiences. Behavioral issues and changes (e.g., acting out) (17) were noted as the prompt for some consultations, as were socioemotional issues, including depression, depression, and self-esteem (15), and attachment issues (5). Some highlighted learning issues and disabilities (16) and grades/academics (10) as the impetus for some consultations. Some (13) noted issues surrounding racial/cultural identity and/or transracial adoption (“We discuss adoption particularly when a student is clearly exploring the ‘who am I?’ questions which are common in middle school. Especially true with transracial adoptees”). Some (9) noted a desire for more information about family medical history, including early background information.

More rarely, adoptive family dynamics (4), birth family issues (3), acculturation issues (e.g., language) (4), trust/abandonment issues (4), and exclusion/lack of belonging (4) had prompted the consultation. Other teachers framed the consultations less about children’s concerning behaviors and more about their own desire to develop skills and competencies in best supporting children (e.g., help them to express their emotions in a healthier way; show more empathy to children who were struggling; understand and manage children’s behavioral issues) (“[I usually consult] to make sure that students are getting the best support possible, to get strategies to support the child and family, to understand other teaching methods or approaches I might use”).

*“I have consulted about early trauma, the impact of early attachment, the complexities of trans racial adoption, particularly in our predominantly white school, and how to support students around birthdays and framing/supporting adoptive kids with assumptions about parents (i.e. reading a book about melanin and skin tone and how it describes one’s skin tone being a result of one’s parents’ skin tones).”*

*“Looking for help to understand triggers for students or family dynamics. Some students have positive adoption stories, some have been adopted out of sheer need (i.e., bio parents were involved and could no longer get care for children anymore), figuring out what student knows about their history, or helping child deal with learning about their adoption.”*

## VI. Perspectives on Adopted Children: Challenges and Strengths

This table summarizes data related to participants' perspectives on their adopted children as compared to non-adopted children.

*Based on your experiences/impressions, are adopted children less likely, the same, or more likely than non-adopted children to experience any of the following? (Indicate unsure if you have no basis for making these judgments.)*

<b>Issue/Characteristic (N, %)</b>	<b>Less</b>	<b>The same</b>	<b>More</b>	<b>Unsure</b>
Learning disabilities	3 (1.4%)	108 (52.2%)	59 (28.5%)	34 (16.4%)
Developmental delays	3 (1.4%)	96 (46.4%)	76 (36.7%)	29 (14.0%)
Poor academic performance (grades)	4 (1.9%)	104 (50.2%)	67 (32.4%)	29 (14.0%)
Individual Education Plan/other accommodations	2 (1.0%)	94 (45.4%)	75 (36.2%)	34 (16.4%)
Be in special education	4 (1.9%)	109 (52.7%)	55 (26.6%)	35 (16.9%)
Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)	3 (1.4%)	106 (51.2%)	61 (29.5%)	35 (16.9%)
Behavior problems	0 (0%)	89 (43.0%)	89 (43.0%)	21 (10.1%)
Emotional difficulties (depression, anxiety)	1 (.5%)	49 (23.7%)	133 (64.3%)	22 (10.6%)
Take medication (e.g., anti-depressants, Ritalin)	2 (1.0%)	99 (47.8%)	44 (21.3%)	58 (28.0%)
Be in therapy	2 (1.0%)	55 (26.6%)	112 (54.1%)	35 (16.9%)
Peer/social problems	1 (.5%)	110 (53.1%)	61 (29.5%)	31 (15.0%)
Have family problems	5 (2.4%)	93 (44.9%)	69 (33.3%)	36 (17.4%)
Struggle with identity issues	1 (.5%)	46 (22.2%)	118 (57.0%)	38 (18.4%)
Be empathic toward peers	9 (4.3%)	117 (56.5%)	45 (21.7%)	33 (15.9%)
Be tolerant of differences/diversity	7 (3.4%)	101 (48.8%)	61 (29.5%)	35 (16.9%)
Be part of multiracial families	7 (3.4%)	57 (27.5%)	117 (56.5%)	24 (11.6%)
Be part of families headed by 2 moms/2 dads	13 (6.3%)	58 (28.0%)	85 (41.1%)	48 (23.2%)
Have parents who are active in the school community (e.g., volunteer)	7 (3.4%)	109 (52.7%)	50 (24.2%)	38 (18.4%)
Have parents who advocate for their children (e.g., for school supports)	3 (1.4%)	72 (34.8)	106 (51.2%)	24 (11.6%)

*Note.* Where numbers do not add up to 207, there were missing data. There were no more than 8 missing responses for any given item.

## VII. Teaching Modifications and Adopted Children/Families

This table summarizes how participants have modified their teaching material to be more inclusive of adopted children and their families.

*What modifications or adjustments, if any, do you make in your teaching practices in order to be inclusive of adopted children/families? Check all that apply: Language; Assignments; Books, materials; Curriculum; Disciplinary Practices; Something else.*

**Table 7.1 Teaching Modifications and Adopted Children/Families**

Modification (N, %)	Yes	Examples
Language (e.g., including adoptive families as one type of family; avoiding language like “Adopt-a-Highway”)	145 (70.0%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Referring to parents as “your grown-ups”, “adults at home”, “guardians” and “caregivers”, as opposed to mothers, fathers, and parents</li> <li>*Calling family trees “family genograms”</li> <li>*Avoiding use of “adopting” when referring to fundraising, sponsorship, etc. (e.g., “adopting shelves” in a library)</li> <li>*Avoiding use of terms like “real parents” and “given up [for adoption]”; using terms like “biological parents” and “placed for adoption”/“making an adoption plan”</li> <li>*Using expansive definitions and language surrounding family (e.g., some families have...others have...)</li> <li>*Using the language that families use/prefer</li> </ul>
Assignments (e.g., family tree/family history assignments)	116 (56.0%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Modifying genetics, DNA, family history assignments (e.g., not referring to material from “mom and dad” but “from the egg and the sperm”)</li> <li>*Modifying family tree assignments (e.g., offering an expansive/chosen family definition) or avoiding these assignments</li> <li>* Avoiding Mother’s and Father’s Day celebrations and assignments, or providing options to choose from</li> <li>*Avoiding baby photo assignments or contests</li> <li>*“Case by case basis” approach (e.g., we contacted the parents to find out if assignment would be a problem; we allowed student to skip a heritage assignment)</li> </ul>
Books, materials	95 (45.9%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Avoidance of books or music that narrowly defines or celebrates a particular type of family</li> <li>*Displaying, assigning, and discussing books and materials that highlight diverse families, including adoptive families and multiracial families</li> <li>*Avoidance of books and materials that negatively stereotype adoption or adopted people (e.g., that “villainize or romanticize the orphan or orphanage experience”)</li> </ul>
Curriculum	72 (34.8%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Discussing diverse family traditions</li> <li>*Using books, movies, etc. that have adopted children or adoptive families as main characters</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Discussing artists, historical figures, etc. from a variety of backgrounds/cultures</li> <li>*Using visuals (e.g., handouts, videos) that include less commonly represented people, including people of color and multigenerational households</li> <li>*I don't have a lot of control over the curriculum/I don't make modifications</li> </ul>
Disciplinary practices (e.g., out of acknowledgment of children's adoption/trauma histories)	89 (43.0%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Using trauma-informed and/or restorative practices</li> <li>*Using a positive reward system</li> <li>*Practicing tolerance and empathy</li> <li>*Working closely with school supports, counselors</li> </ul>
Something else	12 (5.8%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Using own story of adoption to make a connection with students</li> <li>*Reaching out to families in advance of possibly tricky assignments so they can share relevant information</li> </ul>
None/no modifications	26 (12.6%)	

*"The issue with modifying assignments is that it only underscores the ways in which the child's experience is different than the expected "norm." There is no reason to have any assignment that requires modification. All assignments should be created and delivered in ways that honor and lift up everyone, not require modification in order to fit what is perceived to be the "normal" lens."*

**What types of assignments or activities are challenging for adopted children?** Teachers were asked about what types of interactions, activities, or assignments, if any, tended to be especially tricky for adopted children, in their experience. Consistent with the table above, many teachers discussed family tree, family history, and family heritage assignments, as well as bringing in baby photos, and discussion of traits/DNA/genes vs. environment/physical resemblances to family members (e.g., in biology or health classes).

In addition, teachers identified a variety of other topics as potentially challenging for adopted students, including discussions of immigration and personal identity, discussions about family that involve personal sharing (e.g., traditions, culture), and highly visible family-focused events (e.g., Mother's Day/Father's Day; school plays and other events "where families are invited to watch their children"). Assignments or discussions that involve reflecting on early childhood memories, and/or discussing loss/grief, were also described as potentially tricky. Assignments involving how children got their name, "choices parents made as a baby (e.g., names, traditions)" and reproduction/pregnancy were also mentioned as having presented challenges for adopted students.

## VIII. Adoptive Parents, Advocacy, and Involvement

This table summarizes how participants view parents who advocate for their adopted children.

*How do you typically view parents advocating on behalf of their adopted children?*

<b>Table 8.1. Perception of Parents Who Advocate for their Adopted Children</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
I very much welcome it	157	75.8%
I welcome it	45	21.7%
Neutral	3	1.4%
Missing	2	1.0%

**Feelings about parent advocacy?** Teachers were asked to elaborate on their response (i.e., how they viewed parents' advocacy). They typically expressed a strong valuing in parent-teacher collaborations, noting that parents "know their child best" and that parent engagement and communication were key components in successful family-school partnerships ("I am really appreciative of the information/feedback that I get from adoptive parents because it helps me to be a better and more supportive teacher"; "I view parents as partners in education until proven otherwise"). Some noted that parent involvement and advocacy was not typical at their school ("In the community where I teach, having parents or guardians who care is quite uncommon"), and, in turn, they were "ecstatic" when parents advocated for their children. A few spoke to their perception that adoptive parents were particularly likely to advocate for their children. A few emphasized that they generally valued advocacy by parents but also appreciated when parents "teach their adopted child[ren] to advocate for themselves too."

Significantly, a few teachers noted that many of the foster and adoptive parents they interacted with "don't have a lot of trauma training," and, in turn, parents' lack of sensitivity or awareness to certain issues and dynamics (e.g., not understanding why children might feel angry or struggle with issues of abandonment) impeded their ability to be effective advocates for their children. "I have had adoptive parents that clearly don't recognize, validate, or understand the effects of adoption trauma on a child. Those parents are always welcome to give input and be involved, but sometimes it is difficult because they are not always going about things in what is objectively the best manner for the child," said one teacher.

*"It is helpful to me as an educator, when adoptive parents come to me and let me know what their child's needs are. I want to be as accommodating and inclusive as possible in my classroom and can't do that if I'm not aware of what is expected of me as an educator and advocate for the adopted child. I consider the relationship I have with my families as a partnership where we work together for what's in the best interest of the child."*

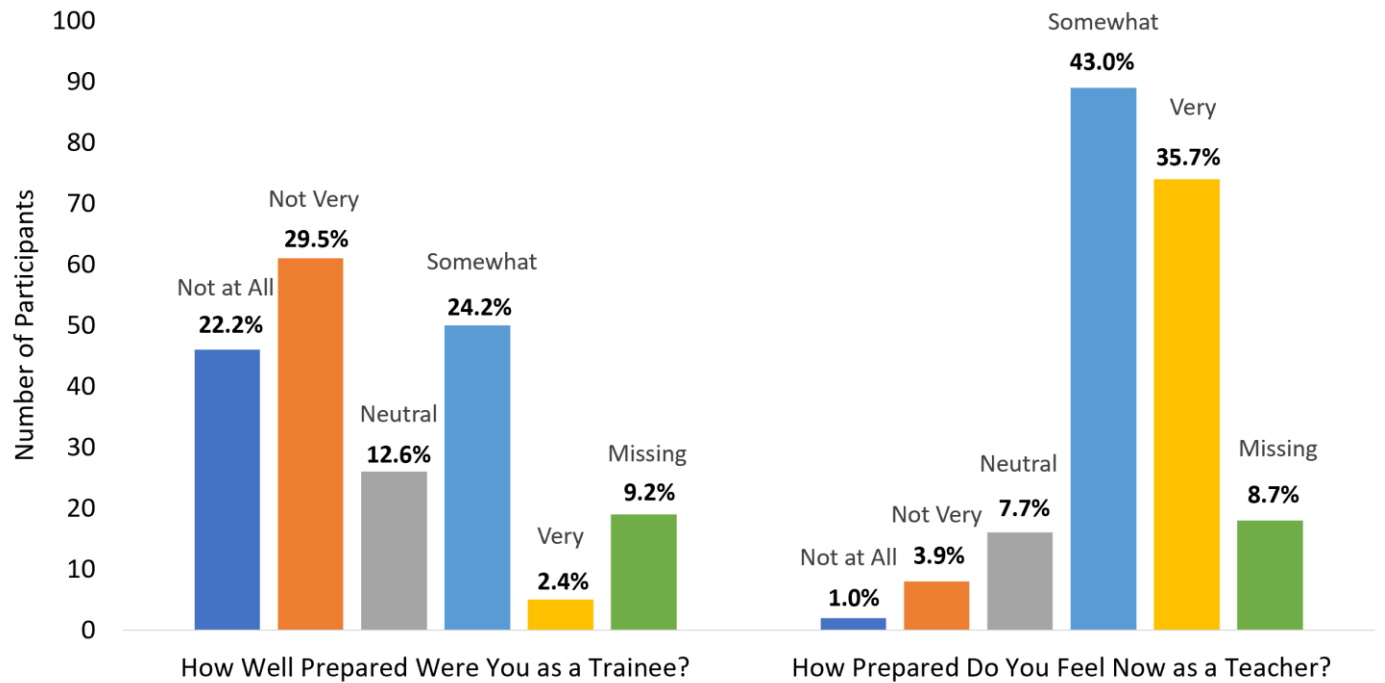
## IX. Adoption Preparation, Training, and Needs

These tables summarize how participants view their training on adoption and adopted students.

**Table 9.1. Adoption Preparation and Training**

	Not at all	Not very	Neutral	Somewhat	Very	Missing
How well do you think you were prepared by your education/training to work with adopted students and their families?	46 (22.2%)	61 (29.5%)	26 (12.6%)	50 (24.2%)	5 (2.4%)	19 (9.2%)
How prepared do you feel now? (as an experienced teacher)	2 (1.0%)	8 (3.9%)	16 (7.7%)	89 (43.0%)	74 (35.7%)	18 (8.7%)

**Figure 9.1. Adoption Preparation and Training**



**Table 9.2. Reflections on Knowledge about Adoption**

	Yes	Examples	No	Examples	Missing
Has this survey given you “pause” in terms of reflecting on what you know/don’t know about adoption?	143 (69.1%)	<p><i>“It reminds me how many teachers out there have no idea how to teach adopted kiddos.”</i></p> <p><i>“I never learned about [adoption] while getting my degree and certification to become a teacher.”</i></p> <p><i>“I am realizing that my curriculum doesn’t really highlight any voices of adopted children or adults, which is a huge oversight and also a missing piece in thinking about the nuances and complexities of racial and cultural identity.”</i></p> <p><i>“I feel really ignorant about issues related to adoption. It hasn’t been addressed in all the years of diversity work I have done. This is kind of unbelievable to me.”</i></p>	35 (16.9%)	<p><i>“Because I grew up with adopted family members and took college courses on adoption, I feel that I knew a lot of this information coming into teaching. However, it is very clear to me that our teachers don’t get enough explicit training.”</i></p> <p><i>“With adopted children of my own, these issues are always in my mind.”</i></p> <p><i>“I have learned a lot, but because of my life, not because of any class. Literally zero classes. But I do a lot of reading and thinking about [these] kinds of issues.”</i></p>	29 (14.0%)



For each item, indicate if you learned about it (a) while training to become a teacher (e.g., coursework), (b) in the context of professional development or continuing education, and/or (c) “on the job” experience (e.g., through teaching); or, if you never learned about it.

<b>Table 9.3. Learning About Adoption</b>	<b>Teacher Training</b>	<b>Professional Development</b>	<b>On the job</b>	<b>Did not learn</b>
Common issues among adopted children, including: identity or attachment issues; managing relationships with birth family; loss/grief	22 (10.6%)	40 (19.3%)	107 (51.7%)	63 (30.4%)
Adopted children’s educational needs and challenges	13 (6.3%)	26 (12.6%)	89 (43.0%)	88 (42.5%)
Different types of adoption (private domestic, child welfare, international)	6 (2.9%)	22 (10.6%)	67 (32.4%)	104 (50.2%) <sup>6</sup>
Elements of family diversity that may overlap with adoption (e.g., LGBTQ-parent, multiracial)	15 (7.2%)	35 (16.9%)	101 (48.8%)	67 (32.4%)
Awareness of adoption when developing curricula; awareness that certain assignments can be stressful for adopted children (e.g., family trees)	18 (8.7%)	31 (15.0%)	101 (48.8%)	72 (34.8%)
Awareness that holidays may be stressful for adopted children (e.g., Mother’s/Father’s Day, birthdays)	21 (10.1%)	23 (11.1%)	122 (58.9%)	53 (25.6%)
Knowledge of the potential for trauma in adopted children and how it may affect classroom behavior or need for accommodations (e.g., some children struggle with changes in routine)	25 (12.1%)	56 (27.1%)	109 (52.7%)	54 (26.1%)
Awareness of assumptions about adoption (e.g., assuming that a child who is a different race than their parents is “from” somewhere else)	17 (8.2%)	28 (13.5%)	111 (53.6%)	61 (29.5%)

<sup>6</sup> Eight participants did not complete this item.

Now, thinking about what *WOULD* be most helpful, please indicate how helpful training or education might be for *YOU* in the following areas, and for *NEW TEACHERS*:

(Note: due to the large amount of missing data for this section [n=69-74], we present the %s for each response (not helpful, somewhat helpful, etc.) first out of the full sample (207) and second out of the sample minus the missing data (e.g., 207-69 = 138).

Table 9.4. Needs as a Teacher	ME				NEW TEACHERS			
	Not helpful	Somewhat helpful	Very helpful	Missing or N/A	Not helpful	Somewhat helpful	Very helpful	Missing or N/A
Common issues among adopted children, including: identity or attachment issues; managing relationships with birth family; loss/grief	7 (3.4%) (5.1%)	57 (27.5%) (41.3%)	74 (35.7%) (53.6%)	69 (33.3%)	3 (1.4%) (2.2%)	24 (11.6%) (17.9%)	107 (51.7%) (79.9%)	73 (35.3%)
Adopted children’s educational needs and challenges	8 (3.9%) (5.9%)	45 (21.7%) (33.3%)	82 (39.6%) (60.7%)	72 (34.8%)	3 (1.4%) (2.2%)	26 (12.6%) (19.3%)	106 (51.2%) (78.5%)	72 (34.8%)
Different types of adoption (private domestic, child welfare, international)	33 (15.9%) (24.3%)	60 (29.0%) (44.1%)	43 (20.8%) (31.6%)	71 (34.3%)	17 (8.2%) (12.8%)	52 (25.1%) (39.1%)	64 (30.9%) (48.1%)	74 (35.7%)
Elements of family diversity that may overlap with adoption (e.g., LGBTQ-parent, multiracial)	15 (7.2%) (10.9%)	61 (29.5%) (44.5%)	61 (29.5%) (44.5%)	70 (33.8%)	5 (2.4%) (3.7%)	43 (20.8%) (32.1%)	86 (41.5%) (64.2%)	73 (35.3%)
Awareness of adoption when developing curricula; awareness that certain assignments can be stressful for adopted children (e.g., family trees)	11 (5.3%) (8.0%)	48 (23.2%) (35.0%)	78 (37.7%) (56.9%)	70 (33.8%)	5 (2.4%) (3.7%)	22 (10.6%) (16.3%)	108 (52.2%) (80.0%)	72 (34.8%)
Awareness that holidays may be stressful for adopted children (e.g., Mother’s/Father’s Day, birthdays)	18 (8.7%) (13.0%)	56 (27.1%) (40.6%)	64 (30.9%) (46.4%)	69 (33.3%)	4 (1.9%) (3.0%)	28 (13.5%) (20.7%)	103 (49.8%) (76.3%)	72 (34.8%)
Knowledge of the potential for trauma in adopted children and how it may affect classroom behavior or need for accommodations (e.g., some children struggle with changes in routine)	7 (3.4%) (5.1%)	42 (20.3%) (30.4%)	89 (43.0%) (64.5%)	69 (33.3%)	2 (1.0%) (1.5%)	17 (8.2%) (12.8%)	114 (55.1%) (85.7%)	74 (35.7%)
Awareness of assumptions about adoption (e.g., assuming that a child who is a different race than their parents is “from” somewhere else)	21 (10.1%) (15.3%)	55 (26.6%) (40.1%)	61 (29.5%) (44.5%)	70 (33.8%)	4 (1.9%) (3.0%)	33 (15.9%) (24.6%)	97 (46.9%) (72.4%)	73 (35.3%)

***What should future teachers know?*** Teachers were asked about what they had learned about adopted children and families that they felt that future teachers should know. Their narratives centered on both generalities (e.g., adoption involves loss; many adopted children have experienced trauma of some kind) and particulars (e.g., there's no single adoption story; don't make assumptions; "each adopted child is unique"; "each child feels differently about their adoption") of adoptive families. They also emphasized the importance of allowing children to take the lead in sharing their story or details about their background, and noted that children generally do not want to be singled out and want to belong—in turn, drawing attention to their "unique" background was inadvisable ("teachers need to be inclusive of adoption but careful not to 'spotlight' it in a way that causes the impression that adoption is something that is to be pitied"). They noted the importance of teachers creating a classroom climate and community where diverse ideas about family were shared and adoption was included as one type of family, thus cultivating an atmosphere where adopted children felt safe and validated.

## X. Learning Opportunities and Mechanisms

These tables summarize participants' reflections on how best to teach professionals in schools about adoption and adopted children.

*What types of learning opportunities do you think would be most helpful to teachers or teachers-in-training in terms of learning about adoption/adoptive families?*

<b>Table 10.1. Helpful Learning Opportunities for Teachers</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Panel of adoptive families	121	58.5%
Panel of adopted students	134	64.7%
Inclusive curriculum examples/discussion	141	68.1%
Case studies	77	37.2%
Role plays	23	11.1%
Something else ( <i>examples given</i> : quick reference charts of inclusive language and assignments; data that can convince teachers that programming is worth their time; videos of adopted people/families talking about their educational experiences)	12	5.8%

*Note. Participants could choose more than one category, so percents >100%.*

*What would be the best way to implement or offer these learning opportunities?*

<b>Table 10.2. Best Mechanisms of Implementation</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Incorporated into coursework or in-service on multiculturalism	116	56.0%
Incorporated into coursework or in-service on special education	81	39.1%
Incorporated into coursework or in-service on trauma-informed teaching	135	65.2%
Online course	74	35.7%
In person course	67	32.4%
School-wide training	116	56.0%
Provided by accredited or credentialing bodies	55	26.6%

*Note. Participants could choose more than one category, so percents >100%.*

*What barriers do you foresee might prevent these types of learning opportunities?*

<b>Table 10.3. Barriers to Learning Opportunities</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
District or school lack of interest or prioritization	120	58.0%
Training program lack of interest or prioritization	55	26.6%
Lack of funding	113	54.6%
Time constraints on the part of teachers	131	63.3%
Lack of interest on the part of teachers (e.g., if offered as optional/elective)	79	38.2%
Schools' fear of backlash from parents (e.g., who may view such learning opportunities as a waste of time)	18	8.7%
Something else	9	4.3%

*Note. Participants could choose more than one category, so percents >100%.*

## XI. COVID-19, Teaching, and Vulnerable Populations

Teachers were under significant stress during COVID-19. In response to an open-ended query about the top three stressors they faced as a teacher during COVID, teachers often emphasized state and school level stresses (e.g., lack of or inconsistent communication from administrators; shifting guidance), high demands (e.g., teaching online and in person “doubled the work”; sanitizing after school often took several hours), and lack of work-family balance and declining morale (e.g., they were overworked, lacked a sense of competence, were isolated from their colleagues, and often felt unappreciated by administrators and others). They also experienced stress related to worry about children (e.g., their social/emotional needs and well-being; their physical safety; their academic progress or lack thereof) as well as worry about their own health (e.g., contracting COVID). In general, they felt that they had spent many months existing in “survival mode,” amidst ongoing uncertainty and a lack of routine.

Teachers were asked about their perspectives and concerns related to adopted children and COVID as well as other potentially vulnerable child populations:

**Table 11.1. The Impact of COVID-19 on Teaching**

	Yes	No	Missing
Has COVID and/or remote schooling affected children who are adopted and/or in foster care, in your experience?	132 (63.8%)	46 (22.2%)	29 (14.0%)
Have you experienced more worry or concern about children at risk for abuse/neglect during period(s) of remote learning during COVID (e.g., due to not having contact with people such as teachers who are potential reporters of suspected abuse/neglect)?	163 (78.7%)	23 (11.1%)	21 (10.1%)
Have you experienced more worry or concern about vulnerable children in general (e.g., children with food insecurity)	168 (81.2%)	18 (8.7%)	21 (10.1%)

***Has COVID disproportionately impacted adopted children/children in foster care?*** Teachers were asked to elaborate on whether or not they viewed COVID and/or remote schooling as affecting adopted/foster children specifically. Most teachers indicated that they felt that children in general were affected by COVID and remote schooling, but especially children who were reliant on special education or additional support services, children in difficult home situations for whom school was a “safe haven.”

Some indicated ways that children who were adopted and/or in foster care were uniquely affected. Specifically, some noted that such children may be more likely to receive special education and other support services, and were thus disproportionately impacted by remote schooling since many of those services did not translate well or were more challenging for children with certain types of special needs (e.g., attentional issues, learning disabilities) (“Some of our adopted students have learning disabilities which makes online learning difficult”). Some noted that adopted children/children in foster care may be more likely to struggle with loss/abandonment issues, making separation from school, teachers, and peers especially difficult. Others felt that the switch to remote learning might be especially challenging for adopted children who have experienced “so much trauma and uncertainty” inasmuch as it disrupted the predictability, consistency, and structure of school life (“The pandemic has been hardest on the two adopted students in my class. . .both have trauma histories and I think school provided a regularity that was hard to cope without”; “So many of these kids need structure and routine as well as socialization”).

## **XII. Recommendations**

### **→ RECOGNIZE THE DIVERSITY AMONG ADOPTED CHILDREN**

The findings presented here suggest that many teachers believe that adopted children are more likely to struggle educationally, emotionally, behaviorally, and socially compared to non-adopted children. Although some studies do suggest that, on average, adopted children may have more academic, behavioral, emotional, and social challenges, there is tremendous diversity among adopted children in terms of their adjustment. Adoption status itself does not have a direct causal link to children's behavior inside or outside of school. Rather, adoption can have varying effects, depending on the child's pre-adoption history (e.g., orphanage rearing, exposure to family violence, abuse or neglect) and post-adoption circumstances (e.g., growing up in a transracial or international adoption where there are racial and/or ethnic differences between parents and children; experiencing discrimination; growing up in a family with significant resources versus more limited resources). The majority of adopted children are well adjusted and doing well, but some adopted children have special needs and educational challenges that must be addressed with sensitivity.

### **→ DEVELOP MECHANISMS FOR PARENTS TO PROVIDE INFORMATION TO TEACHERS ABOUT CHILDREN'S NEEDS**

Teachers lack comprehensive information about children's family histories (including about adoption or foster care experience) that they need in order to plan effectively for their success. This information needs to be gathered from families in a more systematic matter, shared with appropriate personnel, and passed down from one year to the next, while simultaneously protecting family privacy. Schools need to discuss how to balance families' rights to privacy with schools' needs to know information about children so that they can effectively meet their educational needs.

One possibility is having all teachers seek input or feedback from parents at the beginning of each school year, via paperwork wherein parents are offered the opportunity to share details of their children's adoptive background if they wish (e.g., in response to a query such as: "Is there anything else about your child's background or history that you wish to share with us? E.g., adoption history; foster care experiences; family separations, divorces, or remarriages; etc.>").

At the same time, obtaining information about adopted children's background is not sufficient. Without training and education geared to help teachers to effectively interpret the information that they obtain about children/families, as well as what follow up questions to ask or additional information to solicit, teachers are at risk of drawing inappropriate conclusions and/or responding in ways that might be counterproductive to children and families.

### **→ FOSTER STRONG PARENT-TEACHER PARTNERSHIPS**

Parents need to know that teachers welcome their advocacy on behalf of their children and view their role with parents as a partnership. Yet teachers should also be aware that parents may view schools (as institutions) and school administration as unwelcome to their input and feedback (e.g., regarding accommodations). Sensitivity to the challenges that parents may have encountered with respect to school administrators and/or in prior schools may help teachers to anticipate or better understand parent behavior and emotions (e.g., anger, withholding).

### ➔ ACTIVELY PURSUE TEACHER/STAFF TRAINING TO ENHANCE ADOPTION COMPETENCE

Teachers noted the importance of adoption-savvy guidance counselors, social workers, and school psychologists. Therefore, special emphasis should be placed on providing relevant training for these school personnel, who may be a “first stop” for challenges that arise within the school vis a vis adopted children and families.

Few teachers had much preparation about adoption in their teacher training, but many more have had significant “on the job” learning. That on the job learning can be idiosyncratic and (worst case) erroneous or misleading, so there is a clear need for more systematic training at all levels.

Teachers provided a range of excellent suggestions for the types of learning opportunities they thought would be most helpful—including panels of adoptive families, panels of adopted students, and demonstrations of inclusive curriculum examples.

A key barrier to professional development and training aimed at enhancing adoption competence is clearly time constraints on the part of teachers. Another key challenge, though, is a lack of prioritization (e.g., on the part of the school administration). In turn, with more prioritizing, teachers might see this area as more central.

### ➔ RETHINK CURRICULUM

Teachers suggested many thoughtful ways in which curriculum could be modified in order to be sensitive to the diverse backgrounds of children. Their time-tested strategies need to be disseminated broadly. Yet as the quote on page 16 highlights, there is perhaps a more urgent need to rethink the notion of “modifying” curriculum to consider ways that curricula could simply be more expansive to begin with, such that diverse families and children with diverse life histories and backgrounds can all participate fully in their education.

### XIII. Resources for K-12 Teachers on Adoption, Foster Care, & Family Diversity

#### Trainings

##### C.A.S. E. Educational Trainings for Parent Groups and Professionals

<https://adoptionsupport.org/education-resources/for-professionals/c-s-e-publications/>

- For parents, child welfare and mental health professionals, and teachers
- Teacher relevant training: ***Adopted or in Foster Care: Educators and Adoption Professionals in Partnership***

##### Adoptions from the Heart (AFTH)

<https://afth.org/community-education/educational-series-seminars/>

- Adoption agency that offers trainings for teachers re: adoption.
- Teacher relevant training: ***Adoption and Family Diversity in the Classroom:***

#### Resource Documents

**C.A.S.E. (2016):** fact sheet about adoption and schools: <https://adoptionsupport.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/09-Adoption-at-School.pdf>

**C.A.S.E. (2018):** fact sheet about supporting adopted children with special needs in schools: <https://adoptionsupport.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Supporting-Adopted-Children-with-Special-Needs-in-the-School-Setting.pdf>

**American Academy of Pediatrics (2021)** guidance for early childhood educators and teachers regarding how trauma affects development and learning, common emotional, behavioral, health, and learning related issues in adopted children, and how to support children who are adopted/in foster care:

- <https://downloads.aap.org/AAP/PDF/Teachers.pdf>
- <https://downloads.aap.org/AAP/PDF/EarlyEd.pdf>

##### What Teachers Should Know About Adoption (QIC-AG)

<http://qic-ag.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/QICAG-Education-Brochure-v041-final.pdf>

- For teachers and other school personnel.
- This 4 page informational/resource document addresses what teachers should know about adoption in order to best serve the adopted children they teach. It offers includes additional resources for both the teacher and their students re: adoption, such as journal articles, books, and television shows.
- It provides brief, digestible suggestions re: creating inclusive assignments, classroom, etc.

##### Suggestions for Teachers Working with Adopted Children (PACT)

<https://www.pactadopt.org/app/servlet/documentapp.DisplayDocument?DocID=408>

- For teachers/educators working with adopted children
- Much of the material seems to be catered toward younger ages, but can apply to adopted



- children of a wide range of ages
- Addresses issues such as language and assignments.
- Highlights different adoption-related issues for children according to their developmental stage.

### **Adoption Basics for Educators** Iowa Foster & Adoptive Parents Association: IFAPA)

[http://www.ifapa.org/pdf\\_docs/AdoptionBasicsforEducators.pdf](http://www.ifapa.org/pdf_docs/AdoptionBasicsforEducators.pdf)

- For teachers/educators working with adopted children
- Addresses children’s understanding of adoption at various ages
- Contains a list of books about adoption for children of various ages
- Provides suggestions for alternatives to assignments that raise issues for/are often problematic for adopted children
- Contains a glossary of terms related to adoption

### **Adoption Awareness in School Assignments**

[http://www.adoptionpolicy.org/Adoption\\_Awareness\\_Schools.pdf](http://www.adoptionpolicy.org/Adoption_Awareness_Schools.pdf)

- This 12 page self-described “pamphlet” prepared by Christine Mitchell (2007) in collaboration with Tapestry Books is aimed at parents and teachers of adopted children (seems to be catered toward younger ages, but can be applied more broadly).
- It provides suggestions for alternate family tree assignments (rooted family tree, family wheel) and other common assignments, addresses adoption positive language, and also outlines some typical experiences of adopted children in school. It provides visuals (e.g., that can be used as templates for assignments) for teachers and educators.

### **3 Ways Teachers Can Support Adoptive Families**

<https://www.americanadoptions.com/blog/3-ways-teachers-can-supportive-adoptive-families/>

- Online American Adoptions article for teachers/educators of adopted children that suggests that teachers address adoption as early as possible, adapt assignments, and be sensitive and don’t make assumptions.

### **A Teacher’s Guide to Introducing Adoption into the Classroom in 4 Easy Steps**

<https://afth.wordpress.com/2015/03/18/a-teachers-guide-to-introducing-adoption-in-to-the-classroom-in-4-easy-steps/>

- This web based article by Adoptions from the Heart provides guidance to teachers on how to have discussions on adoption in their classroom. It provides suggestions such as using appropriate language, reading books about adoption to the class, educating parents, and initiating a community service project (e.g., involving a local adoption agency).

### **A Guide for Teachers: Helping Classmates Understand Adoption**

<https://www.adoptivefamilies.com/parenting/explaining-adoption-at-school/>

- Web-based article by AdoptiveFamilies.com aimed at teachers from preschool through high school, and resources for adults.
- Unique in that it provides somewhat detailed guidance for teachers of students in upper grades, including high school.
- **Preschool:** mention the word adoption/adopted occasionally as you tell stories about babies or families; initiate role plays related to adoption, such as going to the airport to meet a new child

or going to court to have an adoption finalized; reading stories that mention adoption; ensuring that books in the classroom represent diverse families.

- **Early elementary:** Read stories about adoption; discuss different types of families; consider National Adoption Awareness month events, including having an adoptive parent visit; be aware of potential confusion when the word adoption is used in relationship to animals or fundraisers and suggest different language (e.g., finding an owner vs adopting an animal at a shelter).
- **Later elementary:** Be sensitive that children in this age group generally don't want to be singled out because they are adopted; they want to blend in (as most children do); present alternatives to family tree exercises and give examples of how adopted children have chosen to make their trees in the past; mention that many famous people are adoptees (e.g., President Gerald Ford, Steve Jobs, John Lennon)
- **Middle and high school:** suggest adoption as a theme for essay/journal writing; introduce family history assignments sensitively, mentioning alternatives for everyone and noting that some students may not have access to their birth relatives, due to divorce, death, adoption, etc; mention adoption in science class in connection with genetic studies, noting those traits, skills, and characteristics which are inherited and those which are acquired; in sexuality education and family related classes, discuss families formed by adoption. Explain adoption as a choice for people who face an unplanned pregnancy. Use positive adoption language.

### **Cultivating Connections with Diverse Families**

<http://www.amle.org/BrowsebyTopic/WhatsNew/WNDet/TabId/270/ArtMID/888/ArticleID/686/Cultivating-Connections-with-Diverse-Families.aspx>

- This web-based article is aimed at teachers/educators and addresses ways to foster connection to families from diverse backgrounds. It highlights the importance of home-school ties, especially for students from culturally diverse backgrounds. It provides ideas for developing connections, including via questionnaires and community-building activities.

### **10 Ways Teachers Can Help Students From Foster Care**

<https://redtri.com/10-ways-teachers-can-help-students-from-foster-care/>

- Online article, for educators of children in the foster care system (applicable to all ages)
- Outlines typical issues and ways to manage them (e.g., flexibility re: difficult circumstances)

### **What Teachers and Educators Can Do to Help Youth In Foster Care**

<http://fosteringsuccessmichigan.com/uploads/misc/EducatorsFC.pdf>

- Foster Care Month.org created this 3 page guide for educators. It outlines strategies for teachers such as being mindful of each child's individual circumstance, contacting prior teachers/schools for information about academic status, strengths, challenges, and history, respecting children's privacy in the classroom, and being sensitive and inclusive in assignments.

## **Other Resources**

### **Ready to Succeed in the Classroom**

<https://affcny.org/wp-content/uploads/RTSTeacherVoices.pdf>

- 2010 report on “Findings from Teacher Discussion Groups on their Experiences and Aspirations Teaching Students in the Foster Care System.” This document is one aspect of The Ready to Succeed Initiative, which is an effort on behalf of the Stuart Foundation, with a mission to improve the educational outcomes for foster care youth. They aim to do so by assisting public education systems and child welfare systems.
- The document at hand is a compilation of findings, resources, strategies, and how to support students in the foster care system.
- Aimed at educators but also schools and community resource centers more generally.

**Kids In The House (The Ultimate Parenting Resource)** provides videos aimed at helping parents advocate for their adopted children in schools as well as for educators, such as:

- <https://www.kidsinthehouse.com/adoption/parenting-adopted-children/dealing-with-schools/how-to-make-educators-aware-of-adoption>
- <https://www.kidsinthehouse.com/preschooler/friends-and-siblings/discussing-differences/challenges-faced-when-adopted-kids-start>

**The Roles of School in Supporting Children in Foster Care**

<http://www.promoteprevent.org/sites/www.promoteprevent.org/files/resources/The%20Role%20of%20Schools.docx.pdf>

- This 10-page brief was prepared by the National Center for Mental Health Promotion & Youth Violence Prevention
- The brief summarizes research on school stability and achievement among youth in foster care and outlines issues related to disruptions in caregiving, school environment, etc.
- It provides suggestions for enhancing collaboration between schools and other agencies in promoting academic stability and success for children in foster care.

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<sup>i</sup> Beverly et al., 2008; Goldberg et al., 2021; Harwood et al., 2013; Tan, 2009; Tan et al., 2017

<sup>ii</sup> Goldberg, 2014; Goldberg & Smith, 2014, 2017; Goldberg et al., 2017; Nowak-Fabrykowski et al., 2009.

<sup>iii</sup> Novara et al., 2017; Rijk et al., 2008; Taymans et al., 2008

<sup>iv</sup> Baker, 2013; Barratt, 2011; Fishman & Harrington, 2007; Gore Langton, 2017

<sup>v</sup> Goldberg, 2014; Goldberg et al., 2017; Goldberg et al., 2021

<sup>vi</sup> Novara et al., 2017; Taymans et al., 2008

<sup>vii</sup> Farr & Grotevant, 2019; Grotevant & McDermott, 2014; Wrobel, Hendrickson, & Grotevant, 2006