



Ontario Teachers' Federation— Learning from and with Beginning Teachers

(June 2026)

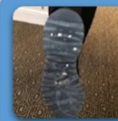
Ontario Teachers' Federation—Learning from and with Beginning Teachers

The Ontario Teachers' Federation (OTF) and its Affiliates are deeply committed to enhancing the preparation, recruitment, retention, mentorship and professional growth of beginning teachers. With this in mind, we engaged beginning teachers in an appreciative inquiry process via a series of focus groups from February to June 2026.

As outlined in the logic model below, the goal of each *Learning from and with Beginning Teachers* focus group is to directly inform the continuum of professional learning and supports provided by faculties of education, school boards and teacher federations.



What's working well?
(themes of success)



What's not working well?
(stones in your shoe)



What are our next steps?
(collaborative strategy
harvest of ideas)

Logic Model

If,

- We use appreciative inquiry to listen to and learn from beginning teachers across the province

Then,

- We will increase our understanding of:
 - What is working well in Initial Teacher Education and the New Teacher Induction Program (themes of success)
 - The issues and challenges beginning teachers are encountering (stones in shoes)
 - How we might best prepare and support beginning teachers (collaborative strategy harvest of ideas)

And,

- Our learning can be triangulated with the findings from the joint OTF Research Study with the Ontario Association of Deans of Education (OADE), scheduled to be administered in the fall of 2026, and, in this way, inform the professional learning and supports provided by faculties of education, school boards and teacher federations
- Preparation, recruitment, retention, mentorship and professional growth of beginning teachers will be enhanced

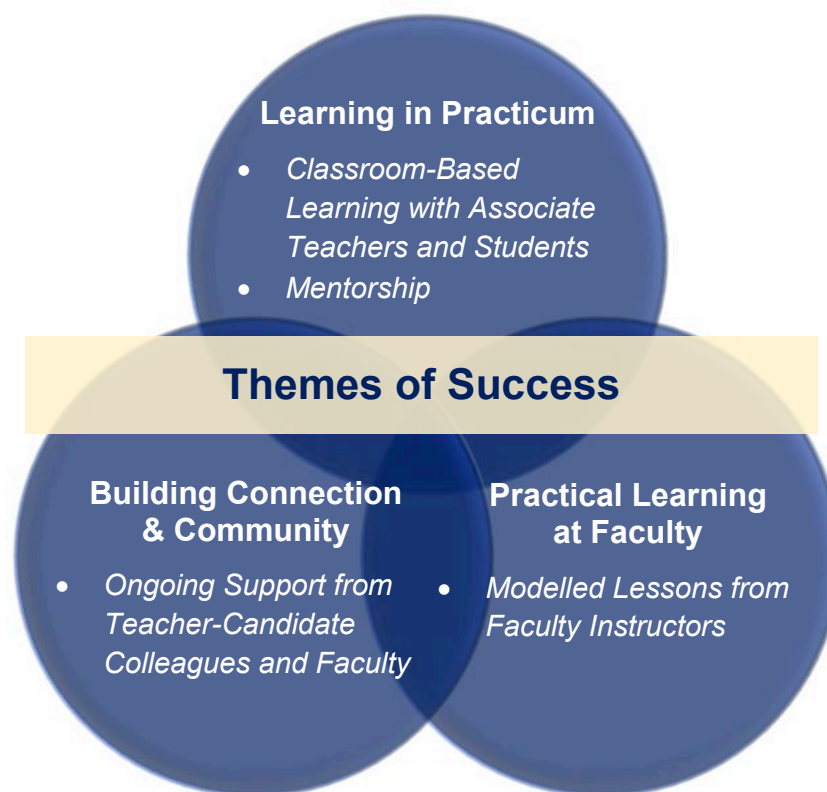
Beginning teachers were invited by the Teacher Education Liaison Committee (TELC) chairs from interested faculties of education to participate in this appreciative inquiry process. In total, six focus groups were held with five facilitated by OTF and one by l'Association des enseignantes et des enseignantes franco-ontariens (AEFO). A total of 28 teachers in their first five years of

practice participated. The appendix to this report contains additional demographic information about the focus group participants.

This report provides a summary of what we learned from these focus groups and the concrete ideas beginning teachers have to enhance their professional preparation and entry into the teaching profession.

Themes of Success

*Thinking about your commitment to the well-being and learning of your students...
What was the most meaningful learning experience you had as a teacher-candidate?*



Learning in Practicum

Classroom-Based Learning with Associate Teachers and Students

- Seeing learning in action in classrooms
- Seeing ideas in action and becoming excited about teaching
- Experiencing hands-on learning—beyond ideas from a lecture
- Getting to know students and how they learn
- Building connections and learning from students—letting students see you as a person, role model and sharing humanity with them
- Learning how documents (e.g., IEPs) live in practice with students

- Having multiple placements and schools—this fostered learning about different approaches to instruction

Mentorship

- Having a mentor teacher to guide us—especially after COVID-19
- Receiving support, encouragement and resources from mentor teachers
- Being mentored by my associate teacher (e.g., practical tips, tools for assessment, classroom information)
- Being inspired by my placement to pursue structured literacy program research
- Receiving practical support from my school principal

Building Connection and Community

Ongoing Support from Teacher-Candidate Colleagues and Faculty

- Building connections with other teacher-candidates—this was fostered by the small size of our cohort and resulted in continued sharing of learning experiences and challenges with peers as our careers began
- Experiencing a close-knit group of educators who provided peer support, collaboration, resource building—we grew together
- Having a Faculty Advisor to facilitate individual and small group connections and support us with empathy and kindness
- Experiencing support from staff at the university who were patient, kind and understanding
- Being supported by professors via zoom and in person (e.g., our program head came to our DIY Grad ceremony during COVID-19)

Practical Learning at Faculty

- Experiencing modelled lessons from faculty instructors
- Engaging in hands-on learning with faculty instructor modelling teaching approaches to excite students about learning
- Participating in workshops with authors, teachers and principals focused on practical tools to enter the profession

Developing Voice and Agency as an Educator

- Having opportunities to provide input into the program—led to learning how to advocate and address concerns professionally

Issues/Challenges

What issues and challenges are you currently encountering in your classroom? (a.k.a. stones in your shoe)



Classroom Complexity

Behavioural Challenges

- Classroom behaviour—multiple challenges, complexity
- Managing student behaviour, responding to social-emotional needs and addressing increasingly complex classroom realities
- Classroom management—student behaviours and addressing gaps from COVID-19
- Balancing meeting the needs of one student vs the needs of the whole class
- Large classes with multiple needs
- Lack of supports for students with complex needs
- Self-regulation—not seeing transfer to interactions with students and other educators

Violence in Schools

- High levels of student needs—classroom complexity, violence
- Feeling vulnerable due to classroom violence
- Not feeling safe
- Physical and verbal violence in the classroom—challenge is how to support the student and move forward

Student Motivation

- Lack of interest in learning and willingness to complete work
- Motivation an issue across all Grades (even in Kindergarten)
- Technology allowing an easy way out (e.g., artificial intelligence to complete assigned tasks)
- Responsible use of technology, social media and artificial intelligence

- Some students overbooked with sports, arts and other extracurricular activities—as a result they are tired and don't value time in class

Lack of Support

Administration

- Different expectations from multiple administrators
- Inconsistency (four principals in four years) with expectations/goals varying
- Not knowing about student issues from administration (e.g., mental health)
- Being assigned multiple preps with leftover timetables—having no cart and no space for a home base within a department

Access to Professional Development (PD)

- Lack of opportunities for classroom observations as a new teacher—required support, advocacy from union to address
- Required to deliver board mandated programs without having background knowledge and without access to professional development
- Need greater expertise for what we're mandated to implement (e.g., assessment tools as a Long-Term Occasional (LTO) teacher)
- Being evaluated in areas where PD is lacking

Resources

- Navigating multiple resources—when you are brand new there's so much to take in with no experience
- Limited resources (e.g., French Immersion, Science)

Working with Parents

- Parental engagement, support a challenge in some cases
- Parental demands and impediments vs supportive collaboration

*With both our themes of success and stones in our shoes in mind...
What advice would you offer to faculties of education, school boards and teacher federations
as they seek to best prepare and support beginning teachers?*

Faculties of Education



Expand Length and Scope of Practicum

- Provide fewer courses and more experiential learning with longer practicum
- Increase duration of practicum placements
- Start placement in September to enhance learning re how to set up classroom, establish routines and behavioural expectations, plus other practical items
- Start placement at beginning of school year as this would enable us to see how classroom and school community is built
- Provide placement in a variety of schools, grades, classrooms
- Provide minimum of at least three distinct placements (socio-economic)

Offer More Practical Courses

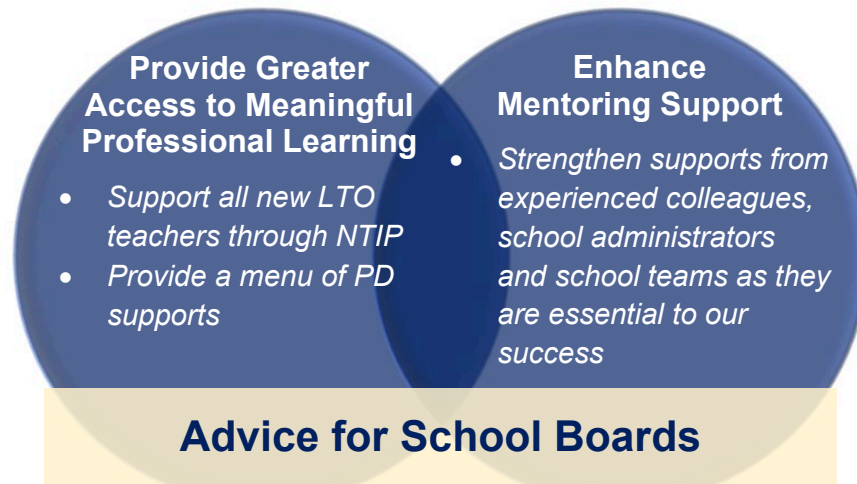
Align Teacher Preparation Learning Experiences to Classroom Realities

- Engage in collaborative problem solving to proactively prepare for classroom realities (complexity, violence etc.)
- Examine real world classroom scenarios where things don't always go as planned (e.g., practical "what would you do" conversations)
- Teach classroom management—practical ideas for modern classrooms
- Provide tools, systems and practical approaches to support positive behaviour
- Provide substantive content like how critically to look at a lesson
- Restorative Practices—offer at Faculty or in conjunction with local school board
- Social-emotional learning
- Trauma-informed instruction
- Meeting diverse learning needs
- Everything my principal will ask me for (expectations for fall—e.g., supply binder, long range plans etc.)
- Focus on application of learning during second half of time at faculty
 - Part 1—Basic content
 - Part 2—Support for being the best teacher you can be in your first five years

Increase Emphasis on Assessment

- Be intentional about how assessment can be part of faculty courses—show us how to assess beyond asking our Associate Teacher
- Deepen our understanding re how to assess objectively—this requires more than a three-week course at faculty
- Expose us to moderated marking of student work at faculty and developing next steps based on assessment
- Provide us with training about how to use observation and conversation to assess learning
- Focus on how to explain grades via practical examples and report comments
- Teach us about Report Card, IEP writing, as we have limited opportunities to observe these during our placements

School Boards



Provide Greater Access to Meaningful Professional Learning

Support all new LTO teachers through the New Teacher Induction Program (NTIP)

- NTIP should start earlier in the year if you're a new LTO
- Provide access to NTIP PD even if length of LTO is less than 97 days
- Ensure access to training as an LTO in order to support high needs students
- Allow us to join in board PD as an LTO

Provide a Menu of PD Supports

- Ensure consistency of NTIP support across boards (e.g., first board very organized, supportive, release time, monthly meetings ... second board only limited support)
- Provide more release days for classroom observation and debriefing—these are very useful learning opportunities but access is uneven
- Proactively provide PD before difficulties are encountered (e.g., if not experiencing success you actually get a lot of NTIP PD—should be the other way around)
- Offer more PD for new teachers
 - Best Practices—Diagnostics for Literacy and Math
 - Planning Resources
 - Meeting diverse learning needs (e.g., equity, behavioral)
 - Social-emotional learning
 - PD with Instructional Coaches on board programs
 - Writing Report Cards, IEPs

Enhance Mentoring Support

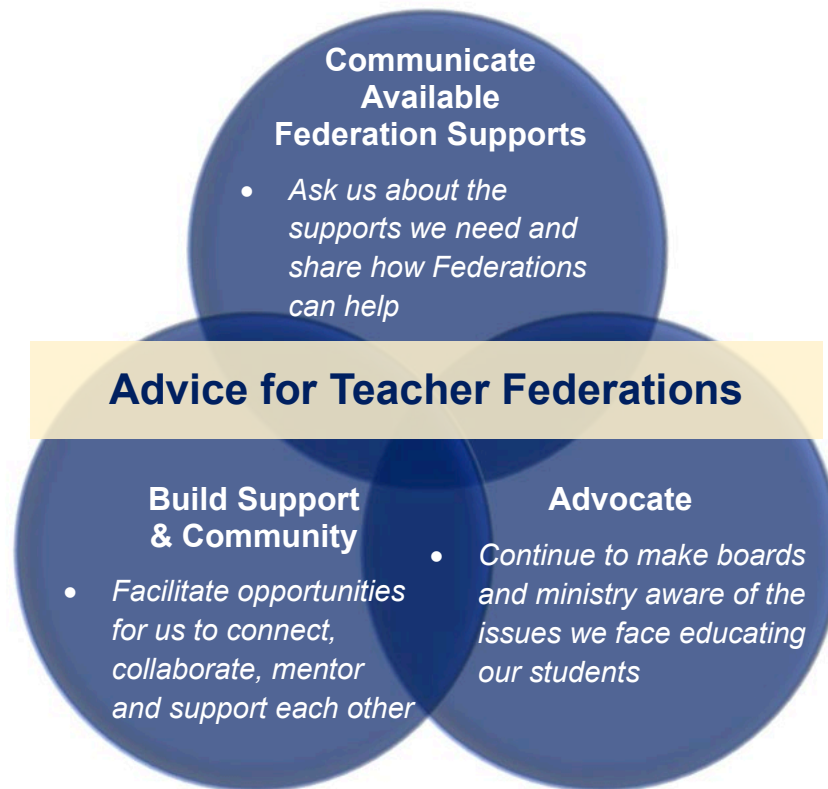
- Strengthen supports from experienced colleagues, school administrators and collaborative school teams as they are essential to our professional confidence, problem-solving and long-term success
- Provide more opportunities in NTIP to spend time with seasoned teachers, both in our school and from other schools
- Provide more release time with mentors—two days is not enough
- Ensure mentors want to help and provide them with guidance/support for building our mentoring relationship
- Have a concrete person assigned as a mentor—it is uncomfortable to reach out to a web of people without structure and support
- Provide NTIP mentors for Occasional Teachers (OTs)
- Extend mentoring opportunities beyond the first few years of teaching
- Create avenues for sharing of resources (e.g., Grade 2 folder on Google Drive)

Provide Support for Navigating the System

- Make hiring procedures more transparent
- Ensure onboarding is a humane process (e.g., access to a human from the board when hired—not just a series of emails)

Additional Ideas

- Allow daily OTs to participate in board PA Days and, also to have access to board laptops
- Ensure ease of access to essential classroom resources
- Provide additional classroom funding for new teachers



Communicate How New Teachers can be Supported by the Federations

- Communicate resources and services to new teachers—what they offer and how they support us
- Bring us together as new teachers—ask how can we support you
- Come to our schools—provide release time to listen to and learn from the collective voices of new teachers
- Conduct a needs assessment—help provide the missing pieces (e.g., IEPs)
- Provide new teachers clear support via an FAQ—who to reach out to and when
- Create a tool kit that new teachers receive upon hiring with resources and names of people willing to help in different areas
- Provide more information for in-school union reps about OTs

Build Support and Community

- Facilitate opportunities to network/connect with colleagues in order to build collaboration, mentorship and communities of practice
- Incentivize staying in education by providing support, resources, connections to colleagues
- Provide opportunities to connect with union colleagues—important human element
- Combat isolation by supporting mentorship (e.g., shadow days for classroom observation and debriefing)
- Provide support from union rep via check ins and by sharing perspective based on trends they are seeing

- Offer training for OTs not able to access board PD
- Host more de-centralized PD—not just in Toronto

Advocate

- Continue to make boards, ministry aware of the issues we face educating our students
- Keep boards accountable (e.g., consistent support for all new teachers, resources)
- Fight, advocate for access to PD for OTs
- Continue bargaining for smaller class sizes

Appreciation and Continuing our Learning

We would like to conclude this report by extending our deep appreciation to the beginning teachers who participated in our appreciative inquiry process. Their sincere commitment to supporting the well-being and learning of students (and each other) was so clearly evident during our focus groups.

By listening to and learning from our beginning teachers, we hope to lay the groundwork for continued research, advocacy and support for our newest members and ultimately for our students. We welcome your ideas and collaboration as we continue to learn from and with each other.

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Appendix—Focus Group Demographics

Faculty of Education	
Brock University	5
University of Ottawa (French)	4
University of Ottawa (English)	1
Queen's University	5
University of Windsor	5
Lakehead University	2
Niagara University	2
Nipissing University	2
Western University	2
TOTAL	28

Years Teaching	
One or Less	7
Two	4
Three	6
Four	7
Five	4
TOTAL	28

Additional Notes

- Four focus groups were facilitated virtually with two held in person
- 24 participants graduated from English language teacher education programs and four were graduates from French language programs
- 23 participants are currently teaching in the Elementary panel and five participants are teaching in the Secondary panel