

FAR NORTHEAST TRAINING BOARD (FNETB)

Consultation with the Education Sector

2024





FAR NORTHEAST TRAINING BOARD (FNETB)
your local labour market planning network

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The information presented in this report is current at the time of printing.

TABLE OF CONTENT

Introduction	1
The Process	3
Consultation Summary Notes	4
Challenges related to recruitment	4
Challenges related to retention	6
Impact of workforce shortages on operations, on staff, on children/students	6
Hiring of less qualified employees	9
Strategies employed to address recruitment and retention challenges	9
Suggestions to help address workforce shortages of the education sector	11
Conclusion	13

Consultation with Education Sector (conducted between July and October 2024)



INTRODUCTION

Between July and October 2024, the Far Northeast Training Board contacted employers in the education sector across the region to gain some insight on current challenges related to human resources recruitment and retention. The outreach involved the whole spectrum of education, from daycare to post secondary.

The most recent local labour market forecast anticipates the exit of many workers in the education sector ranging from senior manager level positions to administrators, teachers, teachers' assistants, early childhood educators, monitors and crossing guards, bus drivers, janitors, etc. Customized Census data for the region further reveals that the proportion of younger workers in some of the key education occupations decreased between 2016 and 2021.

Additionally, the sector experienced several expedited retirements because of the pandemic. That is reflected in the number of job postings in the education industry that are promoted on the FNETB local job portal. Posting for jobs in the education sector represented 27% of the total job postings in 2023 compared to 24% in 2022.

That is why this consultation focused on getting some insight from education sector employers about:

- the highest in-demand occupations in the education sector currently and in the future.
- Challenges related to the recruitment and retention of workers.
- Strategies that are in place or that are being considered to attract workers.
- What the industry and the community can do to support recruitment and retention efforts.

Collecting this input is intended to:

- Support local workforce attraction initiatives aimed at addressing the needs of the education sector.
- Provide specific details about the future needs to help inform the education and career paths of local high school and post-secondary students.

Education is a foundational need to ensure the growth and development of our region and its population. That is why it is important to clearly understand and communicate the human resources challenges of the education sector so that qualified workers are available to address the current and future needs of the sector and ensure the socio economic well being of the region.

PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS:

- School boards/education authorities (4), post secondary institutions (2), adult education (10), teachers association (1), daycares (5).
- Size of participating organizations: large- 500+ employees (2), Medium – 100-499 employees (3), small – 5 – 99 (7), micro – 1-4 (8).
- Language of instruction of participating organizations: French (10), English (6), Bilingual – French and English (2), Bilingual – English and some Cree (1).

THE PROCESS

This project involved Interviews with local representatives of the education sector to discuss challenges and opportunities related to recruitment and retention for that industry. For this consultation the outreach was done across the entire spectrum of education, from pre-school to post secondary. Interviews were conducted with representatives from daycares, school boards, adult education centers, and post secondary institutions.

A list of 51 agencies was prepared. Between July and October 2024, the Far Northeast Training Board invited all those agencies via email to participate in an interview to share their views on the HR recruitment and retention challenges and opportunities. The invitation for one-on-one interviews were sent by email. A total of 20 organizations responded and participated in this consultation.

Note: The information contained in this report presents a summary of the input collected from representatives of the 20 participating organizations. The information they provided reflects their knowledge of the situation within their respective organization at the time of the consultation.

OCCUPATIONS IN HIGHEST DEMAND:

Teachers

Teachers' Aids

Early Childhood Educators

Instructors

Teaching Fellows

Supervisors

IT Specialists

Janitors

Human Resources

Finances Personnel

CONSULTATION SUMMARY

Interviews were conducted between July and October 2024 with education sector representatives to discuss challenges and opportunities related to recruitment and retention for that industry. For this consultation the outreach was done across the entire spectrum of education, from pre-school to post secondary. Interviews were conducted with representatives from daycares, school boards, adult education centers, and post secondary institutions.

Several challenges were identified by the participating organizations. Those challenges could be summarized under the following topics: the lack of qualified candidates, competition, high turnover rates, lack of financial resources, and lack of awareness and/or interest in the profession.

The extent of those challenges differs depending on the type of organization: daycare, school board or education authority, adult learning center, or post secondary institution. There are also differences in the scope and importance of the different challenges based on whether participating education representatives worked for smaller community-based organizations or larger institutions, and whether they are in a rural and isolated community or in a more urban center.

Challenges related to recruitment:

- Representatives from the participating daycare centers highlight that their ability to offer competitive wages represents one of their main recruitment challenges. They indicated that the current wage levels that many of them offer are insufficient given the level of responsibility that is required of the daycare managers and early childhood educators. They also point to the shortage of qualified early childhood educators, the competition and the resulting high turnover as qualified workers will go to the school board where they get better wages and benefits.
- Comments from participating school boards and education authorities around wages differ greatly from one agency to another depending on the size of their institution and its location. Some indicate that they offer competitive wages and working conditions which in their view would be an incentive for anyone considering a career in teaching but that the challenge is sometimes the fact that they are in a small, rural and sometimes isolated community. Others feel that the starting salary is not sufficient for someone who invested

significant financial resources and six years of their time to become a teacher. The example given by one institution is that the starting salary is \$48,000 annually, based on a salary grid and that it takes ten years to reach the \$100,000 annual threshold.

- Wages is also a key challenge for community-based adult learning centers. Current funding allocations limit their ability to offer competitive wages and benefits. Additionally, adult education representatives indicate that they have trouble finding instructors for part-time and evening courses. They also highlight the fact that their agencies are funded annually which in turn results in contracts with their employees that need to be renewed annually, therefore offering no job security.
- Some of the participating agencies mention that the cost of living has increased during and post COVID, but because of the lack of funding increases they are unable to increase wages.
- The pandemic led to an increased appetite for remote work which also impacts recruitment and retention as more people are looking for opportunities to work from home.
- For the post secondary institutions, the main challenge is finding qualified instructors, particularly for trades and health care programs at the college level. At the university level the challenge is finding professors and teaching fellows. Beyond the teaching professionals, post secondary institutions highlight some of the challenges related to recruitment for senior management positions and IT staff. Given the credentials required for those same positions, recruitment must often be done outside of the region. When such recruitment is successful, one of the barriers faced is the lack of available housing for the relocation of potential candidates. In some cases, the fact that the offers are for part-time positions and/or contract positions adds another level of difficulty. Post secondary institutions also raise the difficulty recruiting professional teaching personnel for evening courses.
- Regarding challenges related to recruitment, daycares and school boards alike mention the high demands of children and parents which they claim can be difficult to support and could have a negative impact on efforts to encourage people to choose a career in education.

40% of respondents indicated that they deal with challenges related to staff shortages on a weekly basis. **25%** deal with staff shortages daily.

Challenges related to retention:

- For many organizations, one of the biggest challenges regarding the retention is the lack of resources to offer competitive wages and benefits.
- Several agencies mention that they are doing all that they can to ensure the retention of their staff. The larger agencies can obviously offer better wages and benefits. Agencies with limited budgets try to offer other types of compensation such as more vacation time, good work conditions and flexibility for better work life balance.
- Despite the challenges related to staff turnover, some of the participating agencies highlight that they have very dedicated staff who have been with them for many years. The concern regarding those long-standing employees is to ensure that we don't lose them by adding too much to their already full workload and expecting them to backfill vacant positions while maintaining their scheduled duties.

Impact of workforce shortages on operations, on staff, and on children/students:

How do challenges related to the workforce shortage affect your organization's operations?	How do challenges related to the workforce shortage affect your organization's current staff?	How do challenges related to the workforce shortage affect the children/students at your organization?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some of the participating daycares indicate that they are unable to operate at full capacity because of the shortage of workers needed to meet requirements. As such they are unable to expand their programming and activities. They also indicate that 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The shortage of workers means that in some instances tasks are being reassigned to current staff who are expected to step in and take on more. Morale is impacted and it affects their regular scheduled duties. Although the reassignment of tasks allows the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daycares and school boards alike mention that the high turnover results in a lack of continuity and stability. Consequently, there is an impact on children, especially those who are more anxious or agitated. The high turnover and frequent staff changes

<p>the government announcements about reducing the cost of daycare is good news, but the problem is not always the lack of places, or the lack of willingness to increase the number of places, it is the shortage of workers needed to move forward with those increases. Additionally, the announcements raise parents' expectations which cannot be met leading to frustration as new applicants end up on a waiting list.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School board representatives indicate that being under-staffed means that they sometimes must hire less qualified teachers or have jobs go unfilled. • Several of the participating organizations indicate that they have had to cancel or postpone programs because of the shortage of workers, others state that the human resources issues limit their ability to expand their programming and consequently meet their delivery and financial commitments. 	<p>participating organizations to avoid disruptions in the delivery of their programs and services, it results in a high level of stress, and an increase in staff turnover and sick leaves.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The HR departments or the person responsible for recruiting and hiring face added pressure as they are continually recruiting. • One of the participating agencies mentioned that they increased the number of people working in their HR department with a focus on more active and focused recruitment on social media and outside of the region. • Supporting staff who are not specifically skilled for the tasks means more training and mentoring is need to be assigned to existing staff increasing workload and responsibilities, in some cases without the financial resources to compensate for those additional efforts. This situation also leads to employees being overworked, tired and increases sick leaves. • Some of the adult learning centers indicate that management often has to 	<p>mean that children are continually having to adapt to and develop a connection with different people. Additionally, staff are dealing with parents complaining about the impact of the high turnover on their children who are more anxious and have difficulty dealing with the constant change.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adult educators had similar comments about the high turnover and its impacts on relationship building between students and instructors which leads to interruptions of learning momentum. Many students have a hard time transitioning and developing trust. In some cases, those students leave the program and it is difficult to get them to return. Students who don't quit are also impacted as they tend to try to complete the work on their own without asking the new instructor for help. • Some of the participating agencies indicate that they had to postpone courses because they were only able
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many of the participating agencies mention that they had to limit the number spaces available, or reduce their hours of operation. • A few of the participants mentioned that they had to close temporarily when their instructor was not available, while a few others had to close their satellite sites. • Agencies are generally aware of the training needs of their community and try to create training opportunities to fill those gaps – but they indicate that they are not always able to accommodate as less course and curriculum development will occur because of a lack of financial and human resources. 	<p>fill in to deliver training when instructors are away or unavailable. They further note that most of the smaller organizations have only 1 or 1.5 management/administrative staff so when they are delivering training, their work is backlogged, and they are not able to invest much time for strategic planning and to assess how to improve and/or increase their programming.</p>	<p>to find instructors 3-4 weeks after the program’s scheduled start date, therefore learners’ then need to catch up for example by having two courses per week instead of one. In some cases, courses are postponed until the next semester to allow more time to recruit instructors.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school board representatives indicate that fewer staff within a school means fewer extracurricular activities and outings for students.
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Hiring of less qualified workers:

- To the question about whether they had to hire less qualified professionals due to the workforce shortage, many answered that they had no other choice, they did hire people who did not possess the skills for the job even if that meant more orientation, mentoring, and on the job training.
- All the agencies that indicated having hired people who were not or less qualified have put plans in place for those workers to acquire the skills required.
- Some of the positions for which employees without the necessary skills were hired include early childhood educators, teachers' aides, instructors for adult education.

Strategies employed to address recruitment and retention:

- One of the participating post secondary institutions developed a welcoming plan to accompany new hires for six months following the date they are hired. The goal is to limit the turnover by making sure that new hires feel welcome and supported through regular check-ins with HR and mentors/coaches.
- Some of the online delivery was maintained post COVID to address the shortages, to cater to the needs of some students and learners who have become accustomed to and want to continue with the online courses and, to avoid interruptions for students. The offer of online programs is a popular strategy particularly for the agencies that have several locations. Online options allow them to ensure that programs are offered at all their satellites with fewer instructors.
- For the past two years, one of the agencies created a new position for international recruitment. They attended international recruitment events overseas to find early childhood educators who are qualified and have work experience. A total of 40 to 50

were recruited in Ontario with 22 of them working for their organization. The challenge is to have their credentials recognized even if they have several years of experience in their country.

- Some agencies mention that they increased benefits and offer retention allowances/bonuses after two years of employment, recruitment and referral bonuses, increased travel allowances, free accommodation for teaching personnel, improved working conditions and flexibility to ensure better work life balance, and where possible remote work opportunities.
- In some cases, participating agencies are changing their recruitment strategies to include more active and focused social media such as LinkedIn, others are hiring head-hunters for some key positions such as professors and senior management positions. Some of the participating organizations indicate that they attend more job fairs than they did in the past both locally and outside of the region.
- Remote work and flexible schedules offered to administrative personnel have proven to help with recruitment and retention. For the personnel that must be on site, some are offering more recognition activities which seem to be appreciated.
- One of the agencies indicated that they actually have gone directly to qualified professionals at other workplaces in an effort to recruit them for their organization.
- Job fairs seem to be increasingly popular, but participants highlight the time commitment and resources required to attend.

Suggestions to help address the workforce shortages of the education sector:

- One of the agencies highlighted the funding challenges for Francophones. They suggest that the current allocation of funding for francophone organizations should be managed by and for Francophones to ensure equitable access. They also mentioned that the labour shortages are higher for the francophone institutions vs the anglophone institutions and that it is more challenging to recruit because the pool of potential candidates is smaller.
- Some of the smaller agencies indicate that more funding is required to allow them to develop new programs and services. With the current budgets and the increasing cost of living they are unable to innovate and expand. They also reiterate that more funding would allow them to offer full-time positions vs part-time, offer more competitive wages and benefits, and increase staff retention.
- A few of the participating adult learning centers mention that they have an increasing number of newcomers coming to their centers and would like more flexibility that would allow them to meet that demand.
- Daycares emphasize that what they need is more capacity to meet an increasing demand. They have waiting lists; they have requests for evening and weekend services but are lacking the qualified personnel to meet that demand and in some cases the physical space and the financial resources to expand.
- Housing support and incentives for qualified teachers who chose to relocate to a Northern community is needed.
- Public transportation is not available in most communities which poses a barrier not only to attracting workers but also to attracting students from other jurisdictions which in turn limits local institutions that want to expand their programming.
- One agency mentioned that there is a lot of funding allocated to promoting occupations in the trades and in health care and that perhaps the same should be done for the education sector.

- To address the needs in small rural isolated communities for early childhood educators, it is suggested that more online training be offered which wouldn't require a certain number of students for the program to be offered. It is further suggested that the online training be paired with job placements with local organizations.
- Recognize the difference between northern and rural communities compared to Southern Ontario. Shortages are harder to fill in the North because of the smaller pool of potential candidates and the limited local capacity to train the education professionals that are required.
- It is felt that the community can support the recruitment efforts of local education sector employers by sharing information on the job opportunities and postings.
- Ensure that local recruitment efforts are tied to the broader community and regional based recruitment and attraction strategies promoting not only jobs but also the lifestyle and benefits that Northern Ontario communities offer.
- Encourage more young people to consider a career in education. There was a time when the general perception was that we had trained so many teachers that there weren't enough jobs for all of them. The situation is quite different nowadays, particularly in Northern Ontario as we face a declining population and an aging workforce that is expected to retire in large number over the next decade. Additionally, the COVID resulted in an acceleration of those retirements. It therefore becomes important to showcase the current and future opportunities in the education sector, the rewarding career opportunities in the field, and the importance of the industry for the overall community.

CONCLUSION

As is mentioned in the introduction, the recruitment and retention needs and challenges identified during this consultation process differ depending on the type of organization: daycare, school board or education authority, adult learning center, or post secondary institution. There are also differences in the scope and importance of the different challenges based on whether participating education representatives worked for smaller community-based organizations or larger institutions, and whether they are in a small, rural community or in a more urban centre.

Despite the differing perspectives of the participating organizations, the needs and challenges that were highlighted during this consultation revolve around common themes: : the lack of qualified candidates, competition, high turnover rates, lack of financial resources, and lack of awareness and/or interest in the profession.

The nuances related to the specific conditions of the various participating organization mean that interventions to address the recruitment and retention challenges of the education sector will need to be tailored to the unique environment of the individual daycare centers, school boards, education authorities, adult education centers and post secondary institutions.

Additionally, addressing the challenges identified by the participating educational organizations, are compounded by the fact that some of those challenges are common across various industries and communities. This also highlights the importance of supporting cross sector community-wide attraction and recruitment strategies.