Participants were positive about the Geneseo program completers they hired, citing their strengths: the ability to plan instruction, work ethic, drive to be effective teachers, content knowledge, sense of purpose, and willingness to take chances. One administrator remarked that in comparison to completers from other local colleges, Geneseo completers “are just stronger educators when they come in,” and that in the last four to five years, all of their stronger teachers have completed Geneseo programs. One added that “our Geneseo grads are stronger employees.”

The focus group participants also responded to specific open-ended questions dealing with those areas of interest and concern listed above. In discussing the differences noted for the areas in which the trend was for those with less than one year and two years of teaching experience to have higher ratings than those with one year of experience, both respondents referred to the “honeymoon period,” when new teachers are energetic and excited. This is followed by completers’ realizations of the realities of teaching and administrators noticing areas in which the novice teachers need coaching, which is in turn followed by teachers with more experience accepting and using the feedback and becoming leaders. As previously stated, many of these survey items go beyond the daily mechanics of teaching (such as curriculum and instructional strategies), and it is only teachers with more experience who are able to “go into these deeper pieces,” as recounted by one participant.

For six of the survey items, at least one survey respondent indicated that a program completer was only “somewhat” prepared by their educational programs. We classified these as areas of weakness, though scores here are lower than for other items, the scores are not low (the lowest was 2.18/3). Focus group participants cited several possible reasons for this, some of which centered on the developmental levels of the P-12 students (e.g., “I’m not sure what ‘foster creative and critical thinking related to global issues’ means in second grade”). Participants noted teachers’ levels of experience as a potential intervening variable, noting that higher-level thinking items might not be a priority for a first- or second-year teacher who is perhaps more focused on daily concerns such as management. They also noted that with respect to the community-focused items, it takes time to get to know the community if you are not a local.

In four areas, completers from our Childhood programs scored lower than those from the Adolescence programs (see table on pp. 11-13 of ev: 2018 Employer Survey Results). Interviewees acknowledged the differences in the structure of those undergraduate programs, in that elementary-level completers take many more education courses while adolescence completers focus on content-area classes in their programs. This could account for differences in some of these items, with one participant noting that some of the concepts addressed in the questions may just “lend themselves more naturally to a secondary building.”

Focus group participants noted areas for improvement for the EPP to consider, including having preservice teachers complete assessments and interpret data, growing preservice teachers’ awareness of differentiation in the field, and for the SOE to partner more purposefully with school systems so that college faculty are more up to date with current trends faced in P-12 schools. They would also like to see a stronger connection between the College and school systems, so that program completers will be able to make stronger connections between theory and practice, and to help program completers to be better prepared for the realities they will face in P-12 classrooms.