



Report to the Michigan Department of Education

**A Review of TeachMichigan and
Recommendations to Scale Similar Programs**

December 2024

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I. Context and Background

Teach For America Detroit is pleased to submit our third report highlighting the results and key learnings of the TeachMichigan talent initiative. The enabling legislation requires that Teach For America (TFA) work with an independent evaluator and share progress and learnings bi-annually. Our first reports were submitted in December 2023 and July 2024 (Appendix A and Appendix B), and this report demonstrates the ongoing research, learning, and adaptations undertaken by TFA as we grow our impact.

TeachMichigan is an initiative to invest into the retention and development of high-impact educators working in under-resourced schools in Michigan. The initiative is rooted in the belief that high-impact educators have an outsized, measurable impact on students' confidence, personal well-being, and academic growth – changing the life trajectory of the students they support; as well as a positive rippling impact on the other adults, policies and practices across a school and system. As a response to the critical shortage of teachers in Michigan, TeachMichigan's program provides high-impact educators in poverty-dense schools meaningful incentives, rigorous professional development, coaching, space to build community within the profession, and opportunities to shape broader systems through innovation and advocacy.

Now two and half years into the initiative, TeachMichigan fellows represent a diverse group of high-impact educators reaching students across seven key regions in Michigan. Since its inception, TeachMichigan has supported more than 600 educators, including 451 total educators in Michigan today. 41% of current TeachMichigan educators identify as Black, Indigenous, or People of Color (BIPOC), and 34% teach critical need subject areas including special education, secondary math and science, or pre-K – 3rd grade. The table below shows a breakdown of the TeachMichigan teacher diversity.

Region	Number of Educators	Percent BIPOC-Identifying
Southeast	174	63%
West	96	34%
Northwest	42	10%
Saginaw	42	29%
Lansing	37	22%
Eastern UP	34	9%
Flint	26	50%

The TeachMichigan footprint now serves seven regions: West Michigan (Grand Rapids and Kentwood), Northwest Michigan (Traverse City, Benzie County, and Kalkaska), Saginaw, Lansing, the Eastern Upper Peninsula (Sault Ste. Marie), Southeast Michigan (Detroit and surrounding areas), and most recently, Flint. Within these regions, we’ve partnered with six new districts this school year including Kalkaska in Northwest Michigan, four Flint districts: Flint Cultural Center Academy, International Academy of Flint, Beecher Public Schools and Westwood Heights Public Schools, and one new charter network in Detroit: KIPP Detroit.

TeachMichigan continues to support educators across the career continuum, from educators starting in their career through school and district leaders. We operate six fellowship cohorts as well as the traditional TFA corps member model to provide targeted support to educators based on where they are in their career arc. As part of our collaboration with the Education Policy Innovation Collaborative (EPIC) to study the impact of TeachMichigan, we focus on four of the fellowship cohorts: Early Career Educators, National Board Certification Educators, Aspiring Leaders, and Sitting Leaders. The System Leaders and Michigan Education Policy Fellowships, as well as the corps member program, are not included in the formal program evaluation. An overview of each fellowship cohort can be found in Appendix C.

New this academic year, the Aspiring Leaders fellowship – designed for educators who hold classroom level leadership roles and those aspiring to school level leadership – split into two cohorts following feedback from participating fellows, coaches, and our evaluation partner. One cohort focuses on high-impact potential leaders who are full-time classroom teachers but aim to strengthen their people leadership horizontally – supporting others with whom they work alongside. The other cohort supports outside of the classroom school

leaders including deans, instructional coaches, social workers, etc. who hold a level of positional power and authority to strengthen their school leadership capacities.

The TeachMichigan initiative remains rooted in the broader TFA vision that “one day, all children in this country will have the opportunity to attain an excellent education.” In pursuit of this vision, TFA and TeachMichigan are anchored in the goal that by 2030, twice as many children growing up in poverty–dense communities across Michigan will reach key educational milestones indicating that they are on a path to economic mobility and co–creating a future filled with possibility. By investing deeply into the high–impact teachers and leaders in our most critical need schools, we believe it is possible to make this vision and goal a reality.

This report includes the critical elements that TFA, with input and research from EPIC, believes are important to discuss, highlight, and elevate at this juncture. This report is the third in a series of reports to evaluate and document the progress of TeachMichigan and the recommendations to the Michigan Department of Education, the Michigan legislature, and the education ecosystem more broadly around best practices to scale similar programs statewide. We look forward to continuing to share information as we gather more evidence in support of this effort.

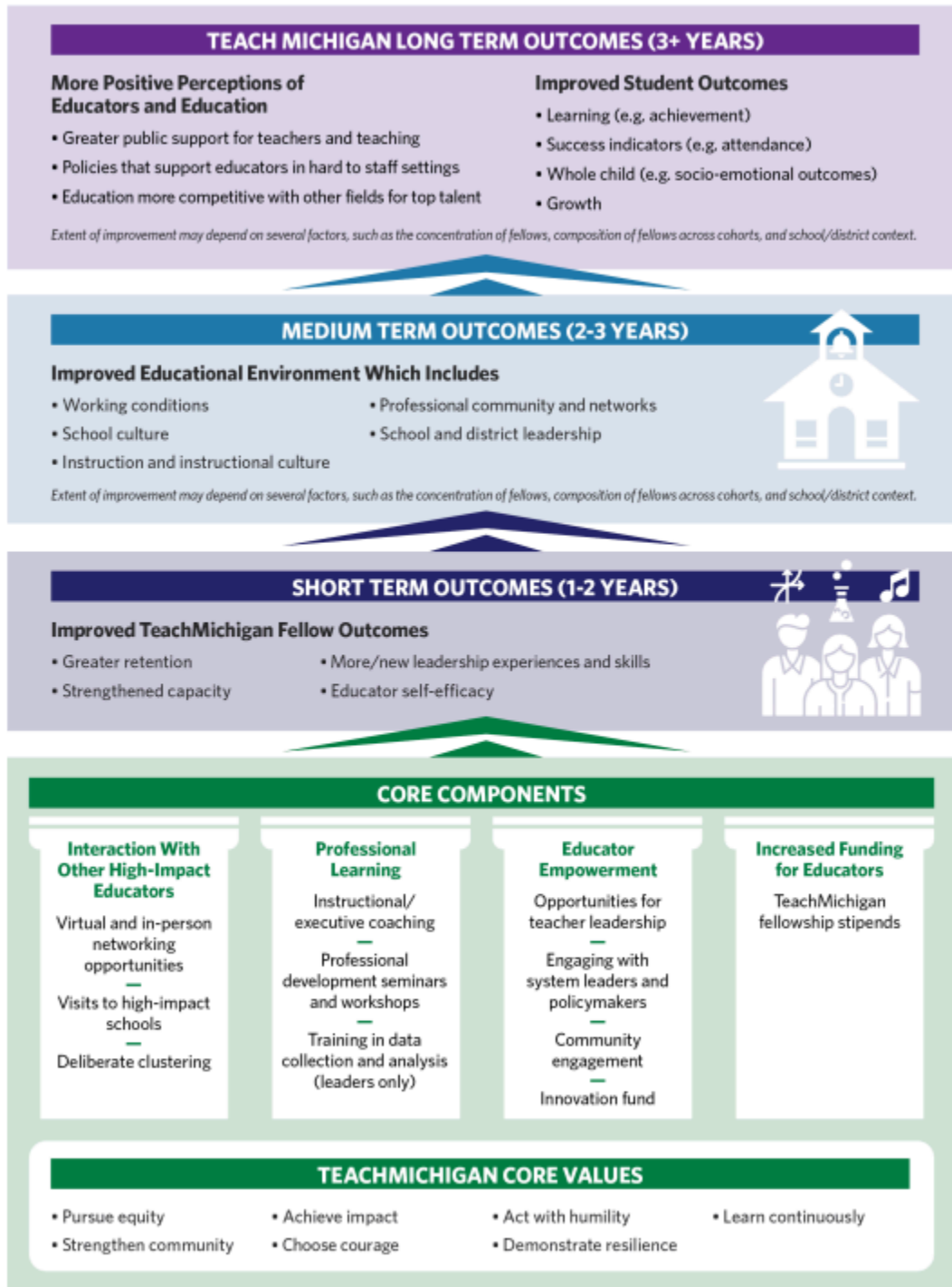
II. Theory of Change

As outlined in the previous reports, TeachMichigan is rooted in a Theory of Change to guide our implementation and accountability for the long–term outcomes we seek to achieve through the initiative. Following the one–year mark of the statewide strategy, TFA and EPIC reviewed our Theory of Change to assess how our strategy evolved and to adjust the Theory of Change accordingly (Appendix D).

Beginning at the bottom of Figure 1, the core components of TeachMichigan remain the same. The initiative continues to focus on four intervention components:

1. Interactions with other high–impact educators
2. Professional learning
3. Educator empowerment
4. Increased funding for educators.

Figure 1: TeachMichigan Theory of Change



Moving up the Theory of Change, we evolved the strategy to clarify the short, medium, and long-term outcomes we expect. This was done, in part, to ensure we become clearer about what we can and will measure and what we expect to see in the short term (one–two years), medium term (two–three years), and long-term (three years or more) as a result of our work.

We also added to the Theory of Change a focus on the outcomes we expect as the result of concentrating fellows within schools. This focus can be found in our medium and long-term outcomes. As we select more fellows in the same schools, we expect the effects on school culture, working conditions, and other medium and long-term outcomes to improve.

Finally, we have focused the long-term outcomes to center on improved student outcomes and perceptions of educators and education. Improving teacher retention remains a key outcome of TeachMichigan, however, we expect to see this sooner in the evaluation while the impacts on people farther from our direct stakeholders may take longer. We are pleased to highlight further the findings around educator retention, strengthened capacity and skill, and self-efficacy in this report.

III. Key Learnings

The launch of another full cohort of educators in Fall 2024 and the continuation of EPIC’s research into the TeachMichigan initiative, offer us key learnings that drive our recommendations below for how to scale similar programs:

A. Educators are more likely to be satisfied and to stay in hard-to-staff schools with improved compensation

Improving educator compensation as a means to retain the highest-impact teachers and leaders in schools serving high-poverty communities is a cornerstone of the TeachMichigan Theory of Change. Research demonstrates that, when adjusted for inflation, the “average teacher salaries in Michigan have declined by more than 20% since 1999”, resulting in “less purchasing power than previous generations” for teachers.¹ Michigan teachers also earn approximately 20% less than other professionals with similar levels of education, demonstrating the lack of competitiveness between education and other industries.²

As part of the TeachMichigan initiative, and grounded in research, Teach For America provides robust stipends to attract and retain top educators. We provide a \$5,000 signing

bonus followed by successive and escalating completion bonuses after each fellowship year, up to three years. A fellow earns on average \$35,000 over the course of three years, with additional one time stipends provided to educators who meet additional criteria including teaching critical need subject areas.

While the impact of the stipends on educator retention is still in evaluation, early evidence demonstrates that the TeachMichigan incentives are having a meaningful impact on the fellows in the program. As highlighted in Table 1 of EPIC's Michigan Teacher Compensation Report, the signing bonus and first two year retention bonuses totaling \$10,000 represent "between 21.7% and 29.2% of the minimum teacher's salary across participating districts." When the third year retention bonus of \$15,000 is added, this percentage increases "ranging from 32.6% to 43.8% of the minimum salary." When looking across all three years of the fellowship, compensation increases "by one-fourth to one-third of their base salary" for new teachers.¹ This is a significant increase in compensation, particularly for new teachers, and likewise results in a "smaller but still meaningful increase in compensation" for mid-career teachers who earn "salaries closer to their district's average."¹

Table 1. TeachMichigan Stipends as a Percentage of Salary								
	New Teacher Salaries			Average Teacher Salaries				
	First and Second Stipends as a % of Salary ¹ (1)	Final Stipend as a % of Salary ¹ (2)	Total Stipend as a % of 3-year Salary ¹ (3)	First and Second Stipends as a % of Salary ² (4)	Final Stipend as a % of Salary ² (5)	Total Stipend as a % of 3-year Salary ² (6)	Average Salary Rank Within ISD ² (4)	Average Salary Rank Within ISD Including TeachMichigan Stipend (7)
Benzie Central Schools	26.4%	39.6%	30.8%	15.3%	23.0%	17.9%	7/17	2/17
Detroit Public Schools Community District	26.0%	39.0%	30.3%	13.7%	20.5%	15.9%	24/35	6/35
Grand Rapids Public Schools	22.6%	33.9%	26.4%	15.9%	23.9%	18.6%	18/22	4/22
Kentwood Public Schools	21.7%	32.6%	25.4%	15.1%	22.7%	17.6%	13/22	3/22
Lansing Public Schools	24.4%	36.7%	28.5%	17.4%	26.1%	20.3%	8/12	1/12
Saginaw Public Schools	22.2%	33.3%	25.9%	16.5%	24.7%	19.2%	7/12	1/12
Sault Ste. Marie Public Schools	29.2%	43.8%	34.0%	19.0%	28.6%	22.2%	11/15	4/15
Traverse City Area Public Schools	22.7%	34.0%	26.5%	14.4%	21.5%	16.7%	3/17	1/17

¹ Source: district salary schedules and/or collective bargaining agreements.

² Source: Bulletin 1014.

Beyond the individual teacher level, the TeachMichigan stipends also improve participating districts’ rank in terms of salary competition within their ISD market. An important outcome of teacher retention through TeachMichigan is ensuring that educators remain in their districts and the highest-need schools, and are not attracted away to higher paying opportunities in other more affluent districts. As a result of the stipends, compensation is raised “to the top third of districts in every ISD” along with “three districts – Traverse City Area Public Schools, Lansing Public Schools, and Saginaw Public Schools – moving to the highest-paying position in their ISD”. This data demonstrates that by providing stipends, thereby improving overall compensation, reduces educators’ “financial incentive to seek employment in other districts”.¹

As a result of the increased compensation due to the TeachMichigan stipends, fellows are more satisfied with their overall compensation and, we anticipate, are more likely to stay in education long-term. When surveyed by EPIC, results demonstrate that the “TeachMichigan

stipends meaningfully increase fellow’s satisfaction with their compensation.” Figure 3 from EPIC’s report, *Teacher Compensation in Michigan: State Policy Context and Prospects for Reform*, details that “when asked about their satisfaction with their base salary from their district, fellows’ responses averaged “somewhat disagree” on the survey scale.” When factoring in the TeachMichigan stipends, however, fellows on average “reported “somewhat agree” when asked about their satisfaction with their total compensation”.¹ This is a significant variation in response, reflecting an entire scale point difference across all fellowship groups, and suggesting the meaningful impact that TeachMichigan stipend provides to fellows.

Figure 3. Satisfaction With Pay Over Time



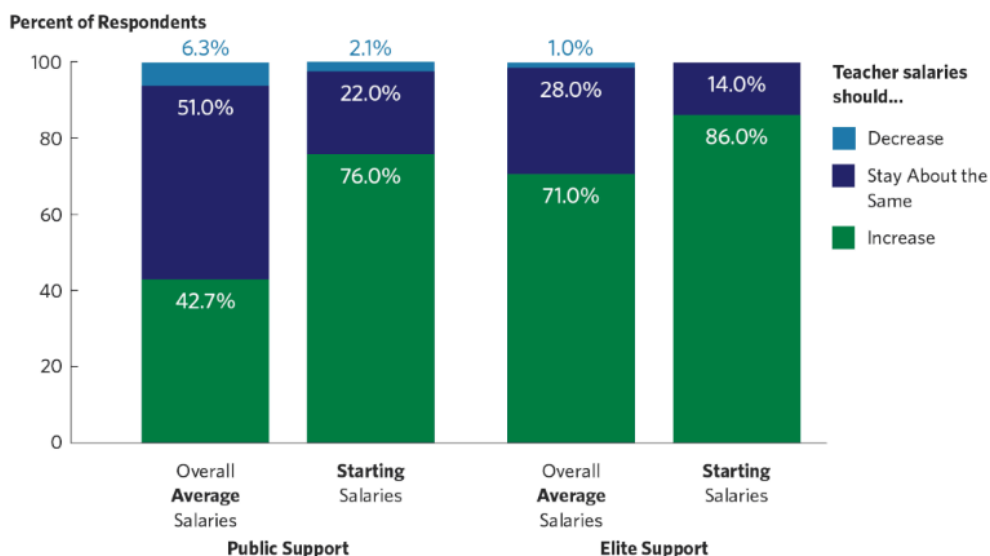
Fellows were asked: “To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your compensation as an educator? a. I am satisfied with the pay I receive from my district or charter network (i.e., regular salary plus any school or district stipends/wages). b. I am satisfied with my total pay (i.e., regular salary plus school or district stipends/wages and TeachMichigan stipend).

TeachMichigan fellows are among the highest-impact teachers in the state, with the autonomy to determine where, or in what field, they’ll work. When compensation is markedly higher in other districts or industries, these “differences create incentives for teacher mobility”.¹ EPIC’s research suggests that improving teacher compensation will support retention of Michigan educators, particularly in our highest-need schools, which will in turn improve student achievement in the long-term. Should teacher compensation not increase more broadly, once the fellowship and incentives end for TeachMichigan, they may “wish to maintain the level of compensation they enjoy during their fellowship period” and seek other opportunities, as demonstrated by similar research on teacher incentives by Glazerman et al.¹

Compensation remains a significant driver in teacher satisfaction and long-term retention in education. To date, the TeachMichigan stipends have demonstrated that improving teacher salaries makes a meaningful difference on overall teacher satisfaction with compensation and, we anticipate, the likelihood of remaining in their schools. Teach For America internally tracks retention in districts from the start of fellowships. To date, more than 95% of fellows have remained in their schools or districts (Appendix F).

This research supports the TeachMichigan recommendation of increasing teacher salaries more broadly, and is widely supported by the broader public. In the most recent State of the State Survey (SOSS), Michigan State University’s Institute for Public Policy and Social Research (IPPSR) “asked respondents about their views on both starting and average teacher salaries, including whether these should increase, decrease, or stay about the same, and what respondents believed appropriate salary levels should be.” The survey findings, evidenced in Figure 2 from EPIC below, “reveal high levels of public support for increasing teacher compensation in Michigan”.¹

Figure 2. Public and Elite Support for Increasing Teacher Salaries



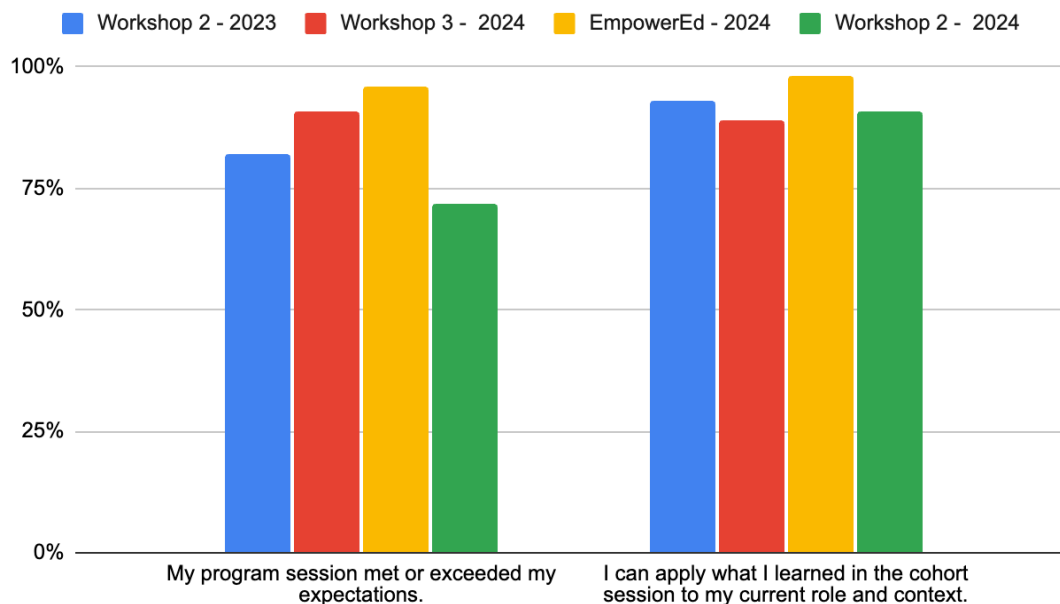
Given the widespread support for increasing teacher salaries, coupled with the evidence of impact on improved compensation through the TeachMichigan stipends, it is Teach For America’s recommendation that organizations seeking to scale similar programs also emphasize providing and improving overall teacher compensation in high poverty schools, and that the state should consider a more scalable and sustainable solution in this effort.

B. Educators at all stages of their career want high quality professional development

The TeachMichigan fellowships support educators across the continuum of school roles with varying levels of experience. The fellowships offer opportunities for those early in their careers through educators who are very experienced with more than 20 years in the profession. To understand the impact of TeachMichigan professional development, we zoomed in on a snapshot of the fellowship programming offered to teachers – our Early Career Educators and our National Board Certification (NBC) fellows.

The professional development provided by TeachMichigan focuses on improving teachers' "capacity, knowledge, and skills".³ NBC fellows – some of the most experienced and skilled teachers in the program – believe that the structure of reflection, coaching and peer feedback they have received has helped them improve their teaching practice, even at such an advanced stage of their careers. Specifically, they have implemented "concrete changes... to their practice as a result" including improved formative assessments, scaffolding strategies, and student collaboration. A complete list of described improvements from fellows is available in EPIC's *Learning Through TeachMichigan: Teacher Fellows' Perceptions on Factors that Impact their Learning and Application of Learning*.³ Survey results from TeachMichigan workshop data further demonstrate the NBC fellows satisfaction with the professional development provided and the impact on their practices. 85% of participants reported that their workshop met or exceeded their expectations. Additionally, 93% of NBC educators stated they could apply the knowledge gained from their cohort session to their current role and context, emphasizing the relevance and impact of the professional learning experience.

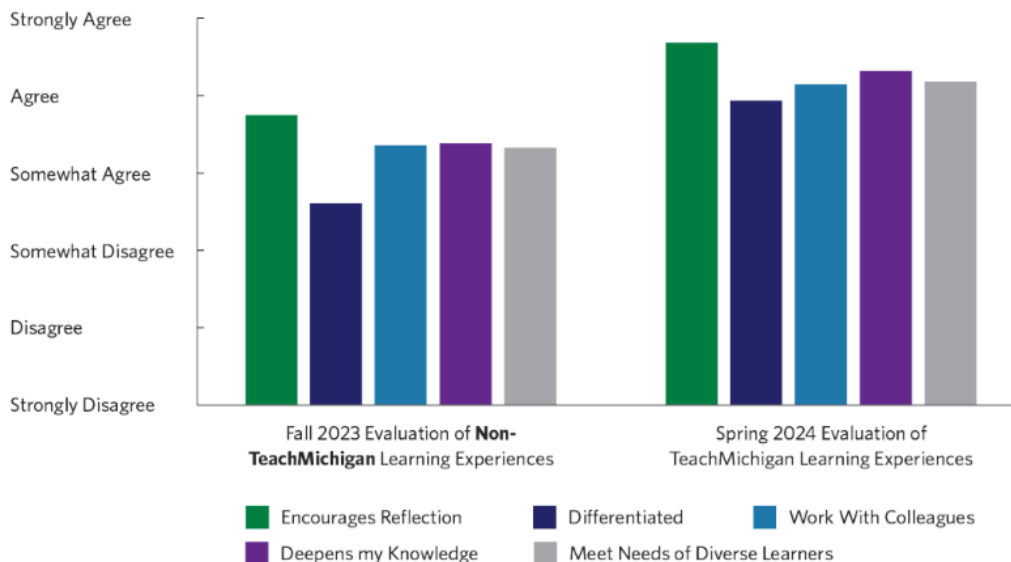
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Although NBC-pursuant educators do not need to be a part of TeachMichigan in order to pursue National Board Certification, surveyed fellows highlight the growth that TeachMichigan professional development has provided them. Fellows “described feeling stagnant or stuck in their careers and looking to TeachMichigan for a challenge that would help them to continue growing in their practice”.³ This is additional evidence to the impact of the learning opportunities provided through TeachMichigan.

While all educators receive some level of professional development from their schools and districts, the survey of Early Career and NBC fellows demonstrates that fellows are more satisfied with the professional development they receive from TeachMichigan than other professional development to which they have access. When accounting for design of professional development, “fellows indicated that TeachMichigan professional development was superior across all three design characteristics” – encouraged reflection on their practice, provided ways to work with colleagues to refine their practice, and was differentiated to meet their individual needs.³ Figure 4 from EPIC’s report showcases this enhanced satisfaction from fellows across all professional development characteristics.

Figure 4. Design and Outcomes of Professional Learning Activities Over the Last Year



Note: Analyses include only fellows who started in fall 2023 and who identified as teachers. Fall surveys asked about the ‘last 12 months’ while spring survey asked about the ‘current school year.’ Results are presented as means of a five-point Likert scale from 0 (“strongly disagree”) to 4 (“strongly agree”).

As part of the evaluation of TeachMichigan’s development of educators, it was important that EPIC also interview non-fellows to understand their perspective on professional development and perceived impact of TeachMichigan. Overall, the interviews and focus groups with non-fellows demonstrated “positive impressions of TeachMichigan’s professional development opportunities, seeing the program as an opportunity to improve their teaching practice”.⁴ The non-fellow educators, many of whom are experienced educators, also shared the desire for professional development at their zone of proximal development, which they don’t see themselves receiving at this point in time. Their current professional development, coupled with their observations of professional development received by TeachMichigan educators, “reflects the overall perception that TeachMichigan’s professional development is more aligned with the specific needs of experienced educators and higher quality in comparison to that which they are offered within their schools and districts”.⁴ The growth and development of educators is crucial to ensuring improved student outcomes, and should be robust for educators in fellowships like TeachMichigan and non-fellowships alike.

Ultimately, there is a strong desire for TeachMichigan to continue working with educators who are teachers, and who want to remain in the classroom and improve their craft. EPIC’s

focus groups with NBC educators and non-fellows demonstrated the interest in “a cohort focusing on instructional techniques, allowing experienced educators to grow professionally through exposure to current educational strategies while staying in their classrooms”.⁴ In part as a result of these evaluation findings, TFA evolved the Aspiring Leaders fellowship and designed two distinct cohorts for the fellowship – one for those pursuing school leadership and one for those interested in developing as people leaders while remaining in the classroom. This was an opportunity to meet TeachMichigan fellows in their zone of proximal development and attract a new cohort of educators to the program who were interested in the professional development offerings of the fellowships but didn’t see a fellowship fit for themselves. For TeachMichigan, and other programs seeking to scale like initiatives, it is important to ensure professional development and learning experiences that meet the unique needs of educators at different stages of their career.

C. District and school level support are crucial factors in the efficacy of talent initiatives

Partnership with educators as well as district and school leaders is an integral component of the TeachMichigan initiative, allowing for productive collaboration and improved educational environment for teachers. TeachMichigan has a clear criteria for selecting district partners that considers a variety of factors including vacancies, certification needs, strategic alignment, and political and locational diversity. Crucial to this effort is the partnership TFA is able to build with the district superintendent and leadership team to ensure alignment on vision and support of fellows in their schools. Appendix I provides detailed criteria TFA uses to select TeachMichigan district partners to ensure strong support and alignment of the fellowship programming.

Even with intentional criteria and the building of strong partnerships, however, we can see that the impact of the TeachMichigan initiative might differ based on school level culture and climate. As evidenced in EPIC’s *Learning Through TeachMichigan* report, there are several factors that support educators’ ability to apply their learnings to their school community including school conditions and relationships between teachers. In schools with existing strong working conditions and school culture, fellows could easily share their TeachMichigan learning with colleagues due to the “positive sociocultural context” in their schools.³ In schools where TeachMichigan fellows “reported a negative school climate or negative relationships with colleagues” fellows did not report sharing their learnings from TeachMichigan because the school environment “seemed to inhibit fellows’ ability to apply their TeachMichigan learning beyond their own classroom, even when they wanted to do so.”³ These findings suggest that the school and district environments play an important role

in spreading learning amongst teachers, and that a positive school climate allows for greater learning and collegiality. TeachMichigan fellows in the same schools and districts, for example, were able to strengthen their relationships with one another because of their shared fellowship experiences, “thereby creating conditions in which they felt ready and able to share their learning”.³ Positive relationships between teachers not only allows for improved school climate and culture, but enhances the instructional culture and shared learning educators are able to have with one another to improve outcomes for students.

Therefore, there are a couple of key learnings here for scaling similar programs. First, supporting and developing the leader of the school, the principal, is an important design choice for talent initiatives. At first, TeachMichigan did not focus on recruiting and supporting the principal in the school with fellows; however, school level culture and climate is a key medium term outcome for the work. Additionally, fostering shared learning and positive relationships between teachers and school leadership can support talent improvements spreading within a school community. We’ve made progress in these efforts by concentrating fellows in distinct districts and partner schools so that TeachMichigan educators can share learning and influence educational outcomes with one another. Educator leadership at both the school and classroom level are important inputs to strengthen school culture, support environments that can spread learning, and result in positive impact for students.

IV. Summary Recommendations

Each program year offers new learning and recommendations to evolve TeachMichigan to better serve teachers and students in Michigan. Our Theory of Change remains a guidepost to our efforts – even as it itself evolves – to ensure the initiative can meet short, medium and long-term outcomes for Michigan’s educators and students. Now one and half years into the full-scale, statewide approach, TeachMichigan offers important learnings that TFA, and any organization seeking to implement a similar program, can use to improve educator retention, perceptions, and student outcomes.

A key input in the TeachMichigan initiative includes additional stipends over the course of the fellowship to measure the influence of compensation on overall teacher retention. Research results show that compensation remains a crucial component of teacher satisfaction. Surveys and interviews demonstrate improved happiness with compensation among TeachMichigan fellows, and research further supports the compensation improvement it provides to teachers within their districts, especially with early career

educators and relative to the market. While the long-term retention of educators continues to be a key point of study through TeachMichigan, we posit that the improved compensation offered by the stipends will increase the likelihood of educators remaining in their schools. We encourage other programs to explore enhancing educator compensation as a means of improving overall satisfaction and ultimately retention in the profession.

TeachMichigan educators also desire strong professional development in order to grow in their practice and improve their impact on student achievement. Given the wide experience level and skill-set of educators, it is important to provide development offerings that meet educators in their zone of proximal development. TeachMichigan provides targeted support to educators through the varied fellowship cohorts, coaching, and formal professional development gatherings, and feedback from fellows find this learning to be superior to others they've previously experienced in other settings which may not be differentiated to meet their needs. Non-fellows interviewed as part of the evaluation further confirm the desire among educators for high quality professional development and learnings aligned with their specific needs. TeachMichigan will continue to offer high quality professional development aligned to the needs of the educators in various cohorts and recommends that other programs offer learning opportunities that meet educators in their zone of proximal development to ensure educator growth and satisfaction in the profession long-term.

The school culture and environment in which fellows work also plays an integral role in shaping the efficacy of talent initiatives. The learnings that fellows receive from TeachMichigan should be shared amongst educators – fellows and non-fellows alike – to improve classrooms and outcomes for students. TeachMichigan has found that when concentrated together, fellows are more likely to share their learning with one another given their positive connections through the fellowship. In addition, in schools with positive school culture, fellows felt more supported in their ability to share learnings with colleagues further supporting the importance of developing school leadership that cultivates a positive school climate.

Research and evaluation play an important role in the TeachMichigan initiative and the program continues to evolve following key findings from the ongoing learnings. TFA remains committed to the input and feedback that the learning from EPIC provides, and we recommend that any organization looking to scale a similar program utilize research to inform and evolve their program overtime. TFA is grateful for the partnership with EPIC and the MDE to make this work possible and we look forward to sharing additional learnings and recommendations in future reports.

ENDNOTES

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APPENDIX

Appendix A: Teach For America Report to the Michigan Department of Education: [*A Review of TeachMichigan and Recommendations to Scale Similar Programs, December 2023.*](#)

Appendix B: Teach For America Report to the Michigan Department of Education: [*A Review of TeachMichigan and Recommendations to Scale Similar Programs, July 2024*](#)

Appendix C: [*Overview of Fellowship Cohorts*](#)

Appendix D: [*TeachMichigan Theory of Change*](#)

Appendix E: Report: [*Teacher Compensation in Michigan: State Policy Context and Insights from TeachMichigan.*](#)

Appendix F: [*TeachMichigan Retention 2024*](#)

Appendix G: Report: [*Learning Through TeachMichigan: Teacher Fellows' Perceptions on Factors That Impact their Learning and Application of Learning*](#)

Appendix H: Report: [*The Insider Outsider Vantage Point: Non-Fellow Educator Perspectives on TeachMichigan*](#)

Appendix I: [*TFA Detroit Partnership Framework*](#)

Appendix J: Report: [*TeachMichigan Evaluation: A Summary of Fall 2024 Findings*](#)

Appendix K: Presentation: [*What are we learning from TeachMichigan to inform policy?*](#)