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Fellow Perceptions of Educator Learning in TeachMichigan

One key component of the TeachMichigan theory of change is educator professional learning. The hypothesis is that professional learning activities can contribute to both improved student outcomes and improved working conditions in schools. To this end, TeachMichigan staff and consultants facilitate professional development and lead small-group and individual coaching sessions with fellows. These learning activities are a central component of the fellowship experience. Because each cohort within the fellowship has its own unique purpose and goals, the structure and content of many of the learning activities vary by cohort. In our interviews with fellows, they frequently refer to professional development (PD) and coaching when discussing the impact of TeachMichigan on their work. In this report, we describe fellows' perceptions of the professional learning activities provided by TeachMichigan. We ask:

1. What are fellows' perceptions of the professional development (PD) and coaching they receive from TeachMichigan?
2. How do these perceptions differ across the Early Career, National Board Certification, and Aspiring Leader fellowship cohorts?

METHODS

Data

To better understand fellows' experiences in and perceptions of the professional learning component of TeachMichigan, we conducted interviews with 43 fellows across 9 participating school systems between February and May 2024. The interviews took approximately 45 minutes each. While the goal was to interview fellows in person, we conducted virtual interviews over zoom for 8 fellows with whom scheduling in-person interviews was difficult to coordinate. The other 28 fellows were interviewed in-person at their schools or at a TeachMichigan event. Table 1 provides an overview of our interview participants. Because learning activities differed across cohorts, we specifically sampled fellows from different cohorts within each district. In all, we interviewed 15 Early Career Educator (ECE) fellows, 15 National Board Certification (NBC) fellows, and 8

Aspiring Leader (AL) fellows. The current report focuses on the experiences of these 38 fellows because these were the three initial fellowships within TeachMichigan.

Table 1. Overview of Interview Participants					
School District or Charter Network	Number of Early Career Educator Fellows	Number of NBC Fellows	Number of Aspiring Leader Fellows	Number of Sitting Leader Fellows	Total Number of Fellows Interviewed
Benzie County Central Schools	2	2	1	-	5
Detroit Public Schools Community District	2	3	-	-	5
Grand Rapids Public Schools	2	-	-	-	2
Kentwood Public Schools	2	2	1	-	5
Lansing Public School District	1	-	1	1	3
Saginaw Public Schools	2	2	2	1	7
Sault Ste. Marie Area Schools	2	2	1	1	6
Traverse City Area Public Schools	1	2	1	1	5
University Preparatory Academy	1	2	1	1	5
Totals	15	15	8	5	43

Our interview protocol was constructed to collect data about multiple aspects of fellows' experiences in TeachMichigan. For the purposes of this report, we focus on responses from the opening interview activity, a roleplay in which the interviewer pretends to be a colleague looking for more information about TeachMichigan. In this part of the interview, we ask about why fellows applied to TeachMichigan, what fellows' have gotten out of the fellowship, what they think of the coaching, what the PD is like, and how it compares to other PD they have received.

Our understanding of the content of the professional learning activities also draws on field observations. The learning activities that we observed included two full-day, in person convenings in Detroit at the beginning and end of the year, two mid-semester workshops, in person for Detroit fellows and virtual for everyone else, and one early-release PD session specific to the NBC cohort.

Multiple members of our research team were present at every convening. To capture the learning in each of the cohort-specific PD sessions, we assigned one member of the evaluation team to follow each cohort during these events. In person, that meant moving from room to room with their assigned cohort. Online, that meant logging into the assigned Zoom sessions and moving into breakout rooms with fellows. Our observation notes include documentation of the content and facilitation of the learning, as well as fellows' reactions to and engagement with learning activities and one another.

Data Analysis

To analyze the portion of the interview transcripts focused on here, we engaged in multiple rounds of coding. First, we used a deductive approach, using descriptive codes to label the different professional learning activities that participants talked about. These codes included *whole group convenings*, *opening sessions*, *wellness sessions*, *choice sessions*, *cohort convenings*, and *coaching*. In our second round of coding, we developed emic codes that emerged from the data to identify fellows' perceptions of their learning experiences within each section denoted above. Sample codes included *expectations*, *applicability*, *peer coaching*, and *logistical concerns*. Below, we present these findings along with overview information on each type of professional learning offering, using descriptions from fellow interviews and from our own observation notes of various PD sessions.

TEACHMICHIGAN PD

TeachMichigan's professional learning component includes two in-person professional development (PD) convenings – EmpowerED weekends – for all fellows at the beginning and end of the school year, two regional PD convenings – Saturday workshops – in-person for Detroit and virtual for all other districts during the winter and early spring, and small-group and individual coaching sessions in-between these events. Fellows engage in most of these activities with their fellowship cohort—ECE, NBC, and AL—and focus on learning tailored to the specific needs of educators within each fellowship.

Overarching Perceptions of TeachMichigan PD

Fellows' global perceptions of the TeachMichigan PD were overwhelmingly positive. They described the PD as “meaningful,” “worthwhile,” “well thought out,” “great,” “inspiring,” and the “best PD I’ve ever had!” Multiple fellows noted that the PD exceeded their expectations, with fellows making comments such as, “It expands my horizons,” “It gets your creative juices flowing,” and “It makes you look at things outside of the box.” Others reported that TeachMichigan PD was meeting their expectations. One NBC fellow commented, “It was everything I thought it would be, and it’s been enlightening. It’s been demanding, which is fabulous. You don’t grow unless you’re challenged.”

Fellows also reported that TeachMichigan PD was impacting their teaching practice and that they gained new insights and skills that they shared with colleagues in their schools. Fellows found their time with TeachMichigan to be “inspiring,” “invigorating,” and “meaningful.” One AL fellow commented:

Every time I attend a session, I leave feeling refreshed, recharged. I just feel like I can keep going. Teaching is hard, and sometimes we feel like we're not appreciated because, one, it pays not that great and, two, just the number of issues that we have. But every time I connect with other fellows and I'm in the space with Teach Michigan, I just feel like I'm seen. I don't know why, but I have this feeling as if I'm being seen, as if I'm being heard, as if I have some value.

Fellows also reported that TeachMichigan impacted how they view themselves professionally – particularly by inspiring confidence. An ECE fellow noted that the fellowship “helps me get rid of that voice in my head that says I’m not good enough.” An AL fellow similarly shared, “It’s forced me to do things that I probably wouldn’t have done and given me confidence to believe that one day I can indeed be a leader.” Participating in TeachMichigan also shaped how fellows viewed the education profession and their commitment to education. One ECE fellow recounted:

The appreciation stuff is just huge because if you think about it teachers don't get appreciation. Well, we get complaints anytime we do anything wrong.... There's so much negativity and we're so busy and we're so overwhelmed, we can't even fill each other's buckets, let alone try and fill ours. And this really is a way that they're like, 'We know it's hard. We expect it to be hard. You made the decision that you were going to do this hard thing, and we're here to help you do this hard thing.' It's just nice to have that appreciation.

In comparing TeachMichigan PD to other PD they have received, fellows appreciated TeachMichigan’s “collaborative and experiential” approach along with the attention to “problem solving,” “social justice,” “diversity and inclusion,” and “the big picture of education.” One NBC fellow appreciated the chance to learn about “some different things that I haven’t heard before,” which is “unlike other PDs that kind of feel repetitive by year 19.” Other fellows reported that TeachMichigan focused on actionable ways to make change and address local problems. One ECE fellow reflected:

I can speak on several districts that I've been at where, and obviously it's important, we talk about data, data and we talk about that pretty nonstop. TeachMichigan, I like it because yes, we have the data, but now we talk about what we do with it, how we act, how we change, how we modify our lesson, how we touch base with those kids that kind of fly under the radar a little bit. So I feel like our PDs here at [my school] are a

little bit more data-driven, whereas Teach Michigan, again, it's a little bit more focused on what to do and how to make those changes.

Another ECE fellow commented:

At the ISD, I did running records.... It was great training, but it's for a specific program to do a specific thing, which is fine. But with TeachMichigan, it's not about a specific program or a specific thing. It's like, these are our issues. These are how these people have fixed it. These are how these people are working on it. What are your issues, and how do we fix them? How do we go about talking to people to get a better environment for all our children, for everyone in the building?

An AL fellow noted the value of teacher-to-teacher connection that TeachMichigan offers, reflecting:

The fellowship provides good professional development in the sense of getting to connect with other educators. I think all PD across building level, district level, state level needs to rely more on teachers talking to teachers and being able to grow from each other and just having authentic conversations about what's working and what's not and problem solving together.

As these global comments illustrate, TeachMichigan fellows reported positive impressions of TeachMichigan PD as a whole and its impact on them as individuals and as educators. Below, we delve into fellows' perceptions on more specific elements of the TeachMichigan PD.

CONVENINGS

EmpowerED Weekends

Overview

In TeachMichigan's first year, the fellowship organizers at TFA-Detroit held four all-fellow convenings. The first and last convenings – entitled EmpowerED Weekends – were two-day, fully in-person gatherings for all fellows. EmpowerED Weekends were held at the beginning and end of the 2023-2024 school year, meeting first in Detroit on September 29-30, 2023 and then in Novi on April 26-27, 2024. TeachMichigan provided all fellows with travel and lodging for EmpowerED Weekends, including flying in fellows from three districts in Northern Michigan. Fellows stayed in single-occupant hotel rooms, attended social receptions, and received meals.

September's EmpowerED Weekend in Detroit opened with a social gathering on a rooftop in downtown Detroit on Friday evening. On Saturday morning, fellows attended a celebratory opening breakfast session in a large conference room with

brightly colored tablecloths and about 400 people buzzing about, mingling and smiling. Once everyone settled in, presentations for the opening session included an inspirational video featuring clips of TeachMichigan fellows from around the state talking about why they teach, poetry readings from high school students sharing about their families and cultures, and addresses from an educational leader and a state legislator who drew on their personal stories to demonstrate their support for teachers and for TeachMichigan. State Senator Darren Camilleri closed out his speech by sharing that the Michigan legislature funded TeachMichigan with \$35 million “to support people like you. We need more people to be in positions of power to make change.” Fellows then moved into cohort-specific groups for 3.5 hours of targeted professional learning for each fellowship. Following lunch, fellows choose from among a menu of sessions and attend two 1-hour sessions that resonated with their professional goals and interests. The weekend concluded with a closing session that included a choir performance.

April’s EmpowerED Weekend in Novi opened on Friday evening with a networking social event at Dave and Buster’s and an optional community-building breakfast on Saturday morning. The morning sessions opened with a keynote speech from State Senator Sarah Anthony, who espoused the value of teaching and the importance of influential teachers in her own life, and a student reading an original poem. Fellows then moved into 3 hours of cohort-specific training, followed by a lunch that offered additional opportunities for mingling. The afternoon included one choice session that ran for an hour and 45 minutes. This EmpowerED Weekend closed with a final session that included a band performance.

Fellow Perceptions

The EmpowerED Weekends made positive impressions on the fellows, who reported finding them to be “really great,” “super fun,” “super cool,” and “fantastic.” Many reported finding the first EmpowerED Weekend convening to be particularly impactful in how they viewed TeachMichigan. One AL fellow shared, “One of the coolest things is that they treat you like a professional, and it was really cool just to have the experiences and the weekends.” An NBC fellow commented:

When we arrived to the very first convening in the fall and they had rented out the rooftop bar overlooking Comerica Park, I was like, ‘Oh, this is what businesspeople get.’ That felt like, okay, someone is seeing us for what we do.

An AL fellow shared:

It’s just really fun! They started off, and they had kids from Detroit come in and read some of their poetry. They had a dance group of high school kids that did a routine to some music that was just amazing, tear inspiring. It was so great.... Plus, we have this really nice hotel, and there’s

a rooftop bar the night before where there's drink tickets and food and all of the things. It was just really fun! So to be in that atmosphere, and everybody's happy to be there because we all wanted to be, but also we're gaining from it. I think it's just a different culture.

Fellows also reported appreciating the variety and quality of experiences offered during EmpowerED Weekends. One ECE fellow reported enjoying that the convening offered “a mixture of getting excited about stuff, practical tools, social justice-oriented things, and just kind of a little bit of everything.” Reflecting on their PD experiences through TeachMichigan, one NBC fellow noted:

The one that I enjoyed the most was the in-person one when we went to Detroit. That was really great! They know exactly what they're doing, and it was really great, and I really enjoyed that and the choice and just everything that was there.

Another NBC fellow shared:

The spring convening, the fall convening, those in-person events are experiences I've never had before. So that kind of blew me away. Being able to meet with teachers and being able to walk away from those in-person events, feeling so much less cynical, which I think teachers kind of build up over time. So I do feel very empowered coming out of those events in a way that I don't think I've really had an experience otherwise to match that.

Choice PD Sessions

At both EmpowerED Weekends, Saturday afternoon sessions offered fellows a choice of brief 1- or 2-hour workshops. Sample workshop topics included:

- The Power of Small Moments of Instructional Leadership
- Uplifting Youth Voice to Envision Equitable Educational Futures
- Promoting Curiosity and Reflection
- The Joy Effect: Prioritizing Emotional Well-Being Improves Learning Outcomes
- We Belong Here: Practical Guide to LGBTQ+ Inclusion at School
- Restorative Practices: A Guide to Cultivating the Genius of Students

In reflecting on the choice PD sessions, fellows greatly appreciated the opportunity to choose topics that were of interest to them. They describe the value of selecting topics that “spoke” to them and of having the ability to “cater my PD to what I want to learn and grow in.” Fellows commented that the choice sessions offered “a huge range of options,” “a lot of variety” in the topics, and “so many options.” One NBC fellow observed that the options were “wide enough that probably everybody could get

something out of what they're doing that may have been applicable." Another NBC fellow shared:

I feel like because I get to choose from an array of different types of professional development, it makes a difference because I feel like I'm going to something that I feel like maybe I need to strengthen myself in or that I'm interested in. Whereas PD for the district is just like whatever they put on the calendar for what we need to talk about, that's what we're doing.

Fellows also noted the high quality of many of the choice PD sessions, describing the sessions as "so well researched" and as offering specific enough information so that fellows "can then apply stuff right away." They also noted the expertise of presenters for the choice sessions and described the presenters as being people who "know what they're talking about." One AL fellow commented:

They have just really great sessions. I think they just find really good people.... They actually seek out people that they know are doing a great job in a particular area. And so those are the people that are leading the sessions, and I think that makes a really big difference because they already know that these people are experts in their field.... [One presenter] had written a book and I just thought he was such a great speaker that I immediately bought his book on Amazon.

For many fellows, choice PD sessions were a highlight of the EmpowerED Weekends, and they reported missing the opportunity to choose their own PD topics during virtual PD sessions. In fact, one NBC fellow observed, "I guess there's nothing that says that couldn't be replicated in an online way." Given the popularity of the choice PD session, TFA-Detroit might consider offering choice options during the Saturday Workshops as well.

Saturday Workshops

Overview

In addition to the EmpowerED weekends, TeachMichigan fellows participated in two regional professional development convenings during the fall and spring. These Saturday workshops were held in person for fellows based in Detroit and virtually for fellows across the rest of the state. The virtual workshops took place on December 2 and March 2. The in-person workshops took place in Detroit on December 9 and March 16.

The content and structure were the same for both the virtual and in-person events. First, all the fellows convened around 9:00 AM for a brief whole-group opening session. During this 30-minute session, the TeachMichigan staff welcomed the fellows, reviewed norms, facilitated small-group check-ins, and updated the fellows on any relevant announcements and adjustments. The fellows then moved into cohort-

specific groups for three hours of targeted learning. After a pause for lunch—provided by TeachMichigan—fellows came back together for a virtual wellness session led by an organization based out of California.

Overall Perceptions

When asked about the Saturday workshops, fellows typically described their experiences in the cohort-specific PD sessions in the morning and the wellness sessions in the afternoon. Many of those participating in the virtual sessions also discussed their feelings about the remote programming.

The cohort-based PD at all four convenings was often intertwined with the coaching sessions between convenings. As such, we discuss fellows' perceptions of the cohort-based PD and coaching together in the next section. Below, we describe fellows' perceptions of the wellness sessions and their feelings about the virtual components.

Wellness PD

During the last two hours of the Saturday workshops, fellows at both the in-person and virtual convenings hopped online for a virtual session focused on teacher wellness. These sessions were designed and facilitated by a California-based organization of former educators working to support teacher wellness.

Fellows had mixed feelings about the wellness sessions. Of the 15 fellows who talked about their perceptions of the wellness sessions during their interviews, seven had very positive experiences, five identified some positive elements but felt that the sessions were not particularly valuable, and three had negative experiences. Among the latter two groups, there were three main frustrations: 1) some felt that the time could be better spent in other ways, 2) some felt that the content was not solutions-oriented, and 3) some felt that after the energizing session at the first fall workshop, the session at the spring workshop was underwhelming. These different outlooks are described below.

1. Positive experiences. Fellows who enjoyed the wellness sessions had incredibly positive things to say. They described the sessions as “authentic,” “relevant,” “needed,” “helpful,” and “amazing.” One fellow explained that the content helped them understand “why we’re feeling the way we’re feeling” and how to “get control over that.” Another appreciated the focus on maintaining a work-life balance.

Multiple fellows noted that the wellness sessions made them feel “seen” and “valued.” One fellow noted that including these sessions in the Saturday workshops made them feel like TeachMichigan is “tuning into the entire teacher, the whole teacher” instead of simply focusing on content. Another fellow pointed out that while many school and district PDs have tried to make self-care a priority, the wellness sessions at the Saturday

workshops were “the only one I’ve had that really can hit the nail on the head every time” and that they “truly understand the layers of stress that are involved in teaching.”

2. Better uses of time. Five fellows expressed that they would have preferred to use the wellness session time differently. One noted that she wanted more time working with her cohort in the afternoon. Others pointed out that if the point is to improve teacher wellness, they would have preferred to spend that time doing something to improve their own wellness. Even though this fellow enjoyed the content of the wellness session, they explained:

I would much rather just have a social or just my afternoon that I could use for what I need it for rather than a session on wellness when what I need is time to just relax or maybe I need that time to grade.

Similarly, another said, “For me to not be burned out, I would like the afternoon on my own.” Finally, another fellow explained that the sessions did not feel impactful enough to justify the time spent on a Saturday: “If I’m going to be in PD on a Saturday, I want it to be super impactful and I want it to be something that I can take back immediately.”

3. Not solutions oriented. Six of the fellows that we spoke with felt that the wellness sessions were not helpful or solutions oriented. One fellow felt the facilitators’ message was unclear. She appreciated the focus on “self-care more holistically than just facemasks and stuff like that,” but felt that “they just kind of listed the problems without many solutions.” Similarly, another expressed that it felt like they were being told how to identify when they are stressed, but that “as a teacher, we know when we’re stressed and there was no solution focus.” Another fellow explained, “I feel like [teachers] are told over and over and over, you have to take care of yourself.... We know that. Give us some mind-blowing tips or just let us go.”

4. 2nd Session Let Down. Four fellows said they enjoyed the first session in December but not the second in March. In a similar vein to the participants described above, one fellow explained that after an energizing first session, they expected the second session to address “ways to deal with wellness” and were disappointed when instead it was just “more of the same as the first one.” Similarly, another fellow expressed that they really enjoyed the first session because the presenter was “so dynamic” that she “could have listed to her talk all day,” but that the second session “felt like the same session” with “no solution focus.”

Virtual vs. In-Person

The non-Detroit fellows understood why a virtual format made the most sense logistically—it is the only way for fellows from across the state to be able to come together to learn without requiring many fellows to travel. Still, many of the fellows that we spoke to mentioned the challenges of virtual learning in the remote workshops. While a couple fellows admitted that the virtual format was convenient for

their schedules, some expressed that they wished more of the PD was in person. Despite the challenges of virtual professional learning, many fellows also pointed out that TeachMichigan intentionally structured the virtual sessions to offset some of these challenges. We detail the challenges and steps taken to mitigate them below.

1. Challenges of virtual PD. Many fellows emphasized that certain characteristics of the virtual PD made learning more challenging. Multiple fellows pointed out that the social aspect of learning does not translate well to a virtual setting. One explained, “There’s so much we can learn from each other that doesn’t always happen and translate when it’s virtual.” Others noted that discussions were harder to have online. This was exacerbated when a participant in a breakout room would have connectivity issues.

Other challenges came in the form of technical difficulties and online logistics. The opening whole-group sessions for the Saturday workshops often had over 100 fellows on one Zoom session; for some, this caused their own connections to lag and computers to glitch. Other fellows mentioned the challenges of trying to navigate transitioning between different zoom sessions with multiple links and passwords. Another fellow noted how overwhelming it was to manage a Zoom screen alongside multiple tabs for all the online worksheets and resources they needed to use. All these things impacted fellows’ virtual PD experiences.

2. Design of virtual PD. Despite these challenges, fellows also appreciated the ways in which TeachMichigan worked to alleviate some of the frustrations of virtual learning. As one fellow put it, “I think they’re doing a really good job of being intentional with what they’re offering.” One fellow mentioned that it is hard to do discussion virtually, but that “putting us in the breakout rooms was great.” Another fellow elaborated:

They do these breakout rooms in Zoom where you go from your whole group and then you go and match with two or three people.... So it's cool that they give you that feeling of you're in a training because you're able to get in touch with small groups.

Intentionally designed agendas with breaks and money for lunch also helped ease the experience of virtual PD. One fellow explained that sitting on a Zoom session all morning can be straining, but that “they do a good job of giving those breaks and delegating what we’re going to do and how participation works.” Another fellow enthusiastically explained, “Even when we have an online PD at home, they send us a \$25 GrubHub gift card, which I think is so nice.”

COHORT-SPECIFIC PD AND COACHING

The cornerstones of the TeachMichigan PD offerings are the learning opportunities that are particular to each of the three primary fellowship cohorts – the Early Career Educator Fellows, the National Board Certification Fellows, and the Aspiring Leader

Fellows. In their fellowship cohorts, educators work to build and demonstrate the knowledge specific to these fellowships. Each fellowship has a point person who takes primary responsibility for running the PD at the four annual convenings and for coordinating other learning opportunities through coaches who work more closely with small groups of fellows.

All fellows meet with a coach who helps them work through a set of cohort-specific learning activities. Coaching often occurs in group sessions, though each cohort organizes these groups differently, and NBC coaches also meet regularly with NBC fellows for individual coaching. The coaches work with their groups of fellows to schedule virtual meetings at regular intervals. Although the coaching sessions' structure varies by cohort, fellows are typically assigned a task to complete or a product to create in preparation for coaching meetings. Below, we explain what the cohort-specific PD and coaching sessions look like across the different cohorts and how fellows perceived their experiences in this professional learning activities.

Early Career Educators PD and Coaching

Overview

The Early Career Educators (ECE) PD sessions target pedagogical skills and concepts to help teachers across grade levels and content areas continue to build and improve their foundational teaching skills. During the sessions, fellows are grouped by grade-level and content area so that collaborative work and conversations are targeted to each fellow's context. Topics covered in these sessions include classroom management, building relationships with students, eliciting student thinking, differentiation, small group instruction, formative assessment, and student choice. A typical session includes opportunities for fellows to reflect on their own practice, learn about an instructional technique, practice using that technique, and set a goal for implementing the technique in their classrooms.

The ECE fellows' coaching groups are based on the groups that they work with during PD (sorted by grade level and content area). The coaching groups, also referred to as "video clubs," are meant to be collaborative problem-solving spaces where teachers watch, analyze, and discuss video excerpts from their own classrooms. Before each coaching session, the ECE fellows record themselves teaching and identify instances of certain types of instructional practices or decision making occurring in the videos. The instructional focus typically mirrors the content being covered in the PD sessions. In their coaching sessions, one fellow shares their video and talks about the issues they are facing in their classroom. The coach guides the group in identifying specific practices in the video and providing constructive feedback.

Perceptions

Across the 15 ECE fellows that we spoke to, perceptions of the cohort-specific PD and coaching fell into five themes, detailed below. The first two themes reflect fellows' experiences in PD sessions. The last three reflect their experiences with the coaching video clubs.

1. Continued learning and growth. Many of the ECE fellows reported that their cohort-specific PD helped them to learn and grow their practice. They appreciated the opportunities for reflection and the personalization and applicability of the content.

One fellow explained that she always left the sessions having learned a lot, even if it was something she had not realized she needed. A second fellow described the PD sessions as a space where they could “really do that introspection and reflective thinking [about] who we are and how we're interacting with students.” Another fellow talked about learning new instructional practices and reflection techniques, explaining, “It has given me new tools to apply in the classroom, new ways to self-reflect on things that I was doing.”

Many fellows felt that the PD was personalized to their specific needs, both as a cohort and within grade-level and content groups. Even though the instructional techniques that they covered were the same for all ECE fellows, a high school teacher remarked,

I haven't noticed in terms of the PDs anything that was not applicable to me as a high school teacher.... They do a pretty good job of making sure that what you're talking about, you can apply in your classroom.

2. Energizing professional learning. Multiple ECE fellows described their experiences as providing new perspectives or rejuvenating their excitement about teaching. Fellows appreciated the perspective that they gained from collaborating with their colleagues. One fellow described conversations with others as “a fresh view from someone outside.” Another explained, “It was nice getting perspectives besides the ones we're used to hearing.” Describing the ECE PD sessions, one fellow noted, “I feel like it's a platform for that, for rejuvenation.” She explained that the main takeaway from her learning experiences was “more excitement for teaching.”

3. Supportive social-emotional dynamics of the video clubs. Most of the ECE fellows that we spoke to emphasized the supportive social-emotional dynamics of the video clubs. Fellows described the video club sessions as “nonjudgmental,” “safe,” “authentic,” “unbiased,” “uplifting,” “helpful,” and “introspective.”

Multiple fellows were initially nervous about the prospect of sharing videos of their teaching. One described it as “a little bit scary,” but conceded that “we need to come out of our shells if you want feedback.” Another fellow admitted that even though the process of recording their teaching and opening it up to other fellows for comments

was “intimidating”, it was also “rewarding because the coaches create a safe space to have those conversations.” From her perspective, the process “asks you to kind of suck it up for a minute and find your courage.”

Similarly, one fellow talked about her transition from feeling uncomfortable with the process, to embracing it:

I don't like being filmed, but this has actually been one of the more easygoing times because you film a lesson, you go ahead, you get online, you evaluate it with your peers, they give feedback, they talk about what they notice, what they wonder, and then a coach basically gives their feedback as well. And you honestly just sit back and observe and take in what they're saying, and you can kind of come back with your own feedback and experiences.

Describing the video club sessions, a fellow explained, “We try and build each other up. We talk about, ‘Well have you tried this or what about that or what about this?’”

4. Video clubs as useful for improving teaching. The video club approach left most of the ECE Fellows feeling like they had useful, applicable suggestions and ideas to implement in their classrooms.

One fellow recounted that her group was able to point out positives that she hadn't noticed and give “wonderful suggestions” for strategies that she had not previously thought of. A second fellow noted that not only did she get helpful feedback on her own practices, but she also got to “give feedback and get some ideas from that.”

Because the video clubs are tied to the PD content, one fellow observed that she left each coaching session “with a deeper understanding” of the strategy they discussed in PD. That the feedback came from other teachers was particularly valuable to some of the fellows. One fellow explained:

It just feels a little bit more authentic to talk with somebody who is in the classroom on a daily basis about issues that you're dealing with in the classroom on a daily basis.

On the other hand, for one fellow that we spoke to, the quality of the feedback varied: “I mean the feedback's useful,” she said, but “I wouldn't say extremely useful.” She recounted a time when she implemented feedback from her video club in a lesson on solving word problems: “I tried it out,” she explained, but “it didn't really work that well.” Still, she appreciated that her coach was “definitely very patient” when they talked it through later.

5. One-on-one coaching versus collaborative problem solving. The video club model is, in effect, a collaborative problem-solving approach. Rather than having a coach

provide each fellow with one-on-one feedback, ECE fellows gave each other feedback on their instruction. One fellow described it as “coaching amongst ourselves.” Another fellow explained that the coaching “wasn’t just coming from our coach, it was coming from the peers too, so it was kind of like a group effort.”

For some, this approach was unexpected. A fellow that had previously been a TFA corps member explained how the TeachMichigan coaching differed from her TFA experience. In TFA, she said, “the TFA staff comes and observes and coaches you as an in-building instructional or as a district instructional coach.” In comparison, she described the TeachMichigan coaching as “a lot more introspective and questioning little things...a little more informal.”

For one fellow, this difference was positive. She noted that the video club coaching was more helpful than her school-based instructional coach. Whereas her colleagues in the video clubs deeply understood the day-to-day experiences of a teacher, she explained that her school instructional coach is “popping from room to room to room,” “not understanding the struggle,” and subsequently providing “pointers that realistically don’t always feel like they’re attainable.”

Some of the fellows wanted a more traditional one-on-one, in person coaching model. One fellow admitted that she would not call her TeachMichigan coach a coach. She explained:

For me, the definition of a coach is someone who takes me from one point to another point, and I don't know quite if she's trying to take me anywhere. I don't know what her role is necessarily or where her vision is.

Another felt that a video did not provide enough of a picture of her teaching for effective feedback and would have preferred “if I could just have somebody in here really just watching straight up as things go, or even just popping in randomly.”

There was confusion around whether in-person coaching observations were available to ECE fellows. While some fellows expressed that they wished this had been an option, others referred to a coach visiting their classroom. One fellow explained, “We do have coaches that are going to be popping into the classrooms throughout the next couple of months,” and another recounted that a coach had visited their classroom recently.

National Board Certification PD and Coaching

Overview

During their TeachMichigan fellowship, fellows seeking National Board Certification work their way through the four components of the National Board Certification process administered by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. As described on the [National Board website](#), the four components include:

- Component 1 – **Content Knowledge** demonstrated through a computer-based assessment.
- Component 2 – **Differentiation in Instruction** demonstrated through a portfolio of student work samples and a written analysis of those samples.
- Component 3 – **Teaching Practice and Learning Environment** demonstrated through video recordings of classroom teaching and a written commentary.
- Component 4 – **Effective and Reflective Practitioner** demonstrated through a portfolio examining use of classroom assessment.
- Teachers pursuing National Board Certification select one certificate area from among 18 options including:
 - Career and Technical Education
 - English Language Arts
 - Generalist, Early Childhood
 - Generalist, Middle Childhood
 - Literacy: Reading-Language Arts
 - Mathematics
 - Music
 - Science

To become Nationally Board Certified, teachers must demonstrate through their submitted materials that their teaching meets specific standards in their certificate area along with the five core propositions of National Board Certification:

- Teachers are committed to students and their learning.
- Teachers know the subjects they teach and how to teach those subjects to students.
- Teachers are responsible for managing and monitoring student learning.
- Teachers think systematically about their practice and learn from experience.
- Teachers are members of learning communities.

TeachMichigan's NBC fellowship uses previously Nationally Board Certified teachers as coaches and mentors to support experienced teachers through the process of applying for National Board Certification. This fellowship is overseen by a Nationally Board Certified teacher with 10 years of teaching experience and prior experience mentoring teachers seeking National Board Certification. In addition to the cohort-

specific PD time at the TeachMichigan convenings, NBC fellows had monthly early release days in which they were dismissed from teaching duties from 2pm to 5pm to meet virtually with TeachMichigan's NBC coaches for information, support, and time to work independently on their certification components. The fellowship also offered writing retreats on Saturdays, and coaches met regularly with the fellowship leader so that she could support them in this work.

Throughout the NBC fellowship, fellows are grouped by certificate area and assigned to a coach who is Nationally Board Certified in that area. During convenings and monthly release time, fellows meet in small groups with their coaches and other teachers pursuing the same certificate area. One primary responsibility of the NBC Coaches is to provide fellows with feedback on their written analyses for certification. In the first year of the fellowship, fellows and coaches focused on Components 1 and 3, which also enabled coaches to give fellows feedback on their classroom instructional videos for Component 3. In the second year of the fellowship, teachers will work on Components 2 and 4. Components for each year must be submitted to the National Board by June, with results coming in December. Fellows who do not receive certification on their first attempt will be able to resubmit relevant components, and TeachMichigan will support them through resubmission during the third year of the fellowship.

Perceptions

Interviews with 15 NBC fellows revealed 4 themes related to their perceptions of the cohort-specific PD and coaching. We share these findings below.

1. PD tailored to support the NBC process. Overall, NBC fellows recognized that their cohort-specific PD was explicitly tailored to helping them become Nationally Board Certified. Most fellows were extremely appreciative of TeachMichigan's detailed support for the NBC process, which can be challenging, time-consuming, and overwhelming. Fellows particularly appreciated how the fellowship leader and the coaches provided guidance on NBC expectations and how they offered personalized feedback on their products. One NBC fellow explained:

What I think is really advantageous about this program, this fellowship, is that they help walk you through this very intimidating process of applying for your National Board Certification, which prior to applying for the fellowship, I had not considered. So I had no point of reference for how much work was involved. And now that I'm in the midst of applying for this certificate, I'm realizing just how much work is required and how much attention to detail is required. And so for that fact, I really appreciate the support that the TeachMichigan Fellowship has provided.

Another fellow described how this support for the process manifested during cohort-specific PD session:

The NBC professional development is just more opportunities for us to work on our work. And that has been helpful. And so sometimes that'll just be whoever's leading it talking about, 'Okay, this is what your writing should look like or let's look at this writing and see what's strong and what needs to be improved upon.' And then other times it would be like us going out into breakout rooms and me working with another fellow who's working on their writing, so we might share our videos or share our writing and give each other feedback. And so that has been helpful.

While fellows recognized that the purpose of the NBC fellowship was to earn the elite NBC certification, one fellow questioned whether the support they received actually qualified as PD because it was not focused explicitly on specific facets of classroom instruction. The fellow stated:

We haven't talked as much about actual classroom practice as I expected and as I would have hoped that we had done.... It feels like we're more focused on the process of applying for this certification and not the end goal of improving our practice.... The PD sessions were, I mean, if you can call them professional development, were targeted at 'here's how you write your submission.' So that is not helping my classroom practice. And I understand that. I mean, because they're telling us that it's a very specific kind of writing, it's very analytical, and I understand they're trying to help us give the best submission possible. But again, it's not helping my classroom practice, and it just feels like we're checking a lot of boxes.

While this comment represents a minority opinion, it does illustrate this fellowship's exclusive focus on supporting fellows through the NBC process.

2. Improving practice through independent reflection. Although the last comment shared above implies that the NBC fellowship is not about improving instructional practice, most fellows reported that going through the NBC process *has improved their teaching*. One fellow commented, "It's actually making me grow." Aimed at experienced teachers, the NBC fellowship offers a forum for fellows to independently analyze their teaching, reflect on their practice, and improve how they work with students in their classrooms. For many fellows, this happens most profoundly in the first year through the process of completing Component 3, in which teachers film themselves teaching two different lessons and write about how their teaching demonstrates the exemplary teaching skills described in the National Board standards. This process requires fellows to do what one describes as "putting my teaching under a magnifying glass." Another fellow commented:

I think it's better than the majority of other PD because it's specific, the process that I have to go through to answer the questions and to do the work. That process in and of itself has probably been the most beneficial

to me. The PD has kind of helped support me in that, which is good, but the actual process has been the most impactful part.

Many fellows reported filming multiple video lessons before securing a sample of their teaching that they felt sufficiently illustrated the National Board standards. Watching and analyzing multiple videos of themselves teaching provided fellows with a chance to reflect on their practice in ways that they felt improved their teaching in areas that mattered to them. One fellow shared:

I don't think I anticipated the amount of work and reflection that is involved in it. And like I said before, it's good for me, especially at this point in my career and being in the same grade level for so long, I've moved with the times and learned all the things and I just completed LETRS training just before getting into this fellowship. So I'm up on the current research, but I haven't really forced myself to be as reflective as what National Boards is asking me to be.

Another fellow explained:

Out of all the things about my teaching that I think has changed this year so far, less so about planning and curriculum design, which is kind of my passion anyways, but more so about assessment. So really the formative assessment piece, setting clear standards for the kids at the beginning of each lesson and really thoughtfully structuring how I give directions. Certainly, watching myself talk on camera is such an eye-opening experience. I really tried to take a breath and stop and think about how I'm going to present things. I think I recorded myself seven times for the two videos I needed.

As these comments reveal, fellows saw the primary source of their learning through the NBC process to come from their own reflection on their teaching and their personal assessment of how they could improve their teaching. Fellows also noted that the process helped them to become “more reflective as a teacher.”

3. Coaching and feedback as the most helpful components. Largely, NBC fellows recognized how their coaches supported their reflective learning process – both as they tried to improve their teaching for their video recordings and as they tried to illustrate their teaching strengths in their written commentary. Fellows appreciated having “subject-specific” coaches with expertise in the relevant certification areas. They described coaches as “accessible,” “supportive,” “phenomenal,” “unbelievable,” “amazing,” “great,” and “very, very helpful.”

The primary responsibilities of the National Board coaches in this first year were to help fellows understand the NBC process and requirements, provide feedback on the materials fellows were compiling for Component 3, and provide personal support and

accountability for fellows. Fellows recognized and appreciated these efforts. One fellow commented:

The coaching has been fantastic. That's one thing I cannot put a price on that has been super helpful. I'll send a recording of my video, and the coach, they'll give me a response, I'll write some stuff, they'll tear it up, half of it, another one back and forth. So, I think you've got to have a pretty strong ego to just say, okay, I got to fix a lot. I'm doing a lot wrong. I can do better.... [My coach] has lots of answers about all the weird nuts and bolts about how to submit things and striking out this sentence isn't great because you switched up your tense. And so it's really great for proofreading. I'm in one of those National Board Facebook groups and all these people that are not in the fellowship who have no cohort and no coaching, and I am looking at the things they're talking about. I'm like, I don't know how I would do this without this fellowship, without the instructional coaching to get here.

As suggested in this comment, accepting feedback on their writing was not always easy for fellows. One fellow noted, "Some people feel that the feedback is sometimes hard to accept." Yet, most fellows we interviewed reported appreciating the feedback. One fellow described:

My coach has been great. She has given me feedback on my writing, not feedback pushing me in one direction or the other, but it's more like, 'Have you thought about this or what about this? Or could you reflect more on this piece?' And so it's kind of helped me push forward. I had writer's block very badly with the component. And then just to have accountability. I know she's waiting, right? And we have those deadlines that we're supposed to meet. And to have another person that's relying on you kind of helps push that procrastination to the side.

Despite overwhelming praise for the coaching and the coaches, a few fellows raised questions about the coaches, including wondering about the coaches' qualifications, training, and teaching expertise. One fellow commented, "I don't feel like I know my coach that well.... I don't know where she taught, how long she taught for, what grades she was teaching." This fellow explained why this information mattered: "My coaching times, I want it to be about my teaching practice and to do that, I feel like we need to know each other as teachers, and we don't." Another fellow shared, "I don't know how much training some of the coaches have been given, other than that they went through the NBC process."

Regardless, fellows overwhelmingly reported positive experiences with the NBC coaches and their coaching experiences. Multiple fellows said they could not imagine going through this process without a skilled coach.

4. Logistical concerns. While many TeachMichigan fellows expressed logistical concerns with facets of the program, these concerns seemed particularly prevalent for NBC fellows. The most significant issue that came up repeatedly was dissatisfaction with the early release days. Specifically, fellows did not feel like time was used well on those days, especially since fellows had to miss part of their teaching day by beginning at 2pm and miss after-school family obligations to stay until 5pm. One commented,

In one of these early release sessions, we spent 45 minutes learning how to upload or how to create a file in a Google drive, like a sub folder. And there has to be a way to differentiate for those people who need that help.... [But] if you're asking me to leave my students early and be away from my family late, then I can't be sitting here listening to you telling me about a Google folder.

Secondary teachers found the early release days to be particularly frustrating because they consistently required teachers to have a substitute in their last class of the day, making it difficult to keep that class on pace with their other courses. One middle school math teacher explained, "As a teacher, you've got all of your classes that you want to keep on the same track, so now you've got one class that you have to figure out something different for." Just the same, this fellow recognized that TFA-Detroit's intention was positive, commenting:

Their intention was to respect our time and to not have us doing so much out of contract time. That's a very respectful thought that we'll give them some designated time to work. The problem, though, is the sub thing. And then we're still on those early release days till five o'clock, so it's still after our regular time and we have to arrange for our families whose picking up what kid, how are the kids getting home because I can't drive and pick them up in a meeting and I'm sure other people with small children are in a similar situation too.

Throughout the year, fellows shared these concerns with the fellowship leader and the coaches, and, to the relief of many NBC fellows, the last early release day of the year was cancelled. One fellow commented, "They heard us. They got rid of that!"

Another logistical concern that arose for some NBC fellows was persistent miscommunication, which they felt sometimes interfered with their ability to meet the expectations of the fellowship. One NBC fellow described:

Oftentimes when we do have spaces to collaborate with the other fellows in my cohort, we're not coming into the space with the same expectations. So I spoke of those afternoon PD sessions virtually. I came in with this understanding that we had to have completed our second video of us teaching and discuss how we were going to write a written commentary. That's what I came in with. And when I was released into a breakout room, I had these lovely cohorts who were four hours away

from me in Traverse City who hadn't prepared that. And they thought they were doing the right thing. It wasn't their fault. Both of us thought we were doing the right thing.... And it just ended up being 15 minutes of us floundering to figure out what we were supposed to be doing because they wanted feedback on a video, and I wanted feedback on writing.

It has been clear that TFA-Detroit has recognized and attempted to address some of the miscommunication issues that came up this year, and fellows appreciated these corrections. However, NBC fellows still noted that the communication mishaps interfered with their ability to have a positive overall learning experience.

Aspiring Leaders PD and Coaching

Overview

The Aspiring Leaders (AL) professional development curriculum is built around “six domains of dynamic school leadership.” These domains focus on adaptive and technical skills that school leaders can use for continuous improvement and include personal behavior and responsibility, strategic thinking and problem solving, people leadership, instructional leadership, operational leadership, and student and stakeholder culture. The AL PD focuses on specific domains over the two-year fellowship. In this first year, they are focusing on “people leadership.”

The first AL PD sessions at the fall EmpowerED weekend introduced fellows to these domains. In the subsequent PD sessions, fellows practiced specific coaching strategies related to the domain of “people leadership.” In the December convening, AL fellows practiced creating high-quality action steps for feedback. In the March convening, AL fellows practiced adaptive coaching. The pre-work that fellows are assigned before the session provides an overview of the strategy that they plan to address in the session. During PD, the facilitator first explains the strategy, then engages fellows in activities to make sure they understand the strategy, then has fellows role-play applying the strategy in pairs or small groups.

For their coaching sessions, the AL fellows are grouped with other AL fellows across the state. The coaching sessions are built around a consultancy protocol addressing a problem of practice brought to the group by a participating fellow. Fellows prepare their problem of practice before the coaching sessions. During the session, the coach facilitates the group in asking probing questions and providing constructive feedback.

On their own time, AL fellows also work on a portfolio project. The portfolio project is aligned with the domains of leadership curriculum described above based on a survey that goes out to fellows’ colleagues. Fellows use the survey results to identify their strengths and their opportunities for growth. For their portfolio, fellows create one artifact to showcase their strength and one artifact to demonstrate development in their identified “opportunity” area. During PD sessions, questions or concerns about the

portfolio projects are briefly addressed. Between coaching and PD sessions, coaches provide fellows with feedback on their portfolio artifacts. For the last coaching session of the school year, each fellow presents one of their portfolio artifacts to the group.

Perceptions

Across the 8 AL fellows that we spoke to, perceptions of the cohort-specific PD and coaching fell into five themes, detailed below. The first three themes reflect fellows' experiences with the PD. The last two reflect their experiences in the coaching sessions.

1. Change in perceptions of themselves and leadership. Multiple fellows described the PD and portfolio work as “beneficial,” “good,” “helpful,” and “engaging.” One cited the “dynamic facilitator” as playing a key role in shaping their positive experience. For about half of the fellows that we spoke to, the PD was transformative, changing their perceptions of themselves as leaders and of educational leadership more broadly.

One fellow explained that her experiences in the PD have given her confidence. As a classroom teacher, she had not thought of herself as a leader, but her learning experiences changed that:

Seeing all the different things that we're learning about, it's really helped me be like, well, I already do that and I already do that. And just when I thought of leader, I thought, okay, well this isn't for me because I'm probably not ever going to be a principal. But leader in TeachMichigan's eyes takes on many different roles within the school. I'm considered a leader because I'm a mentor teacher.

A second fellow noted that the domains of leadership curriculum framework and portfolio work helped her to better understand herself as a leader and her leadership style:

Looking at myself in the areas [of the six domains] that I'm good at, but also looking at the areas that I could make growth in, I think it's been a wonderful opportunity for me for self-reflection... I think that my stance as a leader is we're greater as a whole, I'm not a dictator because everybody has their strengths and it takes all of us to make something greater.

Similarly, another fellow explained that the portfolio project changed her perspectives on her own leadership:

We're building a leadership portfolio, which I think is awesome, and it has really pushed me to think about things through a lens of leadership in that sense and make sure that I am covering a vast range... I think that it has had me think about my leadership in a different way.

2. Applicability of domains of leadership strategies to practice. A notable strength of the AL PD for many fellows was the applicability to their practice. Specific strategies

that fellows practiced during their PD sessions included adaptative coaching, giving high-quality feedback, and having difficult conversations. Multiple AL fellows in coaching and classroom roles¹ emphasized that they could immediately apply these strategies in their work. As one fellow put it, they would “take things that [they] learned in a training on a Saturday and apply it on a Monday.” After the session on adaptive coaching, one fellow explained:

I found myself using a lot of what we did during that session in my coaching conversation, so I've been able to apply it immediately. As a coach, I think that's the beauty of the Aspiring Leaders is that we are able to take what we're learning and put it into practice.

During the sessions, fellows would often practice applying their new skill through role play and feedback with another fellow. Their post-session assignment would then be to implement their new learning in their work. After a session practicing having difficult conversations, one fellow explained:

There's always someone to have a difficult conversation with, whether it's a parent or a student or a coworker or whatever. So that's my post-work right now is that I have to have a difficult conversation. I'm just trying to determine which difficult conversation I'm going to have.

Two fellows mentioned that while most of the work felt applicable, some felt tedious—namely typing up pre-work reading reflections or working through the written portions of their portfolio project.

3. Valuing connection and wanting more. The thing that fellows seemed to appreciate most, and wanted more of, during the AL PD sessions was connecting and collaborating with other fellows. One fellow noted how much they appreciated collaborating with local colleagues as well as those outside their usual “realm of influence.” They explained:

This is giving me opportunities to meet with people from different areas, different backgrounds, and give myself some things to think about.

Another fellow emphasized that their favorite part of the PD was the interaction and role play:

I would say that I like that it's not sit and get. I'm not a sit and get person... I like that we have the opportunity to move around and actually put into practice the things that we learned.

Multiple fellows said they wished they had more time for discussion and collaboration with others. One fellow noted that she would rather keep working with her cohort than go to other sessions in the afternoon. A second fellow specified that she would have appreciated “more time to just get to know people.” Another specifically

mentioned wanting more “unstructured” time to connect with other fellows on the topics that they discussed during PD:

4. Value and applicability of coaching sessions. The AL coaching sessions are essentially collaborative problem-solving sessions. As one fellow describes:

Every month we are in [groups] where there's, I think, six of us and one of the people present a problem, and then we all kind of talk about that in ways to solve it and give strategies, which has been great.

Most of the AL fellows that we spoke to were happy with this coaching experience, describing it as “really good,” “great,” “cool,” and “awesome.” One fellow emphasized that the coaching sessions were their favorite part of the professional learning. Similarly, another fellow noted, “I would say that it’s been one of the most impactful parts for me.” Fellows describe their coaches as “responsive,” “effective,” “engaging,” and “prepared.” They note that the coaching groups are diverse and bring together lots of different perspectives.

A couple fellows felt that the coaching sessions sometimes didn’t feel applicable to their own work. One indicated that the protocol felt too structured. Most, however, appreciated the consultancy approach.

Many fellows indicated that they appreciated hearing other fellows’ perspectives. One fellow explained that it was “really cool” that they got to “hear about what other districts are doing from like-minded educators.” Another explained that she “actually really liked” the sessions because all the participants “are in similar situations and it helps sometimes getting outside of that and listening to somebody else.”

One AL fellow found it particularly enlightening how problems of practice could be so similar and solutions so applicable across radically different contexts. She explained:

It's been so eye-opening to see that some of the problems that they're having in Detroit are similar problems that we're having here in such a small town. And it's awesome to get their perspective on it and for me to be able to give my perspective coming from a smaller school.

Fellows explained that at the end of the consultancy protocol, their coach asked what aspects of the problem and feedback felt relevant to their own situations. Many fellows felt that the sessions helped them to identify strategies applicable to their own contexts. One fellow emphasized that even when issues weren’t directly applicable, “there are little pieces throughout these conversations” that helped them to “improve [their] leadership and practice.” Another fellow remarked:

Hearing different things, that gives us good ideas. Even though it's somebody else's dilemma, I think it's something that universally, for teachers in the group or for coaches, that we like to be able to implement.

One fellow explained how helpful it was when their own problem of practice was the focus of the session:

By the time we leave this meeting, you have something that you can work with.... The feedback was absolutely amazing, was something I could use right away. I called my administrator up right away and I was like, "Hey, this is what happened in my coaching session. These were the suggestions. Am I good to move with it?" She was like, absolutely. And so I was able to get into a staff meeting, get into some classrooms, and just implement right away.

5. One-on-one coaching versus collaborative problem solving. Although most AL fellows seemed to appreciate the collaborative problem-solving approach, a few expected coaching to be a one-on-one, personalized experience. One fellow indicated that she was told that each AL fellow would receive personalized "executive-level coaching." This same fellow expected the coach to be more of an expert rather than a peer with a little bit more experience.

There seemed to be some confusion over the availability of one-on-one coaching. Some thought it was not a formal option, while others indicated that they were receiving some one-on-one support. One AL fellow noted that the PD facilitator "does some one-on-one coaching." Another explained that there were some "one-on-one meetings where we meet one-on-one to talk more in depth," but she would have appreciated more of these types of meetings.

POTENTIAL AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT AND CHANGE

While TeachMichigan fellows report many positives about their experiences with their first year of TeachMichigan PD, our observations and interviews revealed some potential areas for improvement and change. Most suggestions listed below are grounded in data from the study, a few are suggestions directly from TeachMichigan fellows, and a few came from our observations at EPIC. As the program evaluation team, we do not necessarily endorse all these suggestions, but we wanted to pass along the ideas that emerged. We are happy to meet with program leaders at TFA-Detroit to consider the implications of following through on any of these suggestions.

Potential areas for improvement and change fall into 6 categories, as described below:

Allocation of Time Within the Fellowship

- **More time for local collaboration.** Fellows expressed interest in working more closely with other TeachMichigan fellows in their districts to develop strategies for improving the district.
- **More time for statewide collaboration.** Fellows also shared that opportunities to meet face-to-face and collaborate with other educators from around the state greatly impacted their thinking and their sense of possibility. Fellows recognized that TeachMichigan facilitated such collaborations, but many fellows reported wanting more of this as they found it particularly valuable.
- **More time for community building and getting to know other fellows.** With only two statewide in-person convenings, fellows wanted more time for mingling and community building. For some fellows coming from far away, late arrival times on Friday evening impeded their ability to fully participate in the EmpowerED Friday evening kickoff socials. Some reported wanting to leave their communities earlier in the day in order to more fully experience the EmpowerED Weekends as they were designed.

Additional Opportunities for Learning

- **Pairing NBC and ECE teachers for sharing of practice.** Some ECE teachers wanted more exposure to effective teachers and teaching in their content area. Perhaps there is an opportunity at a future EmpowerED Weekend for ECE and NBC fellows to join together to watch and discuss one another's classroom instruction videos and discuss effective teaching.
- **Offering choice sessions for the Saturday Workshops.** Given the enthusiasm for the choice sessions during the EmpowerED Weekends, it could be worth exploring the possibility of including choice sessions for the Saturday Workshops as well. Wellness sessions could remain a choice, but for fellows who do not find value in the wellness sessions, other options would be appreciated.
- **Devote explicit time in the NBC fellowship to improving teaching practice.** Although most NBC fellows reported learning through reflection on their teaching, one NBC fellow requested more explicit attention to defining and discussing effective teaching practice as part of this fellowship.

Quality of Learning Experiences

- **Eliminating any traces of busy work.** Most fellows reported finding their assignments with TeachMichigan to be productive uses of their time. But a handful of fellows complained of tasks they considered to be "busy work." Being mindful of the value and utility of all tasks asked of fellows should be an ongoing goal.

Support From Coaches

- **More timely feedback on submissions.** Fellows requested that work they submitted to their coaches be returned more quickly so that the feedback could be usefully applied to their practice, rather than having the feedback come so late that it was irrelevant.
- **More classroom visits for early career educators.** Fellows in the ECE cohort were particularly interested in receiving more in-person feedback from their coaches. Some suggested that TFA-Detroit hire a coach who resides in northern Michigan to facilitate more in-person observations to help ECE fellows in that region improve their teaching.

Special Considerations for Fellow Needs

- **Attending to the demands of working parents.** One clear distinction between the traditional TFA Corps Program and TeachMichigan is the inclusion of many more working parents in TeachMichigan due to the focus on experienced educators. Some programming strategies that TFA has traditionally used with the corps – e.g., happy hours for socializing, after-school PD sessions – can be less amenable to the schedules of working parents. TFA-Detroit may need to think in new ways to consider the scheduling needs of working parents.
- **Being mindful to the challenges of virtual PD.** Almost all fellows reported preferring the in-person PD to the virtual PD because of the challenges of focusing on a virtual PD session for several hours. While fellows recognize the need for virtual meetings in a statewide program and appreciate the brisk pacing and thoughtful planning of TeachMichigan’s virtual PD, facilitators and coaches need to continue to be mindful of these challenges.

Organization

- **A more intimate experience.** Some fellows were taken aback by the size of TeachMichigan and had expected a smaller, more intimate experience, like how the Detroit Leads program had been advertised to them.
- **Streamline communication.** A persistent frustration for fellows during this first year has been confusion about what to do, where to find materials, and how to prepare for sessions. Continuing to work to streamline the communication system for all fellows is imperative.

CONCLUSION

Overall, participants in the first year of TeachMichigan found their experiences to be positive and worthwhile, with many noting that TeachMichigan has improved their teaching and leadership, their perceptions of themselves as educators, and their

sense of optimism and enthusiasm for the education profession. While this report reveals some areas for improvement and offers some suggestions for change, TeachMichigan fellows are largely satisfied with their fellowships, and many share that they have enthusiastically encouraged colleagues to apply for the second cohort. In the spirit of spreading the wealth, one aspiring leader fellow commented:

I feel like what TeachMichigan is doing needs to be scaled down to every district in Michigan. Every teacher should have the feeling that those of us who attend the convenings feel when we get there and when we leave there. Everyone says we kind of dread coming because even though we know it's great, it's almost just like something else to do and you're tired, and education is hard.... You just have this mental and physical drain, but when you leave from that weekend, you're so charged up and you're fired up.... I think that every teacher should have the opportunity to experience what they're doing.

Similarly reflecting this idea that TeachMichigan fills an emotional need for teachers, an early career fellow commented, "Teaching is rewarding in and of itself. But TeachMichigan makes it that much more rewarding."

END NOTES

¹ Although some AL fellows in TeachMichigan are not in a coach or teacher role, our sample did not include these fellows, so we can not speak to their experiences.