



**Report to the Michigan Department of Education**

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

**July 2024**

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## **I. Context and Background**

Teach For America Detroit is pleased to submit our second report highlighting the results and key learnings of the TeachMichigan initiative over the 2023–24 school year. The enabling legislation requires that Teach For America work with an independent evaluator and share progress and learnings annually (see Appendix A for summary of progress towards legislative requirements). Our first report was submitted in December 2023 (Appendix B).

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 areas meaningful incentives, rigorous professional development, coaching, opportunities to build community within the profession, and to shape broader systems through innovation and advocacy.

In total, TeachMichigan will invest into nearly 500 educators across its footprint during the 2024–25 academic year, and 658 since the initial state investment in December 2021. Currently, TeachMichigan brings investment and enrichment to support high-impact educators and their students in under-resourced schools across six Michigan regions: West Michigan (Grand Rapids and Kentwood), Northwest Michigan (Traverse City and Benzie County), Saginaw, Lansing, the Eastern Upper Peninsula (Sault Ste. Marie), and Southeast Michigan (Detroit and surrounding areas). This summer TeachMichigan expanded to a seventh region, Flint.

The TeachMichigan Initiative involves four key components:

1. Use competitive benefits to identify, recruit and retain 700 high-impact educators into TeachMichigan fellowships,
2. Energize educators with best-in-class development, innovation funds, and a connected community,
3. Amplify educator impact with a statewide campaign, and
4. Study and share the initiative's scaled impact on student outcomes and educator retention.

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In collaboration, TFA Detroit and the Education Policy Innovation Collaborative (EPIC), are studying the TeachMichigan initiative's impact. This report concludes the first year of a multi-year intervention that will measure the impact of at least 700 educators situated within TeachMichigan fellowships. The TeachMichigan fellowships include six fellowship cohorts:

- **Early Career Fellowship:** Designed for early career educators who have completed at least one year of teaching, the Early Career Fellowship is focused on building strong foundations of instruction through professional development focused on culturally responsive pedagogy and practice, instructional best practices for rigor and academic excellence, community building, teacher leadership, and diversity, equity and inclusion. This learning is facilitated through full group workshops and sessions and group coaching. Fellows leave the program with the mindsets and skills necessary to lead transformational classrooms.
- **National Board Certification Fellowship:** Eligible to teachers with at least 4 years of experience, the National Board Fellowships supports educators in pursuit of National Board Certification in their respective certificate areas. Through participation in cohort based learning and direct coaching from a Nationally Board Certified educator, fellows deepen their knowledge of content and pedagogy in preparation to submit a high-quality National Board Certification portfolio.
- **Aspiring Leaders Fellowship:** Focused on educators who hold classroom level leadership roles, such as department heads or grade level leads, as well as those aspiring to school level leadership, the Aspiring Leaders Fellowship supports educators to grow as leaders of others. This learning is facilitated through full group workshops and sessions and group coaching.
- **Sitting Leaders Fellowship:** Designed for those who currently hold school leadership positions, such as assistant principals and principals, the Sitting Leaders Fellowship supports education leaders to lead more just and equitable school communities. Through engagement in convenings, workshops, coaching, and additional experiential learning opportunities, fellows develop the adaptive and technical skills of school leadership, and they apply their learnings to benefit their school communities.
- **System Leaders Fellowship:** Developed to support the next generation of Michigan education leaders, the System Leaders Fellowship provides school systems leaders an opportunity to engage in an innovative program design that explores best practices from across the country to apply to their own contexts, focus on mastery of adaptive skills alongside specific domains of expertise, and work closely with other systems leaders who aim to lead innovative systems that improve achievement and outcomes for children and families.

- **Michigan Education Policy Fellowship:** A leadership opportunity for current or previous educators and school leaders, Michigan Education Policy Fellows are matched with partner organizations to grow in their experience and development as system-level leaders in policy, advocacy, and/or non-profit management, while participating in cohort learning for collective learning and development.

In addition to each fellowship cohort, TFA continues to operate the traditional corps member model in Detroit and includes corps members in the broader TeachMichigan program context. Corps members, however, are not included in the program evaluation of TeachMichigan, nor are the System Leader Fellows and Michigan Educator Policy Fellows. Of the 658 educators that have been served through TeachMichigan, around 80% are included in the evaluation, while 20% are in fellowships not evaluated by EPIC. TFA believes that the corps remains a critical component of the entry point into the teaching profession alongside the retention of high-impact educators in order to change the educational outcomes for students growing up in poverty.

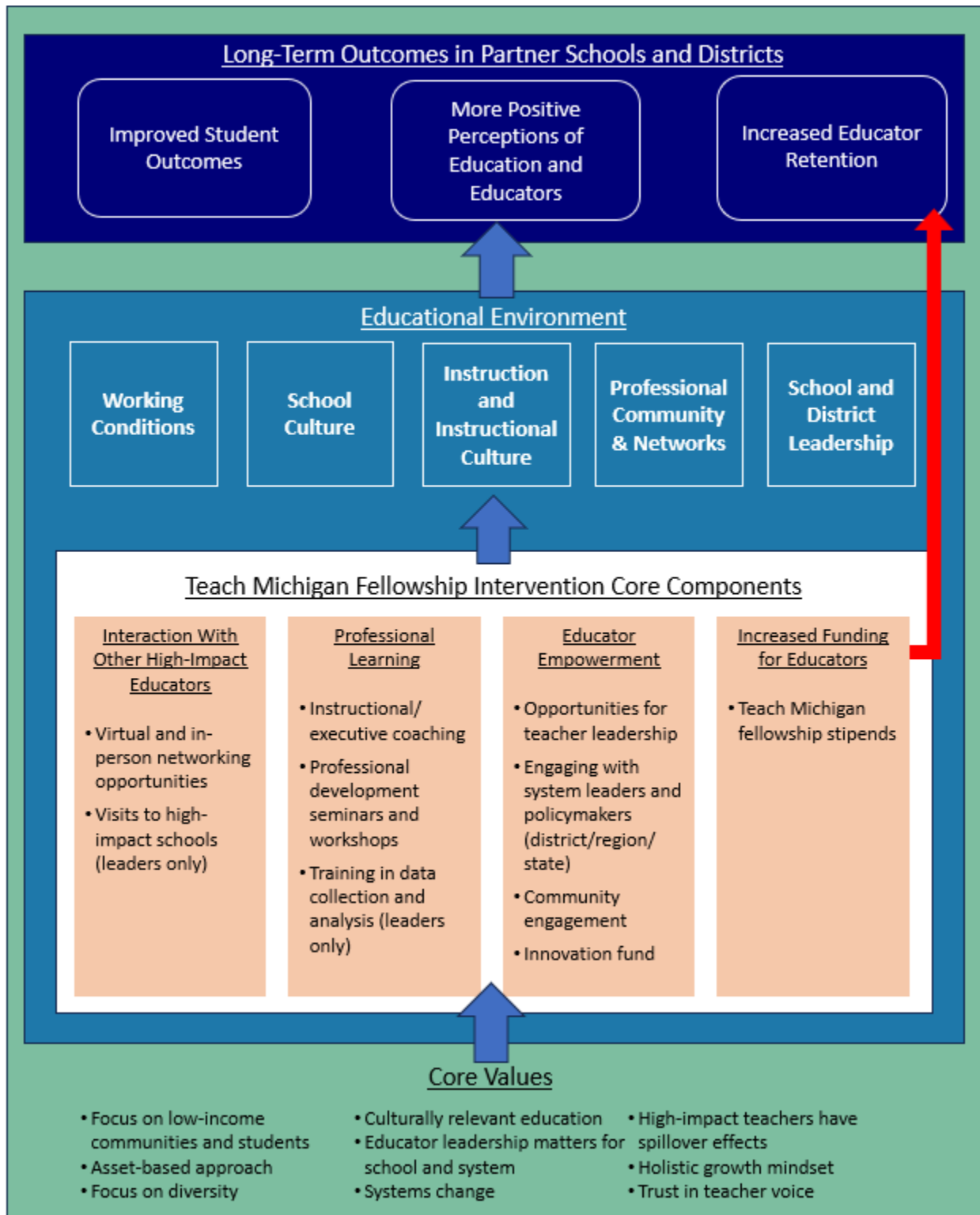
TeachMichigan is rooted in TFA's vision that "One day, all children in this country will have the opportunity to attain an excellent education." In pursuit of this vision, TFA and TeachMichigan are anchored in the goal that by 2030, twice as many children growing up in poverty-dense communities across Michigan will reach key educational milestones indicating that they are on a path to economic mobility and co-creating a future filled with possibility. TFA hypothesizes that only through the development of novice teachers alongside the retention and development of our highest impact educators, will the 2030 goal be attainable.

Included in this report are the critical elements that TFA, with input and research from EPIC, believes are important to discuss, highlight and elevate following the completion of the first program year. This report is the second 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 robust evidence in support of this effort.

## **II. Theory of Change**

As outlined in our first report, TeachMichigan follows a Theory of Change to guide our implementation and accountability for the long-term outcomes we seek to achieve through the initiative.

Figure 1: TeachMichigan Theory of Change



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Beginning at the bottom of Figure 1, TFA identified nine core values to guide all aspects of TeachMichigan. These core values then determined the four core components of intervention – the key activities – of TeachMichigan:

1. Interaction with other high-impact educators
2. Professional learning
3. Educational empowerment
4. Increased funding for educators

The TeachMichigan Theory of Change posits that through these four intervention activities will lead to a more positive educational environment including:

1. Working Conditions for Educators: the observable elements of educators' work setting, such as salaries, contractual obligations, the physical condition of their schools, educator turnover, and the resources/materials for educators to do their jobs.
2. School Culture: the elements of educators' working environments that cannot be directly observed, such as a sense of belonging at the school, relationships with students and other educators, shared values, and a shared sense of purpose.
3. Instruction and Instructional Culture: the practices and strategies used to help students learn, educators' expectations for students, and the way in which teachers draw on their students' culture to guide instruction.
4. Educators' Networks: the people educators reach out to for support regarding their practice, such as leaders within their school or district, colleagues, or other peers.
5. School- and District-Level Leadership: educators' perceptions about the effectiveness of their school and district leadership and the extent to which educators' perspectives inform the work and decisions of their leaders.

In the near-term, the core components of TeachMichigan aim to improve the educational environment in the schools and districts where fellows work, which will in turn lead to long-term improvements in teacher retention, student outcomes, and foster more positive perceptions of education and educators.

Over the past year, TeachMichigan employed all four components of intervention activities, as outlined in Key Activities above. The bi-annual convenings, workshops, and experiential learning trips ensured TeachMichigan educators interacted with other high-impact educators from across the state and nationally. All educators received exceptional professional learning including ongoing instructional or executive coaching and professional development through the bi-annual workshops and convenings. TeachMichigan educators had the opportunity to exercise greater empowerment through application and implementation of an innovation fund, sharing their learning back to their school community

or in formal TeachMichigan engagements, and engaging with system leaders and policymakers at full TeachMichigan convenings. Finally, TeachMichigan provided the first comprehensive round of funding to educators through signing incentives and completion bonuses, a direct effort towards the outcome to increase educator retention long-term. The detailed impact of this funding is described in SECTION IV-C and referenced through EPIC Report, *TeachMichigan Fellows' Compensation in Context: Perceptions and Insights* (Appendix C).

In review of the first program year, TeachMichigan has remained aligned with the proposed Theory of Change and continues to learn about additional interventions and outcomes that could improve student outcomes, education and educator perceptions, and educator retention long-term. The TFA team and EPIC will continue to review and revise the Theory of Change as necessary to meet the desired outcomes. While initial adjustments to the Theory of Change were recommended after review of this first year, no changes have yet been made and TFA will share any shifts that are made in the December 2024 report.

### **III. Key Activities**

The TeachMichigan initiative first launched in 2022, however, the 2023–2024 academic year was the first fully developed program year including educators from across the state. Further, while TFA and EPIC previously partnered to design the key elements of the program model and evaluation, this marks the first full evaluation year of the initiatives. Three primary activities were completed this first year:

1. Educator Development: Following expansion of our work to six regions across Michigan, TFA supported 292 educators through our program offerings. These offerings included:
  - a. Ongoing individual and group coaching of fellows from experienced educational leaders: All fellows received direct coaching support although the type of coaching depended on the fellowship. For example, Early Career Educators engaged in group coaching, reviewing and analyzing instructional practices while Sitting Leaders received one-on-one coaching from an Executive Coach. Based on internal TFA survey data, 90% of fellows agreed or strongly agreed that the TeachMichigan coaching impacted their professional learning.
  - b. Quarterly professional development workshops: These workshops included cohort-based learning opportunities and opportunities to learn across fellowships. Two of these occurred virtually and two occurred during the full group, in-person gatherings for educators located across Michigan. For Detroit-based educators these were held in person both in December and March. From interviews with EPIC, educators noted that these sessions overall



- were positive but feedback varied based on experience with the virtual learning (for statewide fellows) and content quality from external facilitators.
- c. Two in-person gatherings for all TeachMichigan fellows across the state (“EmpowerEd Weekends”): These were unique opportunities for all educators from across the state and across fellowships to convene and learn together. As noted in EPIC’s *Fellow Perceptions of Educator Learning in Michigan* report, fellows reported the convenings as “really great”, “super cool”, and “fantastic”, and “to be particularly impactful in how they viewed TeachMichigan”.<sup>1</sup>
  - d. Site visits to program partner schools: The TFA team, including organization leadership and fellowship program leads, regularly visited the TeachMichigan partner school sites to meet with district leaders, observe fellows’ lessons, and gather feedback for improvement. Site visits allowed TFA staff, coaches, educators, and school leaders to build deeper relationships with one another as well as engage in in-person coaching and development.

TeachMichigan also provided optional programming to enhance fellows’ learning and development including an innovation fund and experiential learning visit. All educators and school partners had access to an application-based Innovation Fund designed to encourage unique ideas to transform teaching and learning. Educators and school partners completed a thorough application, describing their proposed ideas, connection to COVID-19 recovery, and ways in which they’d measure success. In its first full year, the innovation fund received 31 applications and funded 21 projects totaling \$344,184. Reports for the first round of innovation funds will be collected by October 2024.

In addition to innovation funding, educators were invited to apply to an experiential learning trip over the course of a few days in March to learn from educators and districts outside of Michigan. In March 2024, 17 educators traveled to Memphis to gain a deeper understanding of the strengths and opportunities in Memphis’ educational landscape and apply the learning for their own work in Michigan. Results from the experiential learning trip were strong with more than 90% of attendees agreeing or strongly agreeing that “As a result of the trip, I co-created a space to learn, execute, and reflect together. Following their trip, educators presented their learnings to other fellows at the spring EmpowerEd Convening as both a leadership opportunity and learning experience for more educators.

2. Educator Financial Incentives: As a primary tool of the TeachMichigan initiative, TFA designed an incentive structure grounded in research to help both attract and retain more educators. TFA implemented a \$5,000 signing bonus followed by successive

completion bonuses after each fellowship year, up to three years. Over the course of three years of the fellowship, a fellow may earn at least \$35,000 in incentives. As an additional recruitment tactic, we provided up to \$10,000 in a one-time moving stipend to those educators coming to teach from another state, and a one-time \$3,000 stipend for those educators teaching a high-need subject area – STEM, early elementary (grades K-3), and special education. While not covered by public funds, we also provided a \$3,000 incentive to any Black identifying educators in Detroit as a means to improve the number of Black educators teaching in Michigan. Recruitment incentives and completion bonuses distributed between June 2023–August 2023 were covered by final drawdown of GEER funds. Completion bonuses for the 2023–24 academic year and signing incentives for incoming fellows for the 2024–25 year are in disbursement with ARP dollars to be completed by the end of August 2024.

3. Evaluation: Beginning in summer 2023, EPIC began its formal evaluation of TeachMichigan programs and activities. In the first evaluation year, EPIC focused on data collection and learning dissemination through a variety of mediums. They conducted several interviews including with 43 fellows, seven district leaders, eight TFA Detroit staff members, and focus groups with non-fellow educators in seven districts. EPIC also administered four surveys including a fellowship survey in fall 2023 and spring 2024 (both with 95% response rate), a State of the State Survey, and Policy Insiders Panel.<sup>1</sup> Finally, EPIC secured data access through the Michigan Education Research Institute (MERI) and conducted field observations at both bi-annual convenings and workshops. With the significant amount of data collected, EPIC produced several reports and presentations including two literature syntheses, six research briefs and selected analyses from fall '23 survey in fall 2023, as well as a brief on policy elites' views around teacher compensation, a teacher compensation report, community/district profiles and four reports on implementation in spring 2024.

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<sup>1</sup> The Institute for Public Policy and Social Research conducts both the State of the State Survey (SOSS) and Michigan Policy Insiders Panel (MPIP). The aim of the MPIP is to measure the preferences of Michigan's policy elites. To do this, the MPIP surveys people in a range of positions including legislators and their staff, lobbyists, business leaders, leaders of advocacy groups and think tanks, and statewide media. The SOSS is a survey with a sample that is representative of Michigan adults. The waves of the MPIP and SOSS we use were collected in spring 2024.

#### **IV. Key Learnings**

Following the first full program year of TeachMichigan statewide and EPIC's evaluation of the initiative, TFA recommends three key learnings to scale similar programs:

##### **A. Intentionally recruit and select high impact and high potential educators**

TeachMichigan aims to retain the highest-impact educators in the high poverty schools and districts in which they teach. This requires recruiting and selecting both the highest impact and highest potential educators in those districts to receive the financial incentives, professional development, community building, and wraparound experience to enhance their skills and impact for students.

Recruitment of fellows to TeachMichigan requires committed partnership with the districts in which they teach. Our recruitment process launches with a member of the district's leadership team (i.e. the superintendent, deputy superintendent, other) inviting all educators in their districts to learn about TeachMichigan. This move indicates to educators that their district leader strongly supports the partnership and provides additional legitimacy to the program. Next, TFA facilitates information sessions for educators in each district and provides additional opportunities for individual follow up and resources. During these information sessions and conversations, access to the financial incentives are emphasized as a hook to attract educators.

This recruitment approach was initially differentiated for Detroit and statewide partners in its first year, given the established relationships that already existed in the Detroit area. However, this recruitment approach was standardized for all partners during the 2024-2025 recruitment season.

Following a robust recruitment process, TeachMichigan initiates a selection process that is a "comprehensive multi-stage process, designed to identify educators who are, or have the potential to become, "high-impact" and who demonstrated alignment with the program's pillars".<sup>2</sup> Figure 1 in EPIC's *2023-2024 TeachMichigan Recruitment and Selection Process* report provides a detailed overview of the selection process including information collected from educators, artifact submissions, references, and nuances between submission material dependent on the fellowship program (Appendix D). Once a prospective educator has applied, their material receives a thorough review by the TFA team, assessing their application against the program pillars through a common rubric to ensure equity across application reviews. Evaluation of applications is rooted in a strengths-based process, "actively looking for evidence of a candidate being a good fit for the program, rather than looking for "red flags," or non-evidence of program fit".<sup>2</sup> This

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includes looking across all application materials – essays, artifacts and reflections, and recommendations – to gather a holistic view of the educator candidate. TFA then seeks input from the district partner for each educator to ensure there are no concerns about an educator’s application. Only after these steps is a candidate invited to interview with a member of the TFA team. During this interview, the TFA team member follows an interview script and evaluates responses with a rubric to ensure equity across interviews. Following the interview, recommended candidates are reviewed once more with the district partner for a final input step. After these detailed steps are completed, TFA makes final decisions and candidates are invited to join the TeachMichigan fellowship. The rigorous nature of the TeachMichigan selection process ensures that the highest-impact and highest potential candidates are selected for the program and that they have the full support of their district to apply the learnings and outcomes of the fellowship to their classroom and school communities.

As noted in the selection process overview, candidates are evaluated based on four core program pillars. See Appendix E for a sample application with detailed definitions of each pillar.

1. Professional Learning Community Membership
2. Authentic and Impactful Leadership
3. Culturally Relevant Pedagogies and Practices
4. System Impact

These pillars guide all aspects of the selection process, from initial application review through the interview process. Beyond selection, the program pillars are integral to fellows’ learning and coaching through the duration of the fellowship. Select fellowships also apply cohort specific pillars aligned with the expectations and outcomes of the fellowships. These include:

1. High-Impact teaching (Early Career Fellowship)
2. Reflective Practitioner (National Board Certification Fellowship)
3. Visionary Leadership (Aspiring Leaders Fellowship)
4. High-Impact Leadership (Sitting Leaders Fellowship – added in 2023-24)

A thorough review of candidates’ applications from a strength-based approach, coupled with evaluation criteria based on the program pillars, ensured there was clear criteria and evidence to support invitation to TeachMichigan. Programs looking to scale retention of the highest potential and impact educators should apply clear criteria that differentiates educators. Clear criteria for admission also supports efforts to provide feedback to candidates that can help them grow in their practice and application in the future. TFA provides the opportunity for feedback conversations to any applicant that is declined at

any stage in the process and the feedback provided is rooted in the program pillars and criteria for admissions.

Further, depending on the fellowship, it may be important to select for both high-impact and high-potential candidates. TeachMichigan fellowships include educators from throughout the pipeline continuum – from early career teachers through school and district level leadership – requiring different evaluation for different points in their career. TFA “took a developmental stance on identifying high-impact educators” to include educators with the potential for high impact teaching (Early Career Fellows) or high impact leadership (Aspiring Leaders Fellows) because these educators want “to learn and grow to become high impact and demonstrated tendencies and mindsets that aligned with TFA-Detroit’s vision of a high-impact educator”.<sup>2</sup> Selecting for candidates at these points on the continuum that are high-impact or have the potential for high-impact required TFA to design application materials and assess candidates “dispositions, not just achievements, that aligned with TeachMichigan’s values as denoted in the pillars”.<sup>2</sup> In this way, TeachMichigan – and similar programs – should also aim to meet educators where they are in their career journey. It is not enough to only select and retain the highest impact educators at specific points on the continuum. TeachMichigan and other programs must also commit to finding and developing the highest potential candidates to sustain teacher retention and impact over the long-term.

There are several ways in which to evaluate educators: one approach is through a selection process like TeachMichigan’s. Another is considering “effective” or “highly effective” educators as done through the Michigan Educator Effectiveness rating system. TFA does not use the Michigan Educator Effectiveness rating of “highly effective” to select TeachMichigan candidates for a variety of reasons:

1. This evaluation tool does not use all components of TeachMichigan’s definitions for high impact teachers and leaders. There are a few ways that they are different, including the assessment of broader impact beyond the classroom for a high impact teacher. As outlined in the high-impact teacher definition, a high-impact educator “creates educational opportunity and equity inside and outside of their classrooms”, which is not measured through MDE’s effectiveness rating scale (Appendix F)
2. The inclusion of potential for high-impact teachers and leaders into TeachMichigan may mean that they are not yet rated as “highly effective” by the Michigan Educator Effectiveness system and would therefore be excluded given their current career point. The retention of educators long-term requires that TeachMichigan support not only those who already demonstrate that they’re “highly-effective” but also those rated “effective” who can develop into “highly-effective” educators.

3. Finally, TFA seeks to remain neutral in the teacher evaluation system, “both to include their organizational values and to stay away from the politics of teacher evaluation”.<sup>2</sup> Serving as an external entity that supports educators but uses its own criteria allows educators to begin TeachMichigan with a fresh start and protects district partners should an educator not be selected to the program.

## **B. Design programs intentionally and around core components**

To meet the outcomes of TeachMichigan, TFA intentionally designed four core intervention components. As outlined in TeachMichigan’s Theory of Change, these core components include:

1. Interaction with other high impact educators
2. Professional Learning
3. Educator empowerment
4. Increased funding for educators

EPIC’s research and evaluation demonstrate the importance and impact of these core components not only for the educators reached but for the TeachMichigan initiative more broadly and applicable learnings for other programs.

1. Interaction with other high impact educators: The isolated nature of teachers’ work makes it hard to spread good ideas and solve shared problems. TeachMichigan believes in the power of community and shared learning with one another. The bi-annual convenings and workshops gave direct opportunities for educators to spend time in community with one another, particularly those in districts and regions different from their own. As one National Board Certification fellow shared about the convenings, they appreciated “being able to meet with other 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”.<sup>1</sup> Sitting Leaders in particular noted the “opportunity to build and expand their professional community” as a primary factor for their application to TeachMichigan, with nearly 65% indicating as their most or second most important factor.<sup>4</sup> Internal TFA survey data collected from fellows following the convenings and workshops also supports the importance of educator interaction with 95% of educators following Workshop 2, 98% of educators following Workshop 3, and 99% of educators following the Spring Convening, indicating that they agree or strongly agree that they “had opportunities to learn from other educators in the cohort sessions” (Appendix G). Beyond the formal workshops and convenings, educators also interacted with one another through group coaching and networking

opportunities hosted by TFA. Through TFA's internal end of year survey, educators shared the impact of their collaborative opportunities, with one educator stating, "I appreciate the chance to collaborate with peers who bring such diverse perspectives and expertise. The synergy in our discussions is invaluable, as it enriches my own teaching practice and helps me view challenges from different angles." Another educator shared, "Engaging with other high impact educators through professional networks has allowed me to stay at the forefront of educational trends and best practices. These interactions are crucial for my growth as an educator" (Appendix H).

2. Professional Learning: Although required to participate in regular professional development, most professional learning for educators is of poor quality or unrelated to teachers' needs. Through their involvement in TeachMichigan, educators are participating in profound professional learning through direct coaching, professional development workshops, and training opportunities. Overall "fellows' global perceptions of the TeachMichigan PD were overwhelmingly positive" and fellows "reported that the TeachMichigan PD was impacting their teaching practice and that they gained new insights and skills that they shared with colleagues in their schools".<sup>1</sup> Internal survey results from TFA also support the impact of professional learning with 86% of educators following Workshop 2, 96% of educators following Workshop 3, and 99% of educators following the Spring Convening, indicating that they agree or strongly agree that their cohort session met or exceeded expectations. Further, when evaluating if "I can apply what I learned in the cohort session to my current role and context", 74% of educators following Workshop 2, 98% of educators following Workshop 3, and 97% of educators following Spring Convening agreed or strongly agreed (Appendix G). Given the statewide nature of TeachMichigan, several professional learning offerings were provided virtually to educators. Although results from these sessions remained strong, feedback shared by educators emphasized the stronger impact of being in-person together as well as when led by the fellowship cohort lead rather than an external expert. Providing high quality professional learning as a core program component is critical for TeachMichigan's success and any program seeking to similarly scale. As educator reflections demonstrated, "the continuous professional learning sessions have been instrumental in refining my teaching methods. The knowledge gained from these sessions directly impacts my classroom practices, leading to better student outcomes" (Appendix H). By focusing on professional learning as a core component, TeachMichigan and other similar programs can ensure that the educators they serve and the students they reach are receiving the highest quality learning and outcomes.

3. **Educator Empowerment:** Educators have a lot of valuable knowledge and wisdom but there tend to be few avenues through which that is used to inform school and district-level decisions. TeachMichigan's Theory of Change believes that through opportunities for teacher leadership innovation funds, engagement with policy and system leaders, and community engagement, educators will have greater empowerment to enact change in the education system. Through TFA's internal survey, 70% of fellows indicated that they were executing on leadership work, either through sharing their learning with others in their buildings, leading professional development sessions, or other opportunities to showcase their leadership. As well, 25 fellows and 4 school partners applied for the first round of innovation funding with 21 projects totaling \$344,184 receiving funding in its first year. Although there was progress within the educator empowerment component, educators did not share detailed reflections about the impact of this component or data through EPIC's data collection and internal TFA data surveys. While it remains an important component of the program model, TFA has the opportunity to go deeper on understanding how educators can and want to engage in their community, with policymakers, and teacher leadership in order to enact change.
  
4. **Increased funding for educators:** As noted in our first report, salary and performance-based pay remain two important structural factors in educator recruitment and retention. According to research, teachers rate pay as among the most important factors in choosing where to work and in deciding whether to leave the teaching profession (Johnston, 2020; Viano et al., 2021); (Lindsay et al., 2020).<sup>3</sup> Providing increased funding for educators through the TeachMichigan incentives structure allows TFA to evaluate the impact of improved compensation to teachers over time. Every fellow participating in TeachMichigan is eligible for at least \$35,000 in incentive compensation over the course of three years with TeachMichigan. Educators receive the incentives directly from TFA in the form of signing and completion bonuses each year – \$5,000 signing bonus at the start of the fellowship, \$5,000 year 1 completion bonus, \$10,000 year 2 completion bonus, and \$15,000 year 3 completion bonus. Additional incentives including an out of state recruitment stipend of \$10,000 and a \$3,000 critical needs stipend is available to qualifying educators.

Overall educators are not satisfied with their compensation. When including the additional stipends, TeachMichigan fellows satisfaction “meaningfully increase” although “most fellows are still not very satisfied with their compensation”.<sup>3</sup> Notably, Early Career Educators demonstrated increased value in the financial incentives. The EPIC and TFA teams posit that this may be because it represents a larger share of



their salary. A detailed breakdown of the TeachMichigan stipend as a percentage of salary is available in Table 2 of EPIC's *TeachMichigan Fellows' Compensation in Context: Perceptions and Insights* report (Appendix C).

In addition to EPIC's evaluation of teacher compensation and implications of the incentive stipend, TFA internally asked fellows "To what extent have financial incentives impacted your professional learning?" Through survey results, 94% of fellows agree or strongly agree that financial incentives have impacted their learning, indicating further importance of the impact of compensation as a core intervention component. As one educator shared, "The financial incentives have been most impactful. It makes being a teacher and investing in myself worth the time. I greatly appreciate this program" (Appendix H). Increased educator funding is highly tangible intervention for educators and remains a critical component for TeachMichigan and similar programs considering similar scale. As the next section will address, TeachMichigan continues to assess how educators are utilizing the stipends, the impact of the stipends on educators daily lives, and will use this data to influence future interventions and recommendations.

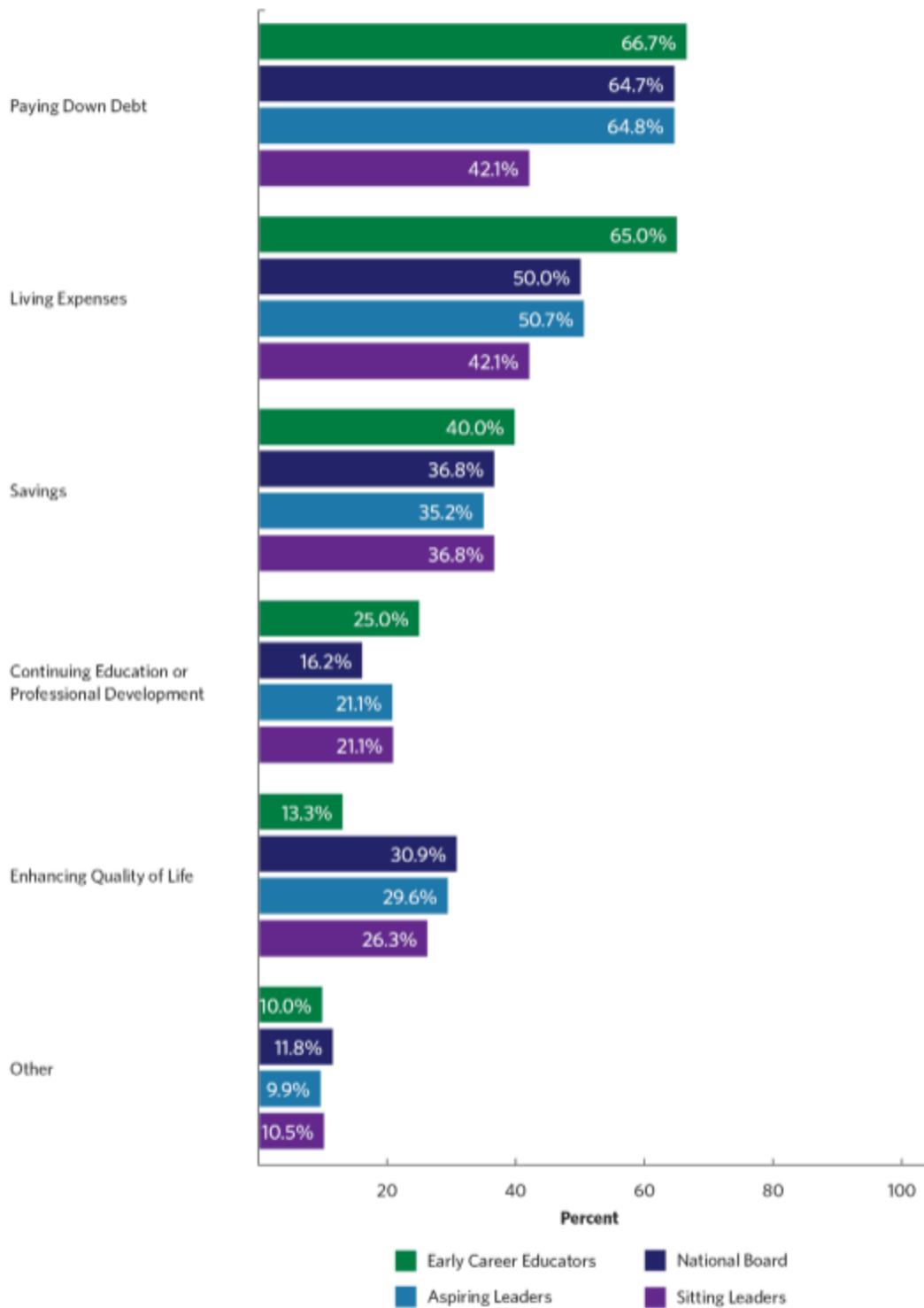
### **C. TeachMichigan stipends are helping fellows to better meet their basic needs**

The incentive stipends provided to fellows through TeachMichigan significantly impact the daily lives of the TeachMichigan educators. As noted in Section B-4 above, TFA provides tremendous funding to educators and the \$35,000 in total stipends represents 16–22% of the average teacher's salary in the districts with TeachMichigan Fellows.<sup>3</sup> What's notable is how educators use these funds; they are not using them on luxury purchases but rather to support their basic needs. Through EPIC's data collection, it is evidenced that "in no cohort did a majority of fellows report that they would use their stipend for what one might consider discretionary expenses" but instead "fellows were much more likely to report that they plan to use their stipend to cover basic expenses such as housing, food, loans, and bills".<sup>3</sup> Figure 2 below from EPIC's *Compensation in Context* report details fellows' response of how they planned to use their stipend.

FIGURE 2: Fellows’ Planned Use of Their Stipend

Figure 2. Fellows’ Planned Use of Their Stipend

*What do fellows plan to do with their stipend?*



When considering providing additional compensation to educators, TeachMichigan and other similar programs should recognize that these stipends help alleviate financial burdens educators may carry. This is particularly true for educators early in their careers who likely make the minimum salary within their district and hold debts including education loans, first time home purchases, etc. that they aim to pay down. Further, EPIC's research indicates that the "stipends make fellows' salaries much more competitive with nearby districts and also bring salaries more in line with other college-educated professionals".<sup>3</sup> TFA and EPIC will continue to study the impact of compensation on TeachMichigan educators and hypothesize that it will continue to play a critical role in the long-term retention of high-impact educators in our greatest need districts.

### **V. Summary Recommendations**

The first complete year of TeachMichigan's multi-year evaluation provided detailed learnings and insights that will continue to guide the initiative over the next several years. As detailed in the Theory of Change, the purpose of TeachMichigan is to increase educator retention, improve student outcomes, and advance more positive perceptions of educators and education. Through TFA and EPIC's findings, other education organizations and similar programs may also use this research to learn and grow their offerings to improve educator support and retention in Michigan. In addition to the findings in the first report, TFA – in partnership with EPIC – offers three key recommendations.

First, it is important to intentionally recruit and select both high impact and high potential educators. Through research, interviews, and data collection, TFA and EPIC developed a high-impact teacher and leader definition that guides the recruitment and selection process for TeachMichigan. The key attributes of a high-impact teacher and leader are particularly important when selecting for National Board Certification fellows and Sitting Leader fellows who should already demonstrate most of these characteristics. Early Career Educators and Aspiring Leader fellows, however, are less likely to already hold the key attributes and instead demonstrate high potential and capacity to grow in these skills through their participation in TeachMichigan. When evaluating for admissions, TFA assessed educators for their dispositions, not just their achievements, to ensure the ongoing retention of both the highest-impact educators as well as those with the greatest potential for long-term impact.

Next, TFA and EPIC's research determined that strong programs are designed around core components. As part of TeachMichigan's Theory of Change, TFA and EPIC identified four key interventions that serve as the core components of the initiative – Interaction with other high impact educators; Professional learning; Educator empowerment; and Increased

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funding for educators. Each of these components contribute to shaping the educational environment in which TeachMichigan educators work and ultimately shape the long-term outcomes the program seeks to achieve. By maintaining strong program components, TFA and EPIC are able to evaluate the cumulative effect of all four components acting at one time, and the effectiveness of each intervention, determining which components are strong or need improvement, and modify as needed to meet the outcomes desired by educators and district partners.

Finally, the stipends provided by TeachMichigan are improving educators' compensation and are helping educators to cover their basic needs. It is a strong belief of TFA and the TeachMichigan initiative that improved compensation will enhance the recruitment and retention of high-impact educators in Michigan, particularly in under-resourced communities and hard to staff schools. Through EPIC's evaluation, it is clear that educators are using the incentive funds to support their basic needs - housing, bills, loans - and not applying the funds to other discretionary costs. How educators feel about their compensation - with and without the additional stipends - as well as how they use their stipends suggests that teacher compensation remains a significant factor in recruiting and retaining top talent in education.

TeachMichigan provides the unique opportunity to support educators, schools, and students in our highest-need communities across Michigan while studying the impact in order to scale and improve our broader system. 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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2. Cooper Stein, K., Turnage, S., Burns, J., Mavrogordato, M., (2024). *2023-2024 TeachMichigan Recruitment and Selection Process*. Education Policy Innovation Collaborative. 10, 23, 41-42.  
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**APPENDIX**

**Appendix A:** Summary of progress against legislative requirements

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

**Appendix C:** Report: [TeachMichigan Fellows' Compensation in Context: Perceptions and Insights](#)

**Appendix D:** Report: [TeachMichigan Recruitment and Selection Process](#)

**Appendix E:** [Sample Application](#)

**Appendix F:** [High-Impact Leader Definition](#)

**Appendix G:** TFA Detroit Internal [Workshops 2 Data](#), [Workshop 3 Data](#), and [Spring Convening Survey Data](#)

**Appendix H:** TFA Detroit Internal [End of Year Survey Data](#)

**Appendix I:** Report: [Teacher Compensation in Context: Perspectives from Michigan's Policy Elites](#)

**Appendix J:** Report: [TeachMichigan Evaluation: A Summary of Year 1 Findings](#)

**Appendix K:** TeachMichigan Regions [Community Profiles](#)

**Appendix L:** Report: [Fellow Perceptions of Educator Learning in TeachMichigan](#)

**Appendix M:** Report: [The Educational Environment in TeachMichigan Fellows' Schools](#)

**Appendix N:** Research Report: [Teacher Compensation in Michigan: Recent Trends and Public Opinion](#)

**Appendix O:** [A Survey of TeachMichigan Fellows: Prior Career Intentions and Reasons They Applied to TeachMichigan.](#)