



Learning Through TeachMichigan

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Report
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Learning Through TeachMichigan: Teacher Fellows' Perceptions on Factors That Impact their Learning and Application of Learning

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In September 2023, TeachMichigan officially launched with a two-day professional learning convening in downtown Detroit. Over the ensuing year, fellows participated in ongoing learning opportunities through virtual individual and small-group coaching, full days of virtual professional learning that included cohort-specific seminars in the morning and choice sessions in the afternoons, and an end-of-year, in-person convening with seminars and choice sessions. TeachMichigan's theory of change posited that these professional learning opportunities would improve instruction, leadership, and culture in fellows' schools.

However, professional development offered by an outside organization may not change educator practice across diverse local contexts. Whether or not educators

learn through professional learning opportunities and then take up that professional learning and apply it to their work can be influenced by many factors, including the quality and design of the professional learning opportunities and the embedded contexts of educators' work, which include personal, sociocultural, and organizational factors (Wei, et al., 2009; Opfer & Pedder, 2011). For this reason, TeachMichigan's theory of change may be faulty. Educator learning through TeachMichigan may not create the desired changes because of the nature of the program design, characteristics of participating teachers, and the dynamics of teachers' local professional contexts.

In this report, we focus on classroom teachers who were in their first year in the Early Career Educator or National Board Certification (NBC) fellowships in the 2023-2024 school year. We use survey data from 170 survey responses from TeachMichigan fellows and interview data from 30 fellows to examine how their learning and application of what they had learned as of spring 2024 were shaped by (a) their perceptions of the quality and design of TeachMichigan professional learning opportunities and (b) the embedded personal, sociocultural, and organizational contexts of their work.

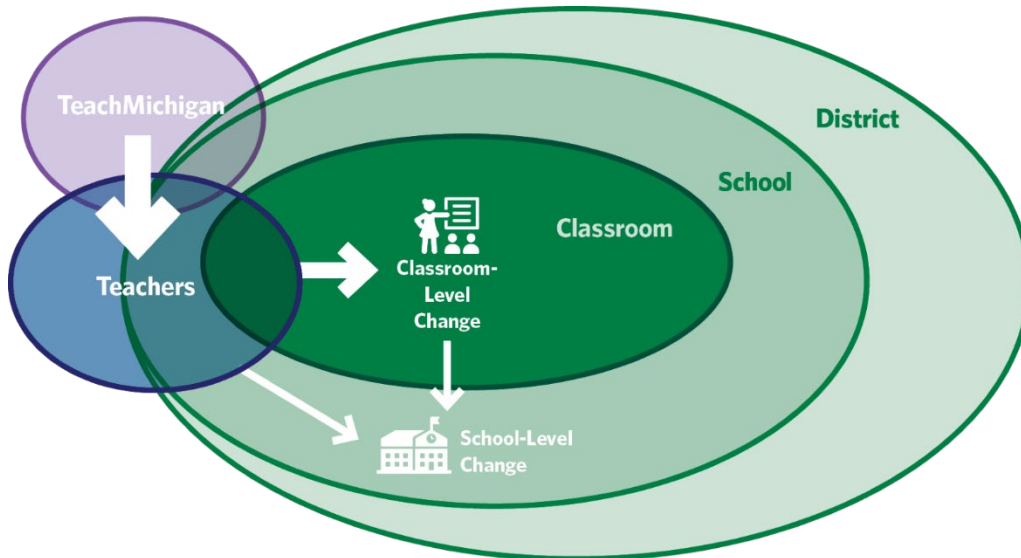
THE ROLE OF CONTEXT IN TEACHER PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Research on teacher professional learning using complexity theory asserts that outcomes of teacher professional learning are shaped by interactions among three systems: the learning activity, the teacher, and the school in which the teacher works (Opfer & Pedder, 2011). In this analysis, we use this theory to examine teachers' perceptions on the quality and design of TeachMichigan professional learning opportunities; how teachers perceived that those learning opportunities aligned with their personal values, needs, and learning styles; and their perceptions of the dynamics within their schools that did or did not enable them to share and apply their learning to their practice.

Figure 1 provides a graphic illustration of the theorized model for how TeachMichigan professional learning could improve teaching and schools, from a complex systems theory perspective. In this model, the TeachMichigan professional learning experiences offered for Early Career and NBC fellows (represented by the purple circle) directly target the individual teacher (the blue circle) as the primary agent of change who has the potential to influence their classroom and school (the two smaller green circles), which are located within the district context (the largest green circle). As shown by the relative size of the white change arrows, TeachMichigan learning opportunities in these teacher-centered fellowships focus primarily on changing the teacher's capacity, knowledge, and skills. In turn, the theory is that enhanced teacher capacity, knowledge, and skills will

lead primarily to classroom-level change through improved teaching practice. School-level changes are secondary and are theorized to occur both through changes to individual fellows' classrooms that contribute to overall school improvement and through fellows' direct efforts to impact the school outside of their classroom, such as by impacting the teaching of their colleagues or by shaping school culture.

Figure 1. Model of TeachMichigan Teacher Learning Within Embedded Contexts



Through the overlapping and embedded circles, the model in Figure 1 also illustrates the embedded nature of these contextual elements of teacher professional learning and how they are related to one another. Reflecting complex systems theory (Opfer & Pedder, 2011), the model captures three distinct systems that impact teacher learning. First, teachers' perceptions of the quality and design of the TeachMichigan learning experiences (purple circle) are key factors in whether, what, and how teachers learned and how they applied that learning in their school. Second, as shown in the blue circle, each teacher is their own system, such that their unique perspectives, interests, values, needs, expectations, learning styles, and so forth influenced whether, what, and how they learned through TeachMichigan and how they used that learning. As shown by the overlapping circles in the model, TeachMichigan is partially embedded in a given teacher's school and district because districts joined TeachMichigan as a whole, and multiple educators within participating districts and most participating schools attended TeachMichigan professional learning offerings. So, the individual teacher is not the only way in which TeachMichigan interacts with schools and districts. Similarly, the circle representing the teacher is partially embedded in the classroom, school, and district where they work, but not entirely, as part of what influences a teacher's learning comes from who they are in ways that are particular to them as an individual and distinct from where they work.

Finally, the green circles capture teachers' working conditions, in which their efforts to apply their learning from TeachMichigan are situated within sociocultural and organizational factors in their classrooms, schools, and districts. Sociocultural factors are related to the nature of social interactions and cultural norms within a space. At the school level, sociocultural factors can include relationships among teachers, the school's social-emotional climate, and teachers' collective perceptions of and interactions with students and families (March & Farrell, 2015). By contrast, organizational factors are related to how an organization is structured in an effort to achieve its goals. Organizational factors within schools include technical dimensions of leadership and resource allocation, such as principal leadership practices, teacher evaluation systems, structures for teacher collaboration, formal or informal support for teacher learning, and district-provided professional development (March & Farrell, 2015). Sociocultural learning theory asserts that both sociocultural and organizational factors influence whether and how teachers apply professional learning to changes in their practice (Wertsch, 1985; Marsh & Farrell, 2015). Importantly, all of the systems depicted in this model are interacting, such that they influence one another and contribute to or restrict teacher learning and application of that learning in complex, integrated ways.

In this report, we use this framework to analyze survey and interview data from teachers in the Early Career and NBC fellowships and address four research questions across two domains:

Fellows' Perceptions of Professional Learning Opportunities

1. Prior to entering TeachMichigan, what types of professional learning opportunities did participating teachers experience, and how did they rate the impact of those opportunities on their development as educators?
2. How did participating teachers rate the design and quality of professional learning opportunities within TeachMichigan, as compared to those outside of TeachMichigan?

Perceived Impacts of TeachMichigan Professional Learning Within Embedded Systems

3. How did participating teachers' perceptions of the design and quality of TeachMichigan professional learning opportunities influence whether, how, and what they learned through TeachMichigan and how they applied that learning to their teaching?
4. How did the embedded personal, sociocultural, and organizational contexts of participating teachers' work influence whether, how, and what they learned through TeachMichigan and how they applied that learning to their teaching?

METHODS

To answer these questions, we use a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods, including multiple rounds of fellow surveys, 30 semi-structured fellow interviews, and observations of multiple TeachMichigan professional learning activities. This analysis focuses on TeachMichigan’s first year of implementation and is limited to fellows who worked as teachers and entered TeachMichigan in the fall of 2023. Because this report considers the impact of TeachMichigan on teacher learning, we further restrict our analysis to classroom teachers in the two fellowships focused on improving teachers’ classroom instruction, Early Career Educator fellows and NBC fellows.

Survey Data

To address our first two research questions, we draw on data from three waves of surveys we administered in fall 2023, spring 2024, and fall 2024. Table 1 shows the number of Early Career and NBC fellows who started in fall 2023 and participated in each wave of the survey, along with the response rates for each wave. It is worth noting that 97.7% - 98.9% of these fellows responded to the survey across the three waves, minimizing concerns around nonresponse bias and lending confidence that the survey results presented here reflect the views and perceptions of almost all fellows who work as teachers and participate in the two TeachMichigan fellowships with professional learning opportunities aimed at improving their instruction.

Table 1. Fall 2023 Early Career and NBC Fellows’ Survey Response Rate by Wave		
Survey Wave	N	Response Rate
Fall 2023	89	98.9%
Spring 2024	81	97.7%
Fall 2024	84	98.8%

Note: Fellows are included here if they are in the Early Career or NBC fellowships and if they indicated on the survey that they are a classroom teacher. Between spring and fall 2024, three additional respondents met these criteria, more than can be accounted for by the difference in response rates. We theorize that this is either related to how respondents answered the survey question about whether they were a classroom teacher or to changes in job responsibilities across school years.

Interview Data

Our team conducted in-person or virtual interviews with 30 Early Career and NBC fellows between March and May 2024. Table 2 describes participants’ gender, race, grade-band, years of experience, and district contexts. These fellows represent nine TeachMichigan partner districts.

Table 2. Overview of Participating Teachers (N = 30).				
Gender	Race / Ethnicity	Grade-Band	Years of Experience	District Context
Early Career Educator Fellows (n = 15)				
Female	White	High School	2	Suburban
Male	Native American	Middle School	8	Suburban
Female	White	Elementary School	1	Urban
Female	White	Elementary School	2	Urban
Female	Hispanic	High School	1	Urban
Female	White	Elementary School	4	Urban
Female	Black	Elementary School	4	Rural
Female	White	Elementary School	1	Rural
Female	Multiple Races	Elementary School	4	Urban
Female	White	Elementary School	2	Urban
Male	White	High School	4	Urban
Female	White	High School	3	Urban
Female	Asian/Pacific Islander	Elementary School	1	Town
Female	White	Elementary School	1	Rural
Female	White	Elementary School	18	Rural
National Board Certification Fellows (n = 15)				
Female	Black	Elementary School	10	Suburban
Female	White	High School	17	Suburban
Female	Undisclosed	Elementary School	13	Urban
Female	White	High School	20	Urban
Female	White	Middle School	9	Rural
Female	Black	Middle School	6	Rural
Female	Asian/Pacific Islander	High School	11	Urban
Female	Black	Elementary School	16	Urban
Male	White	Elementary School	8	Urban
Female	Black	High School	10	Urban
Female	White	High School	9	Urban
Female	White	Elementary School	25	Town
Male	White	Elementary School	13	Town
Male	White	High School	5	Rural
Female	White	Elementary School	5	Rural

Our analysis draws on both open-ended questions and interactive activities to facilitate participant reflection on their social and organizational contexts as well as

their learning experiences in TeachMichigan (see Appendix A for our interview protocol). Teacher interviews were conducted in person at teachers' schools (n = 21), at TeachMichigan events (n = 4), or over zoom (n = 5). All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Observation Data Collection

We conducted observations of the professional learning activities that TeachMichigan offered throughout the school year. This included two in-person convenings in the Detroit area in September and May, two Saturday workshops (in person for Detroit fellows and virtual for everyone else) in December and March, and some additional sessions that NBC fellows were required to attend. The convenings and workshops incorporated multiple types of professional learning opportunities, including whole-group sessions, choice-based sessions, and cohort-specific seminars meant to cover content specific to the different fellowship cohorts. Although we did not directly observe group or one-on-one coaching sessions, we did ask about fellows' coaching experiences in our interviews. To track learning in the cohort-specific sessions over time, one member of our research team was assigned to attend the sessions related to each cohort. For choice-based sessions, we each chose separate sessions to attend. In our observations, we took note of the content covered in each learning session as well as facilitation strategies, interactions among fellows, and evidence of learning. When possible, we also obtained copies of any materials provided during the learning activities. For this analysis we focused on the professional learning activities for Early Career and NBC fellows.

Survey Data Analysis

To identify broad trends related to our first two research questions regarding fellows' perceptions of professional learning activities, we focus our survey analyses on two sets of items that assessed fellows' professional learning experiences and appeared across both survey waves. The first set of items presented a list of various professional development activities and asked fellows to indicate which they had participated in over the previous school year outside of TeachMichigan. If fellows indicated that they had participated in any of these, they were asked to rate the extent to which that experience impacted their practice using a four-point scale that ranged from "no impact" to a "large impact." The fall 2023 survey asked fellows about their participation in professional development activities in "the last 12 months," corresponding to the school year before they joined TeachMichigan. The spring 2024 survey asked about participation in "the current school year," corresponding to the professional learning fellows received from providers other than TeachMichigan during their first year as a fellow.

The second set of items asked fellows to indicate their level of agreement with statements about the design and outcomes of the professional learning activities that they participated in. These include the extent to which their professional development

encouraged them to reflect on their practice; provided ways to work with colleagues to refine their practice; was differentiated to meet their individual needs; deepened their professional knowledge; and enhanced their ability to meet the needs of diverse learners. For comparison, the fall 2023 survey asked about professional development outside of TeachMichigan within the previous year, while the spring 2024 survey asked about fellows' experiences in TeachMichigan during that school year.

Interview Data Analysis

To supplement the survey findings for our first two research questions, we identified interview excerpts describing participants' prior professional development experiences and comparisons between TeachMichigan professional learning offerings and other professional development that they had experienced. We then reviewed all of the relevant excerpts and used analytic memos to track emergent themes across participants' experiences and identify similarities and differences across the Early Career and NBC cohorts.

To answer our third and fourth research questions, we developed analytic matrices to code information related to four key systems and track how those systems shaped fellows' learning and the application of their learning. We examined fellows' perceptions of the quality and design of TeachMichigan PD, fellows' personal contexts, fellows' perceptions of the sociocultural contexts within their schools, and fellows' perceptions of the organizational contexts within their schools. We then reviewed the results and identified salient themes both within and across each of these systems for Early Career and NBC fellows.

FINDINGS

TeachMichigan Versus Non-TeachMichigan Professional Development

NBC and Early Career fellows reported that the professional development they received through TeachMichigan was superior, both in design and outcomes, to the types of professional development that they typically experienced. Below we describe the types of professional development that fellows experienced outside of TeachMichigan and explore how their experiences compared across these learning opportunities and those provided by TeachMichigan.

Teachers' Previous Experiences With Professional Development Outside of TeachMichigan

To understand teachers' previous experiences with non-TeachMichigan professional development, we draw on items from the fall 2023, spring 2024, and fall 2024 fellow

surveys described above. This analysis uses NBC and Early Career fellows' responses to the following questions:

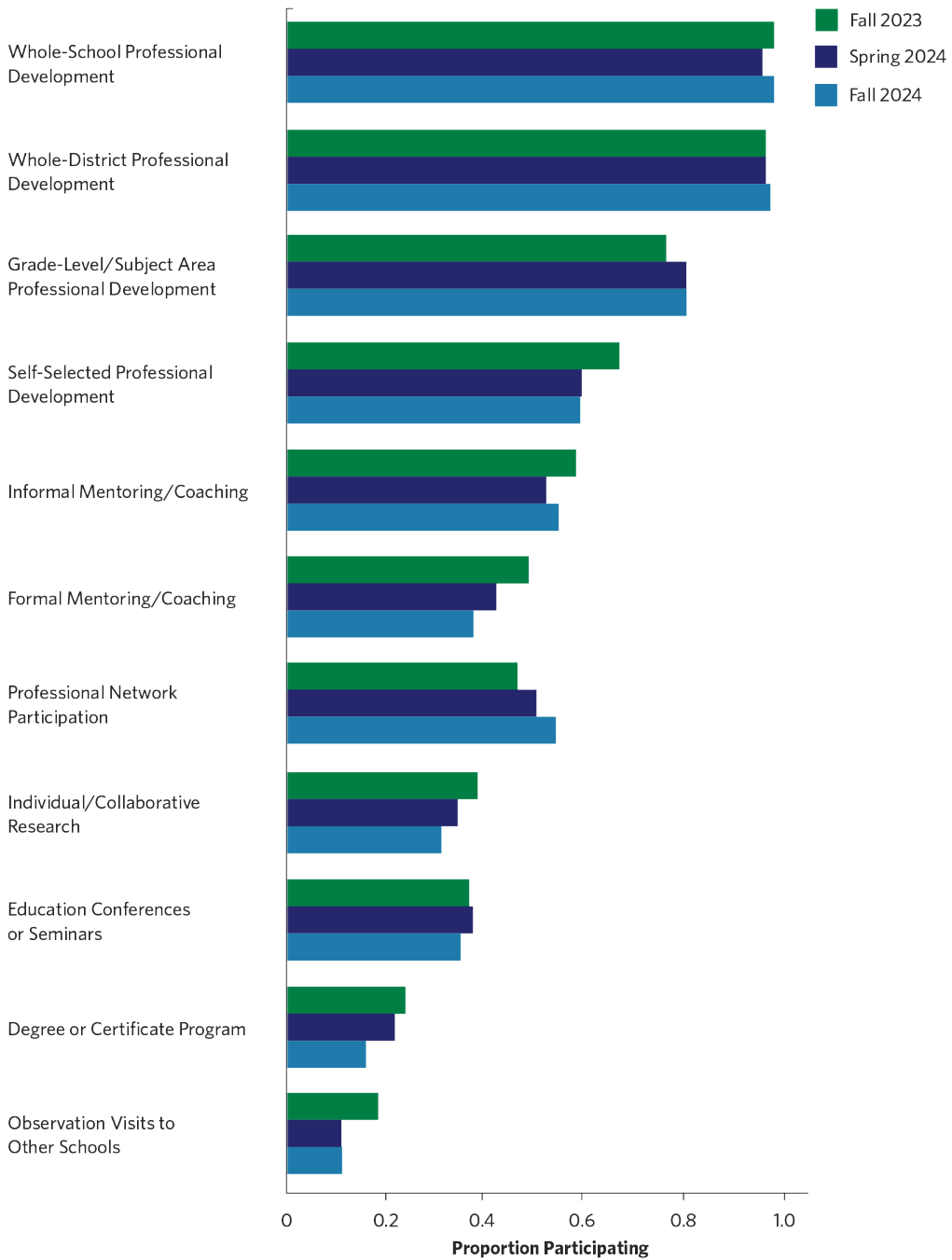
1. During the last 12 months, did you participate in any of the following kinds of professional development activities outside of TeachMichigan
2. What was the impact of these activities on your development as an educator?

To measure participation in professional development activities outside of TeachMichigan, we calculated the percentage of fellows who reported participating in each form of professional development (see Figure 2). To measure the impact fellows perceived those activities having on their development, we use the mean impact rating from the fellows who participated in that form of professional development (see Figure 3).

In Figure 2, responses to the fall 2023 survey, shown in green, indicate experiences with professional development in the year before fellows joined TeachMichigan. Responses to the spring 2024 survey, shown in dark blue, indicate experiences with non-TeachMichigan professional development during fellows' first year in TeachMichigan, and responses to the 2024 survey, shown in teal, indicate non-TeachMichigan professional development over the previous 12 months. There were minimal differences across these three time periods.

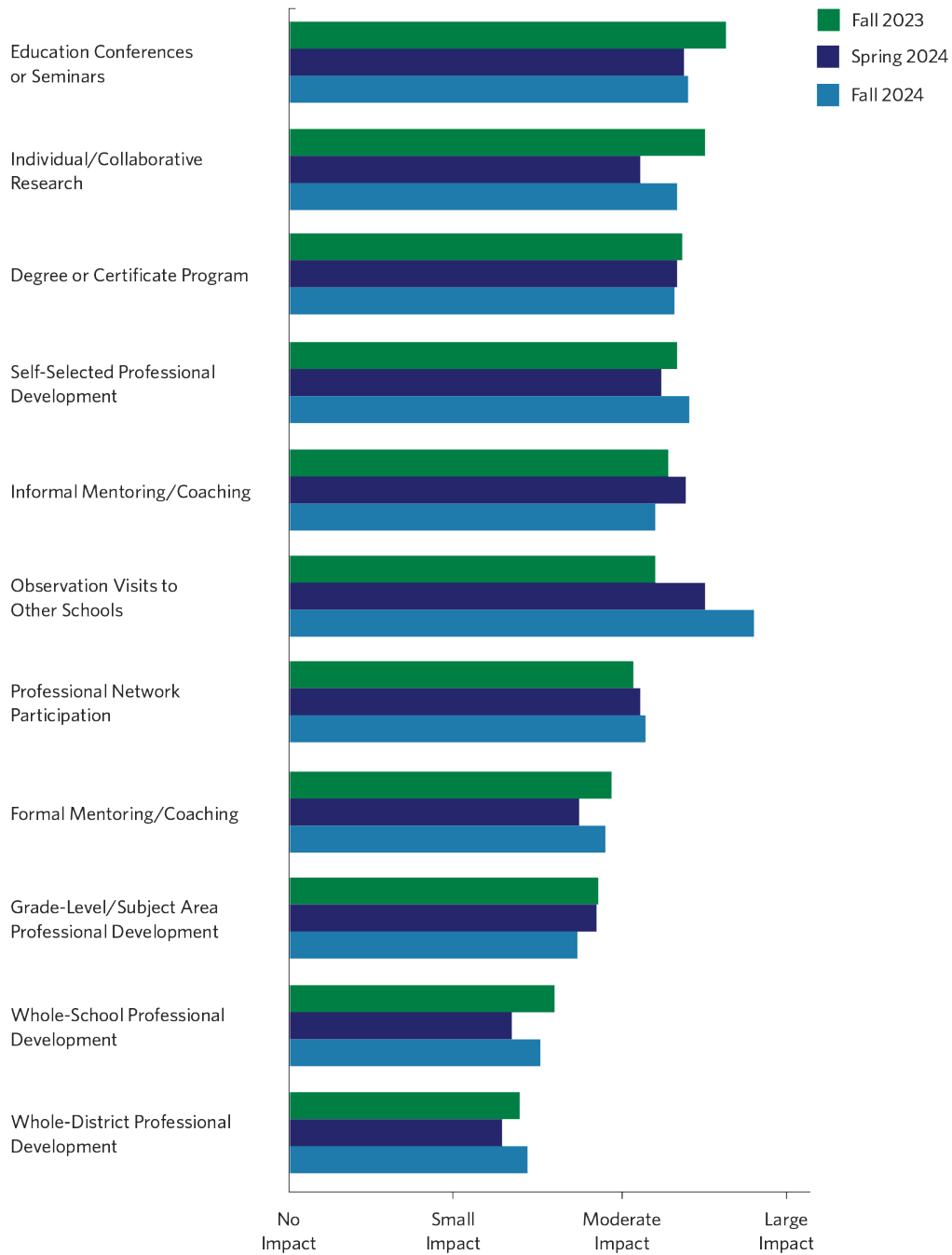
We found that nearly all fellows participated in whole-district and whole-school professional development. Most (about 80%) participated in grade-level or subject area professional development. The next most common forms of professional development were self-selected (67% in fall 2023, 60% in spring 2024, and 60% in fall 2024), informal mentoring or coaching (59%, 52%, 55%), formal mentoring or coaching (50%, 43%, 38%), and professional network participation (47%, 50%, 55%). Fellows were much less likely to participate in degree or certification programs, education conferences, research, or observation visits to other schools. We see in Figure 3 below, however, that fellows ranked some of these less common forms of professional development as much more impactful than the more ubiquitous whole-district, whole-school, grade-level, and content area professional development opportunities.

Figure 2. Non-TeachMichigan Professional Development Participation Rates



Note: Analyses include only fellows who started in fall 2023 and who identified as teachers. Fall surveys asked about the 'last 12 months' while spring survey asked about the 'current school year.'

Figure 3. Perceived Impact of Different Forms of Non-TeachMichigan Professional Learning on Teachers' Development as an Educator



Note: Analyses include only fellows who started in fall 2023 and who identified as teachers. Fall surveys asked about the 'last 12 months' while spring survey asked about the 'current school year.' Results are presented as means of a four-point Likert scale from 0 ("no impact") to 3 ("large impact").

As shown in Figure 3, the types of professional development that had the least impact on educators were whole-district professional development and whole-school

professional development. Both were ranked as having, on average, a small to moderate impact. This is important because, while fellows perceive this to be the least impactful type of professional development, they also report that it is also the most common. The types of professional development that educators perceived to be most impactful on their development were research, education conferences, informal coaching or mentoring, observation visits to other schools, degree or certification programs, and professional network participation. These were all ranked, on average, as having a moderate to more than moderate impact. Here we see that the most common forms of educator professional development tend to be the least impactful and the least common the most impactful.

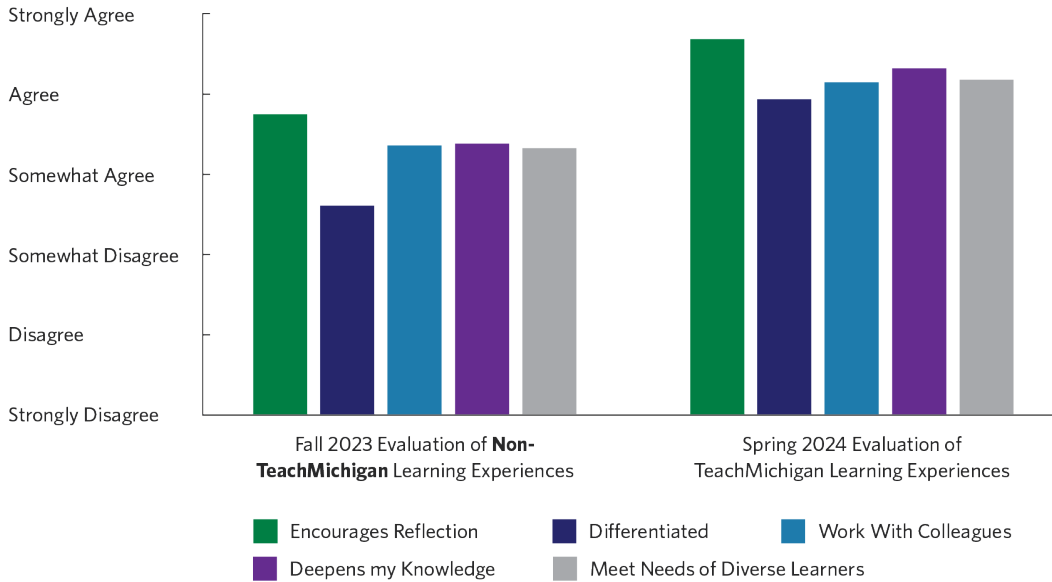
From our observations, we noted that the learning activities in TeachMichigan more closely resembled self-selected professional development, education conferences and seminars, formal coaching and mentoring, and observations of other classrooms. This suggests that the types of learning fellows experience in TeachMichigan may more closely align with the types of learning that they rank as most impactful on their development as educators.

Teachers' Perceptions of the Design and Quality of TeachMichigan Professional Development

To further explore how professional development from TeachMichigan compared to other types of professional development that fellows experienced, we looked at a survey item asking fellows to rate the extent to which non-TeachMichigan (fall 2023 survey) and TeachMichigan (spring 2024 survey) professional development met different characteristics. We compared the mean agreement ratings from fall 2023 to spring 2024 to determine whether and the extent to which the professional development fellows received through TeachMichigan was perceived to be superior to what they received from other providers.

The green, dark blue, and teal bars in Figure 4 illustrates the extent to which fellows perceived that professional development they experienced during each year encouraged them to reflect on their practice, was differentiated to meet their individual needs, and provided ways to work with colleagues to refine their practice – design characteristics that research shows are effective for professional learning (Wei, et al., 2009). As shown in Figure 4, fellows perceived that TeachMichigan professional development was better designed than the types of professional development they experienced outside of TeachMichigan. Fellows indicated that TeachMichigan professional development was superior across all three design characteristics.

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



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

The purple and gray bars in Figure 4 show the extent to which fellows perceived that professional development across the two years deepened their professional knowledge and enhanced their ability to meet the needs of diverse learners. This figure reveals that fellows perceived that TeachMichigan professional development yielded better learning outcomes for them than professional development they experienced outside of TeachMichigan. TeachMichigan professional learning was more likely to deepen their knowledge and more likely to enhance their ability to meet the needs of diverse learners.

Fellows’ Descriptions of TeachMichigan Versus Non-TeachMichigan Professional Development

Findings from the survey data were echoed in our interview data. Fellows typically described the professional development they experienced before TeachMichigan in negative terms. When asked how TeachMichigan compared, nearly all fellows reported that their learning experiences in TeachMichigan were better than what they typically experienced.

One fellow described her school professional development as “pointless, arbitrary, and insignificant.” Others used words like “repetitive,” “boring,” “surface level,” and “frustrating” to describe their professional development experiences. A fellow who is

a special education teacher reported that it often felt like the content of school or district professional development did not apply to her. Describing the professional development at her school, a fellow commented:

The [non-TeachMichigan professional development] that I have been to, it's been like, okay, we're going to go through this slideshow and you're not really interacting or doing activities, you're just going through curriculum or whatever pamphlet they've provided and listening to someone talk the whole time, which can get very just boring.

Another fellow described going to school or district professional development as “another day of listening and sitting through.” Fellows’ frustration with the professional development they had experienced stemmed not only from the content, but also from the attitudes of their colleagues. Multiple fellows described teachers’ attitudes in these settings as very negative. While some fellows did speak positively of their school or district professional development, they also expressed that TeachMichigan offered learning that went above and beyond what they were accustomed to.

When describing TeachMichigan’s professional development, fellows were much more positive. One fellow described it as “the best PD I’ve ever had” and another exclaimed “I would say it’s a million times better than any other PD that I have been to.” Others emphasized that their learning in TeachMichigan felt much more applicable to their work than what they would get out of other professional development opportunities. Multiple fellows reported that TeachMichigan exposed them to learning that they would not typically get from their school or district. As one fellow put it, “You leave [TeachMichigan] feeling very confident that you have things to put in place right away. It’s a good time. And I’ve learned things that I don’t think my district would ever provide in PD as well.”

As noted throughout this section, our survey and interview data revealed that fellows in the Early Career and NBC fellowships perceived that the design and quality of TeachMichigan professional learning experiences were excellent and aligned with the types of learning experiences that they most valued for their development.

How the Design and Quality of TeachMichigan Activities Shaped Fellows’ Learning

We identified multiple ways in which the format of TeachMichigan’s learning activities shaped fellows’ learning and impacted their instructional practice. For NBC fellows, learning was driven by the self-reflection required for the NBC process, but the support provided by TeachMichigan coaches and peers enhanced their learning. For Early Career fellows, learning was driven by the structure of the coaching group video clubs and content highlighted in cohort-specific seminars. In both cases, specific

aspects of the design and quality of the learning activities shaped whether, what, and how fellows learned from TeachMichigan.

NBC Fellows

All 15 NBC fellows that we interviewed reported that working through the NBC application process pushed them to improve. The task of recording themselves teaching and analyzing their instruction against NBC standards led them to reflect on their practice. One fellow explained that the process “causes you to evolve.” Fellows described watching recordings of themselves and asking why they made certain choices, whether they were meeting all their students’ needs, and how to better meet students’ needs. Many described concrete changes that they made to their practice as a result of this process, including

- Improved formative assessments and
- Improved how they give directions
- Increased use of “talk moves” and strategies for academic conversations
- Deepened lessons they had previously designed
- Improved scaffolding strategies
- Improved student collaboration through clearer instructions, minimizing unproductive collaboration time, and providing better supports for special education students

The NBC process itself drove the learning process for these fellows and motivated them to apply that learning in their classrooms. A fellow explained, “That [NBC] 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.” The reflective process described here is a feature of the NBC application. The purpose of the NBC TeachMichigan fellowship is to support this process. To do so, TeachMichigan provides fellows with coaches, peer groups, and professional development.

Fellows felt their learning was best supplemented by their interactions with their coaches and peers. The professional learning opportunities in NBC seminars focused on unpacking the NBC process and helping fellows with technical skills like writing, while coaches and peers acted as sounding boards, providing feedback and examples for fellows. Fellows described their coaches as knowledgeable, experienced, available, and quick to respond with feedback. One fellow explained that the small tweaks suggested by her coach helped her to make changes that took her from being a “good teacher to a great teacher.” She explained that she gets “so much more” out of feedback than she would from any standard professional development. Others explained that their coach’s feedback pushed them to reflect more deeply on some

aspects of their practice. Another fellow reported that she learned tips and strategies from her coach and peers that helped her to improve student thinking and dialogue in her classroom: “the more you’re exposed to,” she explained, “the more you can adopt.” Multiple fellows described actively networking with the fellows in their NBC groups, watching each other’s videos, sharing strategies, and brainstorming improvements together.

Fellows’ learning in this cohort was driven and shaped by the self-reflection inherent to the NBC process itself, but the support that they received from their coaches and peers allowed them to deepen and expand that learning. One fellow described the support from TeachMichigan as critical to the process: “I can’t imagine trying to go through the NBC by myself outside of this fellowship... I definitely wouldn’t be able to do this, so it’s definitely good to have that support.”

Early Career Fellows

Among Early Career fellows, learning was driven primarily by the video clubs. Fellows recorded themselves teaching, then shared their videos with their coaching group for feedback. Their peers shared “wonders,” or questions about why the fellow in the video made certain decisions, and “observations” of things the fellow did well. Ten of the 15 Early Career fellows that we spoke with reported that the video clubs were particularly helpful. Multiple fellows spoke to the quality of the activity, describing a safe space and an effective protocol. Fellows described the space as positive, affirming, and uplifting, and they noted that the clubs highlighted the sense of validation that they got from seeing other fellows’ classrooms.

Both receiving feedback and watching others’ videos gave fellows new ideas and strategies that they could immediately implement to improve student learning. One fellow explained: “I think the feedback has been useful. It’s not like other professional developments that they’re very unrealistic. Everything that they tell me to do is very doable.”

While the coaches facilitated the protocol, it seemed to be the interactions with their peers that generated the most new learning for these fellows. One fellow described the relationship with their coaching group peers as collective problem solving:

It’s been really nice being with other people who are inspired and want to problem solve and will give you suggestions.... Even talking about our problems and feeling some connectedness and then also trying to get at what could be the root and how might we combat that has been very insightful.

Another particularly impactful feature of TeachMichigan’s learning activities for Early Career fellows was the cohort-specific seminars. Early Career fellows from early elementary to high school and across content areas described the topics and

strategies covered in these professional learning sessions as applicable to their practice. One fellow excitedly explained that she left these sessions with something concrete to implement in her classroom. Multiple fellows reported actively adjusting their instruction to incorporate strategies covered in the seminars. They explained that these strategies helped them:

- Elicit more student thinking through carefully designed questions
- Incorporate more student roles to facilitate a student-led classroom
- Build stronger relationships with students
- More effectively gauge students' feelings and mental health

Early Career fellows reported that they learned the most when discussing concrete, realistic, and relevant strategies to improve their practice. Both the video clubs and the intentionally curated seminar topics facilitated this learning. The video clubs in particular provided a communal space in which fellows felt validated in their struggles while simultaneously working collectively to identify and share strong and immediately applicable instructional strategies.

Detractors from Learning

Multiple fellows reported that issues around communication and organization were, at times, barriers to learning. Confusion around deadlines, schedules, where information was kept, and what needed to be completed left some fellows feeling confused, overwhelmed, frustrated, and behind. One fellow explained that a breakout session during one of their virtual seminars was unproductive because all of the participants had a different idea about what the pre-work entailed. He described it as a missed opportunity to give and receive feedback. Improvements in communication and organization related to TeachMichigan's learning activities would likely increase how much fellows were able to learn.

How Fellows' Personal Systems Shaped Their Learning in TeachMichigan

When describing their learning experiences in TeachMichigan, many fellows revealed ways in which their personal systems—their perspectives, interests, values, needs, and expectations—shaped whether, what, and how they learned and applied their learning. We identified two salient themes: fellows' learning was shaped by (a) their personal orientation to learning and personal development, and (b) how their values aligned with TeachMichigan's.

Personal Orientation: NBC Fellows

All of the NBC fellows and several of the Early Career fellows talked about a personal orientation to learning that positioned them to get a lot out of an experience like

TeachMichigan. Among the NBC fellows, the two salient orientations to learning were (a) a consistent desire to grow and be challenged, and (b) a desire for recognition and career advancement. Among the Early Career fellows, the three salient orientations were (a) an interest in continuing to learn and grow, (b) a desire to be a good teacher for their students, and (c) a desire to address and alleviate the feeling of not being good enough. These personal orientations drove fellows to want to learn, want to be successful, and want to improve, which in turn shaped how they interacted with the learning opportunities they were offered through TeachMichigan.

Eight of the 15 NBC fellows described themselves as wanting to grow and be challenged. For example, one fellow explained that she is someone who wants to constantly grow and that she chose to do NBC for the challenge it posed. Another fellow echoed this sentiment, explaining, “It’s been enlightening, it’s been demanding, which is fabulous.... I think you don’t grow unless you’re challenged.” In a similar vein, three other NBC fellows described feeling stagnant or stuck in their careers and looking to TeachMichigan for a challenge that would help them to continue growing in their practice. One of them explained that she chose to join the TeachMichigan NBC cohort because it provided “a different way of evolving as a teacher.” Finally, three fellows focused on the idea of consistently seeking out opportunities for improvement. One described herself as wanting to constantly learn and be the best that she can be. Another already had two master’s degrees and referred to herself as a “life-long learner” who thinks it is critical to grow and improve every year. For these eight fellows, TeachMichigan and National Board Certification provided an opportunity to challenge themselves to grow and improve their practice. This personal orientation helped to motivate their learning and their commitment to the work.

Eight of the 15 NBC fellows also talked about feeling motivated by the recognition and esteem of National Board Certification and what that could do for their career. One fellow described NBC as the “gold star” of teaching. Another admitted, “I like the distinguishment of having the National Board Certification. I think that that’s always kind of a nice thing... I’m weirdly competitive like that I guess.” Similarly, another fellow described being motivated by a sense of competitiveness and desire to be the best that she could be:

I am very competitive, so I always want to be the best person I can be in front of my kids. And for me, that was it. I have a doctorate coming up, I’ll have that. And so there’s nothing else I can do. And when that door closes, I’m sure I’ll find something else to do, but that was to me really important. Otherwise, and I’m going to be frank about it, I would’ve went to one of the other fellowships because they’re much easier.

Five fellows emphasized that obtaining National Board Certification would be a strong resumé builder and helpful for moving their careers forward. One fellow thought it might open up doors to becoming an NBC coach while another hoped it would help

him move into a role in curriculum development and instructional coaching. The others described National Board Certification as the next logical step in their careers as teachers. One fellow explained, "I knew that I needed to do something, and I think this is kind of the next step for me in my career." These eight fellows' engagement with TeachMichigan and the NBC process was driven in part by a competitive desire to succeed or a desire to move their career forward.

Personal Orientation: Early Career Fellows

Among the 15 Early Career fellows that we spoke to, five expressed an interest in learning and growing, four described feeling motivated by wanting to be a good teacher for their students, and five hoped to alleviate the feeling of not being good enough at their jobs. For this group of fellows, the motivation to pursue and learn from TeachMichigan was not about career advancement or competition but about wanting to feel like capable educators.

Five Early Career fellows described themselves as enjoying the process of learning new things and feeling driven to improve their skills. One fellow explained that "as teachers, you still want to always be growing and learning more." Another fellow was drawn to TeachMichigan because she did not feel like her school was interested in pushing teachers to improve. For these fellows, the process of learning and connecting over new ideas is fulfilling. As one fellow explained:

I really like reflecting on my practice and talking about it with other people and having new ideas for how to implement different things that I want to do in the classroom, and I feel like it's a platform for that for rejuvenation. It makes me feel energized to get new ideas and to try new things and also to talk with other people who are interested in that as well.

These Early Career fellows' experiences learning in TeachMichigan were likely influenced by their own love of learning, motivating them to engage with the material and activities. As one fellow cautioned, "I think if you don't like learning, you might not like it as much."

Another group of Early Career fellows were driven by a desire to be good teachers for their students. These fellows, like those above, were eager to improve, but rather than expressing a love of the learning process itself, they focused their desire for improvement on a drive to better serve their students. One fellow explained, "I think I am always looking for that feedback to be better as a teacher." Another described how she talked to her students about her work, modeling a motivation to improve:

I always tell my students, I'm like, I'm going to go be a student and become a better teacher, so this is why I have to leave early or this is why I'm going to do this. And I definitely applied [to TeachMichigan]. I'm like, okay, this is going to make me a better teacher for my students.

In our conversations with these fellows, it was clear that their students' experiences were central to their own motivations to learn. Explaining why he chose to participate in TeachMichigan, one fellow said:

There's work for me to do here. I know that my role is still as a teacher to learn from my students, share with them what I've learned and experienced... I'm here to help students become more compassionate global citizens.

This fellow's students mattered a lot to him, and he wanted to do what he could to improve their experiences. Like the other fellows in this group, a desire to be better teachers for their students drove them to engage in the learning opportunities in TeachMichigan.

In a different vein, several of the Early Career fellows reported feeling insecure or doubting themselves as teachers and looking to TeachMichigan as a way to possibly alleviate some of that self-doubt. Many of these fellows shared that their learning in TeachMichigan helped them to feel better about their capabilities as teachers. For one fellow, she felt insecure next to the more veteran teachers in her school. TeachMichigan's Early Career cohort provided a "safe space" for her to learn with and from teachers with similar levels of experience. In this group, she said, she was able to find her courage. For these fellows, the positive feedback they got from coaches and peers had increased their confidence. Talking about her experiences in TeachMichigan, one fellow explained:

I was going through a lot of self-doubt, doubt about how effective I was being as a teacher, and so it's put those voices away out of my head quite a bit, so I feel more confident and that's important.

Similarly, another fellow confessed that the feedback she has gotten in TeachMichigan has done more to increase her confidence than words of encouragement from colleagues in her school:

I have a very low vision of myself sometimes and being with outsiders—because obviously my peers here [in my school] love, they love me, so they're going to tell me I'm a good teacher—but it actually has, working with others and getting their feedback and seeing it, has increased my confidence in myself as well, where I know I'm a good teacher.

For these fellows, their insecurities about their teaching drove them to seek out a safe space for learning and improvement in TeachMichigan. For many, the design and quality of the learning experiences helped to transform their vision of themselves as teachers.

Alignment of Personal Values With TeachMichigan's Mission

Another element of fellows' personal systems that influenced their learning was the degree to which their values aligned with TeachMichigan's values and mission. These fellows felt that TeachMichigan's focus and goals, expressed through both their stated values and the content of their learning activities, mirrored their own values. This motivated fellows to more meaningfully engage in learning.

Multiple fellows commented on the alignment between their own values and TeachMichigan's as a motivation for participating in the fellowship. One Early Career fellow saw TeachMichigan as an opportunity to reflect on her own bias as a White woman teaching students of color and to learn how to more effectively put equity work into practice in her classroom. An NBC fellow expressed that he did not have training in teaching diverse populations and was hoping to learn how to better serve his students. Multiple fellows talked about the importance of getting higher quality teachers into low-income communities and recognizing the impact of systemic racism on students. They felt that TeachMichigan's mission demonstrated a commitment to these issues.

One Early Career fellow described herself as passionate about social justice and trying to make a difference. As a former TFA corps member, she had started to question some of TFA's practices but felt that TeachMichigan demonstrated a shift in the organization's values:

I started to notice some things that didn't sit well with me when it comes to TFA. Like, the further I got in, the more I realized, oh, we're taking inexperienced teachers and putting them in the most difficult places and the most high need areas. And that just doesn't seem, especially because a lot of the teachers we're getting are White and we were putting them in front of Black and Brown students, I didn't see that as something that was always in the best interests of the students.... It made me frustrated with the system. But when I came up to TeachMichigan, I was invited on a recruiting trip to come up and see what TeachMichigan and TFA Detroit is all about. And I was able to learn that all of those issues that I had with TFA as an institution and within my region were things that here they were attacking head on, that they were working to change those and say like, yes, we see that this is a problem and here's what we're doing to mitigate that.

This fellow had some frustrations with TFA but had valued her experience as a corps member, so she was eager to be a part of a TFA program that more closely aligned with her own values.

Many fellows were excited to see their values and issues that they cared about reflected in multiple TeachMichigan learning activities. For example, an NBC fellow interested in bringing equitable practices into his rural school explained:

The last [convening] we did this spring, I did the LGBT and trying to limit hate speech and things like that [choice session]. So that was really quality, especially being in a rural school like this. I feel like in grad school at U of M, we focused a lot on our urban cities. We didn't talk a lot about the majority of the schools that are rural and largely homogenous, at least at surface level, and how to address those really tough conversations up here. And I did get that from this TFA thing, which is really cool.

This same fellow attended the choice session on equitable gifted and talented programs at the fall TeachMichigan convening and brought that learning back to his school:

We've got a committee going forward with some major changes to our honor system and a lot of that was precipitated because of that fall thing that we did and I was able to bring back to our leadership board as the department head and say, "Hey, I want to change this and this about how we do AP and honors."

Seeing their values reflected in the learning opportunities in TeachMichigan illustrated alignment between teacher's personal systems and the learning activity system, which motivated these fellows to engage more deeply and look for ways to meaningfully apply their learning.

Detractors From Learning

There were a couple aspects of fellows' personal systems that made learning in TeachMichigan more challenging. Multiple NBC fellows talked about balancing family and personal time with the demands of TeachMichigan. One fellow expressed that she hoped TeachMichigan would think more carefully about fellows' "family and life responsibilities" when planning and communicating around learning activities, schedules, and deadlines. Two other fellows talked about the challenges posed by the NBC early release days, which were often hard to navigate with young kids at home. The struggle, they explained, was both in the timing—getting home later—and the structure of missing class time, as having young kids often results in teachers' missing more days of school already.

Among Early Career fellows, there were a few who expressed a desire for more in-person observation in their classroom. These fellows looking for higher levels of support also tended to work in schools where support from administration was lacking. We talk more about this in the Organizational Systems section below.

How Fellows' Sociocultural Contexts Shaped Their Learning in TeachMichigan

Across the fellows we interviewed, it was apparent that they were all applying practices and insights they had learned from TeachMichigan in their own classrooms, and they felt that doing so was improving their teaching. Seemingly because their districts had opted to participate in TeachMichigan, we did not find any fellows who experienced organizational push-back for the types of changes they wanted to make in their teaching. For everyone we spoke with, they were free to adjust their classroom teaching to align with the values and strategies espoused by TeachMichigan or the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. For example, one Early Career fellow shared that TeachMichigan had given them “more ideas about how to move my practice forward, better ideas about how to elicit student thinking and how to make curriculum integrate.” This fellow also noted, “There are things I've done because of TeachMichigan that have led to greater student success.” An NBC fellow noted a “huge difference” in student engagement due to changes she made after analyzing her teaching videos. She reflected, “I realized I needed more prompts and cues and timers and little things to increase their engagement, so they weren't struggling to get started.” In every instance, teachers conveyed that they had full autonomy and agency to change their teaching within their classrooms to reflect their learning from TeachMichigan, and all teachers described doing this in ways that were beneficial to their students.

Outside of their classrooms, however, fellows had to contend with the sociocultural context of their schools and districts. That is, they had to work, learn, and apply their learning within the types of interpersonal relationships and cultural norms that were dominant in their schools. We found that four facets of the sociocultural contexts of teachers' schools influenced their learning: (a) whether or not fellows had opportunities to learn and work alongside other TeachMichigan fellows in their schools; (b) whether they had positive or negative relationships with their teaching colleagues in their schools; (c) whether they were able to collaborate with other TeachMichigan fellows in their schools and districts to apply their learning toward broader change; and (d) school-based perceptions of their local sociocultural contexts.

Learning and Working With Other Fellows in Their Schools

TeachMichigan fellows who worked in schools with other fellows, particularly fellows in the same cohort, often collaborated to discuss TeachMichigan assignments and apply their learning in their classrooms. Seven fellows mentioned this explicitly in their interviews. One Early Career fellow shared that she and the other third-grade teacher in her school were both in the fellowship and that “because she's getting the same experience, it's improved what we do together.” An NBC fellow commented, “One of my coworkers is going through the process with me. So, to have someone in the school I can kind of bounce ideas off of has been beneficial.” For teachers

working alongside other TeachMichigan fellows, this daily proximity to other fellows has supported fellows' learning by providing opportunities for discussion and collaboration related to TeachMichigan learning.

Sharing Learning With Other Teaching Colleagues in Positive School Environments

Of the 30 fellows interviewed, we encountered eight fellows who mentioned sharing new teaching practices or strategies with non-fellow colleagues in their schools. Six fellows talked about having already done this, and an additional two mentioned wanting to share their learning with colleagues at their school. Importantly, we found that all six fellows who had shared their learning with colleagues also reported working in schools in which teachers had positive relationships with one another. For example, one NBC fellow recounted working on integrating student talk moves into his instruction and then sharing that strategy with colleagues in the next grade level. He commented:

I've shared that work with other teachers in the building, and it looks like we possibly are going to try to expand it to have some vertical alignment, so kids are using the same talk moves next year that they've learned in my room.

At another point in his interview, this same fellow described his school as "really a great place to work" with "a lot of support from our principal and from colleagues" where "everybody knows that you could go to anyone to ask for anything." This pattern of a positive sociocultural context held for every fellow who reported sharing their learning from TeachMichigan.

By contrast, we did not have a single fellow who reported sharing their learning from TeachMichigan in a school in which they reported a negative school climate or negative relationships with colleagues. For example, one Early Career fellow shared:

I wanted to leave after my first year. I was this close to leaving. I'm surprised I didn't because it was just, I mean, I would go home crying. I would have panic attacks at night because I would be worried about going back in and having just a nightmare again because nobody really had the time or resources to help me at all.

Another Early Career fellow also commented on wanting to leave their school, noting:

I just can't get what I want from my current school culture.... There are certain individuals that are just so negative and jaded that they really take away from the entire school community." Fellows who described these types of working conditions did not report sharing their learning with colleagues.

Among the two fellows who reported having *thought about* sharing but had not shared their learning with colleagues, they also reported negative school climates. For example, one fellow shared that they wanted to “contribute to turning the school around in a really meaningful way” and that they applied to TeachMichigan to learn new things that they could “bring back” so that “the whole building can absorb it and try it instead of just me.” However, this same fellow described their school as having “not a lot of administrative support” and “vacant positions all the time” due to “disrespect,” “unsafe behavior,” “the meanness of some of these kids,” and “the level of fighting that goes on.”

Working within a school culture that did not support teacher sharing seemed to inhibit fellows’ ability to apply their TeachMichigan learning beyond their own classroom, even when they wanted to do so. These findings that teachers shared their learning exclusively in positive school climates and were left wanting to share in negative climates reveal that positive collegial interactions and a positive school climate are fundamental for fellows to apply their learning from TeachMichigan outside of their own classrooms.

Interestingly, TeachMichigan helped some fellows formulate more positive relationships with teaching colleagues, thereby creating conditions in which they felt ready and able to share their learning. Some fellows described having more and stronger relationships in their schools and districts *because* they had gotten to know local colleagues who were also TeachMichigan fellows while traveling to and attending TeachMichigan events or through discussing TeachMichigan content or tasks at work. For example, one Early Career fellow shared:

There are other educators from my school who are a part of [TeachMichigan,] and I feel closer to them as a result of traveling with them and also talking with them. So I feel more a part of my school community as a teacher, which I think makes an impact for my longevity as a teacher and liking to come to work and stuff, to have people who I feel like care about me.

Later in the interview, this fellow asserted that TeachMichigan “gives me a bit more confidence as an educator, which I think helps me with being a part of more things in the school.” As a result, this fellow reported sharing with other teachers “ideas about preparing kids to think critically” that came “from TeachMichigan and our focus on eliciting student thinking.”

Other fellows also reported being more vocal and collaborative with colleagues due to an increased sense that they had valuable contributions to make to their school, either because they felt more confident about their teaching skills as a result of their learning or because they felt more informed about educational issues and improvement strategies through TeachMichigan. For example, one Early Career fellow recounted:

I'm feeling a little bit more confident in what I have to contribute, even though I am still sort of a newer team member. Now that I've sort of been exposed to the professionalism of TeachMichigan and some of the various ways that people from other districts are doing things, I can offer in some ways a unique perspective.

This fellow's changed sense of herself as a professional and her enhanced knowledge enabled her to participate more in collegial conversations at her school and take those opportunities to share her learning from TeachMichigan.

Collaborating With Other TeachMichigan Fellows to Seek Broader Change

A few fellows described collaborating with other TeachMichigan fellows to envision, plan, or implement ideas or initiatives grounded in their learning from TeachMichigan. For example, one fellow described attending a choice session at a TeachMichigan EmpowerED Weekend with colleagues from her district. She recounted a discussion about a handout from the session:

It was like a guide for how to have a conversation with a parent. And then we were like, 'Holy Moly, this is awesome!' We should maybe apply for the [innovation] grant and put together a whole binder of 'here's how people in [our district] do it' or what we would want, a survival guide basically. We've definitely got that on the brain at the moment.

Through collegial conversations like the one this fellow described, teachers worked with other fellows to examine potential local applications for their learning through TeachMichigan. In some cases, the extent of the collaboration was simply a conversation about what might be able to be done.

Other collaborations for a broader impact went further, particularly when teachers were able to get support from TeachMichigan through innovation grants. In one instance, a fellow recounted working with two other fellows and another colleague in their school to propose and win an innovation grant focused on project-based learning through end-of-the-year projects throughout their elementary school. The grant included funding to provide teacher training around project-based learning, materials for projects, and an open house event to share the learning with families and the community. This fellow commented, "I don't know if it would've ever happened without TeachMichigan," which she cites as having provided her with confidence through her video club's feedback on her teaching.

As was the case for teachers sharing their learning with non-fellow colleagues, teachers who reported working with other fellows for broader change also reported working in schools where they had positive relationships with colleagues. For example, the fellow quoted above who talked about creating a survival guide also reported that teachers in her school regularly went to the gym together, went out for drinks in the

evening together, and that “relationships among the staff have been really great.” The fellow who described the innovation grant was less effusive about her relationships with colleagues, mentioning five times that she felt like she was “in a silo as the only special ed teacher in this building.” Just the same, she described an overall “friendly” atmosphere in her school and expressed optimism that the project-based learning work would “help pull me into the community, pull me into working with the teachers.” In this regard, this fellow saw seeking broader change through her application of TeachMichigan learning in her school as a way to improve her relationships with her colleagues. In both these instances, the sociocultural element of either having or seeking positive, collaborative relationships among colleagues influenced whether and how fellows were able to identify opportunities to apply their learning from TeachMichigan to create change outside of their classrooms.

As an illustrative counterexample, we also interviewed a teacher who had hoped to have opportunities to influence broader change in their district but were disappointed that such opportunities had not materialized, seemingly in part because of a negative administrative climate in their buildings. This NBC fellow recounted:

One thing that I thought I was going to get that I did not was more opportunity to implement systemic change here. That was one of those things that I think both the National Board but also the other TeachMichigan programs like our sitting leaders and things like that, I thought we might be able to meet with our superintendent once a month and have some good conversations about some of the things we'd like to change in the building and that's never happened.

This fellow also shared that there had recently been a high level of turnover in administration and noted, “The administrators don’t talk to each other. They were kind of bickering for a while.... It’s been very chaotic.... There’s no support.” He concluded, “I don’t know any teachers that are not in TeachMichigan that are not looking at jobs elsewhere right now.” At the same time, however, this fellow reported positive relationships among teachers in his school that were “super supportive.” He shared, “Our staff is super tight knit. That has been super, super helpful. So, we are all very collaborative.” He added, “Even though there really is no room for us to meet during school hours or paid hours to do that, we were all finding ways to collaborate and talk to each other and build each other up.” In this instance, it is noteworthy that this fellow perceived positive teacher relationships amidst “chaos” among administrators. As such, it appeared to be the negative sociocultural dynamics among the administration that prevented this fellow from seeing opportunities to create broader change. In this case, the barrier to applying learning for broader change was not related to relationships among teachers.

Perceptions of Local Context Influenced Attitudes Toward TeachMichigan Content

Another facet of the school sociocultural context that influenced teacher learning through TeachMichigan was teachers' perceptions of how educators within the school related to local families and communities, including what educators saw as the perceived strengths and needs of the families and community they served. Within this dimension, we found that some fellows were resistant to learning about concepts that they perceived did not align with their local context. One fellow commented that the origins of some TeachMichigan professional learning activities run by Teach for American Detroit seemed to be "very culturally different than us." She explained, "There's some lessons and some things that don't quite fit with our dynamic. We have a lot of Native American students. We're a very small town. Some of the urban problems don't quite fit." Such assessment of the relevance of learning activities, however, varied by the teachers' personal perspective. Another fellow working in the same community saw things differently. She described one "amazing" TeachMichigan choice session in which teachers from a Detroit school described an initiative in which they got community members to donate money to students' lunch accounts. She reflected, "I don't know if those steps would work here, totally different environment, a little different. But just the thought of being able to do those kinds of things." This fellow perceived alignment between students' needs in Detroit and in her high-poverty rural community, and she saw possibilities for how educators in her school could connect with the community. She acted on the inspiration from the Detroit school, applying for and receiving a grant she learned about from other TeachMichigan fellows to fund a pollinator garden at her elementary school. This example illustrates how teachers' perceptions of alignment across contexts shaped their reactions to and uptake of new ideas from TeachMichigan.

Across the four sociocultural factors discussed here, we found that fellows were better able to apply their learning outside of their classrooms when working with other TeachMichigan fellows, when they had positive relationships with their teaching colleagues, when they were able to collaborate with other TeachMichigan fellows to seek broader change, and when they saw TeachMichigan professional learning activities as aligned with their local school context. In the examples shared here, we illustrate how the embedded systems of teachers' schools and the TeachMichigan programming interacted to support teachers' learning and application of learning. While we have focused in this section on the sociocultural dimensions of fellows' schools – the nature of relationships and school culture – more technical aspects of their schools as organizations were also relevant to their learning through TeachMichigan.

How Fellows' Organizational Contexts Shaped Their Learning in TeachMichigan

In discussing their impressions of the learning opportunities through TeachMichigan, many fellows contrasted TeachMichigan's offerings with organizational elements of their schools and districts. Themes emerged in two primary areas: (a) in-school support for teachers and (b) district-offered professional development. Our findings reveal that teachers' perceptions of these two organizational conditions influenced their expectations for TeachMichigan and their response to TeachMichigan learning experiences, both of which played a role in whether, what, and how they learned from TeachMichigan.

Perceptions of Support

Across our 30 interviews with Early Career and NBC fellows, nine fellows explicitly mentioned that their schools and districts did not provide adequate support for teachers. As relatively new teachers, Early Career fellows were most critical of this lack of support because of their perceived need that this support would help them. One Early Career fellow commented on her district,

It's a hard district to work in. There's not a lot of resources. There's not a lot of help. There's not a lot of support here, it feels like. And it's not really anybody's fault. Everybody's kind of running on thin because we have such a shortage of teachers in general that we have long-term subs thrown in rooms. We've got lots of behaviors. We work in a Title I school where a lot of these kids come from poor families. And when you have poor families, you have behaviors, it happens. They bring those issues into the school. So it's a really hard job.

Given this context, this fellow entered TeachMichigan "hoping they would give me support for my classroom as far as classroom management." But she felt that this had not materialized, sharing, "We've discussed support for classroom management, but as far as actually having the support there, it's kind of not really though." She explained what she felt she needed:

It would be cool if I could just have somebody in here really just watching straight up as things go, or even just popping in randomly because planning a lesson is one thing, but I just want them to be able to support me in what I need just on a daily, even during just random times we're transitioning to this or whatever, just watching them, watching that and being able to say like, 'Oh, I noticed you did this. You could probably do this. It would probably work better.' I feel like teachers that are early in their career often struggle with procedural things and little things, and even just tone of voice, and a lot of that I think needs to be viewed in person.

As this quote reveals, this fellow felt a strong need for individualized support because leaders in her school and district were not helping her to feel successful as a teacher.

Several fellows with this mindset saw their TeachMichigan experience as a potential remedy to their lack of local support, and they went into TeachMichigan hoping for a high dose of in-class coaching and in-person feedback on their teaching. Yet, because the Early Career Educator fellowship does not provide high doses of instructional feedback through direct observation, some of these fellows were frustrated and felt that TeachMichigan was falling short of meeting their perceived need. For example, another fellow cited a “lack of personal coaching” as an area in which he felt that TeachMichigan was not meeting his learning needs. This same fellow explained that he had hoped TeachMichigan would be a program “where early career educators were supported to reflect on themselves” so that reflection would be “back in my repertoire” of teaching practice, as it had been during his teacher preparation program. But he did not perceive this support for ongoing reflection happening. Importantly, we only found these types of comments about a lack of support from TeachMichigan among Early Career fellows when they also reported a lack of support in their schools. To this point, the fellow quoted above also described his school as “a very large school and there’s a lot of teachers” such that teachers “are not willing to make a connection with a new teacher if they’re not going to stay because there’s turnover.” He described teaching in the school as “very isolating” with “a lot of challenges.” Critically, we did not encounter any fellows who commented on not getting their learning needs met through TeachMichigan when they worked in a school context in which they perceived strong support for new teachers. Seemingly, when these individual support needs were being met through the school or district, fellows were able to seek other types of learning through the TeachMichigan Early Career fellowship.

We also encountered a number of NBC fellows who mentioned a lack of support for teachers in their schools. But, for these more experienced teachers working on the esteemed NBC credential, their concerns about a lack of support for teachers were not focused on their own needs. NBC fellows discussed a lack of local support for teachers in the context of describing the working conditions at their schools more broadly. In interviews, we asked, “How do you think a new teacher would experience the working conditions at your school?” Our intention was to understand how fellows viewed the teacher working conditions in their buildings even if they felt that they themselves had a solid handle on their practice. For NBC fellows, this is where the lack of support for teachers came up. For example, one fellow discussed his school’s high turnover among new teachers, theorizing that new teachers left because there was “no support.” He explained, “We had some teachers we hired two years ago who have never even talked to the principal.... There’s no communication.” In such instances, NBC fellows conveyed their perception that TeachMichigan compensated for their school’s shortcoming in teacher support because they perceived that TeachMichigan provided a high level of support for teachers. The fellow above commented, “Teach Michigan’s a great program. It’s awesome for me to go in and see people from other

buildings. That has been super rewarding.” For this fellow, the opportunity to “go interact and network with people across the state” provided him with “quality professional development.” Given the minimal support in his school, this broader network of educators to learn from filled a critical need for support.

Perceptions of District-Offered Professional Development

The second way in which local organizational context impacted fellows’ learning through TeachMichigan was the contrast between the design and quality of TeachMichigan professional learning experiences and those provided in fellows’ home districts. As noted earlier in this report, most fellows praised TeachMichigan professional learning opportunities, and on the spring 2024 survey, fellows rated the quality of TeachMichigan’s professional learning offerings as higher than that of professional development they received outside of TeachMichigan. Interviews suggest that this perceived difference across the quality and design of the two sets of offerings influenced fellows’ openness to learning from TeachMichigan. For example, one Early Career fellow commented:

With the PD here [in my district], I feel like a lot of it’s repetitive. And 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, 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 district] 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.

For this fellow, the actionable nature of what they learned through TeachMichigan was more useful than local professional development that focused on analyzing rather than acting on data.

Other fellows also commented on the comparable quality of TeachMichigan professional learning opportunities in ways that reflected their openness to learning through TeachMichigan. For example, when asked to contrast TeachMichigan with other professional learning experiences, one NBC fellow commented on how attention to new approaches to teaching made the TeachMichigan professional learning more beneficial. She explained:

Well, since I’ve been through our PD about 25,000 times, I don’t go to them anymore. I use a sick day. I think [the Teach Michigan sessions] are pretty good. There’s something new. There’s a different way of looking at your students, at your practice, at what you’re doing. And so they’re new to me.... Because it’s different, it’s beneficial to me.

While this teacher was closed off to and thus did not attend the professional development in her district, she opened herself to the TeachMichigan learning because it offered a fresh take on teaching. Similarly, another fellow explained how the quality of TeachMichigan learning experiences opened her mind to the potential of all professional learning experiences. In describing how TeachMichigan had impacted her as a teacher, this fellow shared that TeachMichigan had given her:

A positive attitude towards PD because I often would be like, 'Oh, another day of listening and sitting through.' But I really think after going and finding benefit in the TeachMichigan PD, I found it is a mindset. If I go in and I tell myself, 'You're going to get something out of this,' you can get something out of it. So I would say yeah, I've had a more positive shift in attitude towards that.

For this fellow, her experience with TeachMichigan not only opened her up to learning from TeachMichigan opportunities, it also opened her up to other forms of professional learning.

Across these examples, we found that because fellows perceived TeachMichigan professional learning opportunities to be high quality and relevant to their work, fellows seemed to approach TeachMichigan with an appreciative and positive mindset that compelled them to value and heed their learning. By contrast, fellows' views of lower quality district professional development offerings seemed to hinder their attitudes toward learning in that setting. One fellow shared, "A lot of times when you go to district PDs, it's just kind of thrown out there. We need to fill this time, so here's something we're going to do." This sense that local professional development was arbitrary and lacked intentionality was common, and teachers tended to dismiss such programming as useless and pointless. By contrast, fellows saw TeachMichigan professional learning as "specific," "helpful," "relevant," and "targeted," which enabled them to approach their learning with positive attitudes.

This connection between teachers' perception of the quality of a learning experience and their openness to learning in response is a good example of how systems theory enables us to see interactions among different systems related to teacher learning. Teachers' perceptions of the professional learning in their district (a facet of the school-level system) influenced their attitudes (personal system) toward the district and TeachMichigan professional learning experiences (learning activity system), which shaped what, how, and whether they learned through these different professional learning opportunities. In the case of TeachMichigan, the contrast with less well perceived district learning offerings positioned TeachMichigan as the more positive, useful professional learning experience.

DISCUSSION

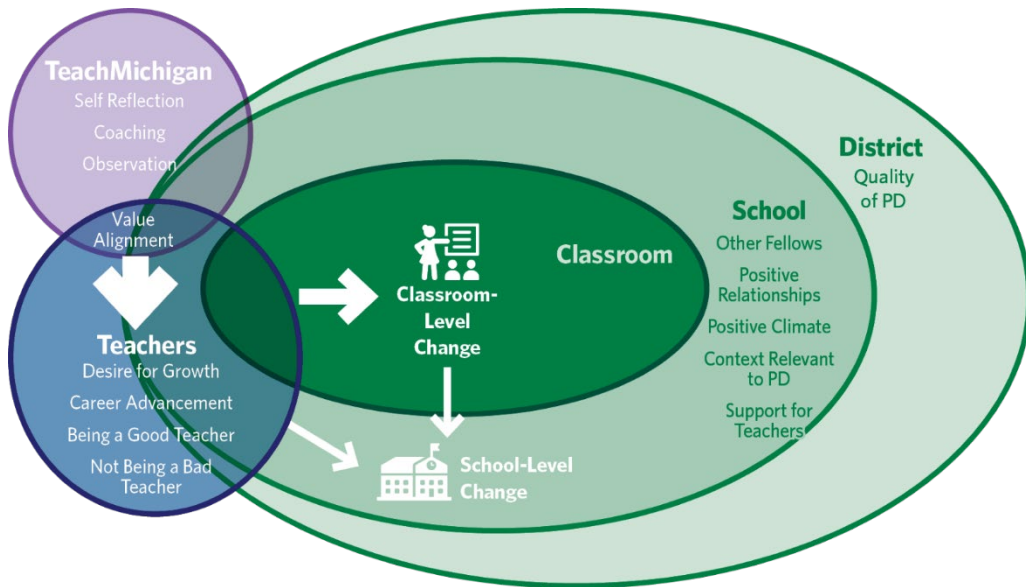
TeachMichigan represents an innovative approach to educational improvement by creating a statewide network of high-impact educators working in poverty-dense communities and engaging those educators in reflective learning opportunities that seek to improve instruction, leadership, and school culture in their buildings. Yet, complex systems theory suggests that efforts to truly create change in teacher knowledge and practice must attend to the embedded contexts in which teachers learn and work. In this study, we find that examining those embedded contexts – specifically, the TeachMichigan learning activities, the personal systems of participating teachers, and the sociocultural and organizational features of teachers’ schools and districts – illuminates the complex and nuanced ways in which context shaped how Early Career and NBC fellows perceived, engaged with, and took up learning opportunities from TeachMichigan during the 2023-2024 school year.

Figure 6 shows our enhanced model of teacher learning through TeachMichigan by reflecting new insights presented in this report. Building onto the original model from Figure 1, this enhanced model adds in key findings from our analysis of survey and interview data to present a more informed representation of the complex systems related to how TeachMichigan supported the learning of fellows in the Early Career and NBC cohorts. Importantly, we acknowledge that we do not and cannot have a complete model of the dynamics of teacher learning through TeachMichigan because it is impossible to identify every relevant variable for every fellow. However, this enhanced model clarifies some dynamics regarding teacher learning through TeachMichigan and provides important insights for improving educator learning and application of that learning moving forward.

First, the purple circle in Figure 6 shows our findings that the design elements of TeachMichigan that fellows found to be the most impactful for their learning were the self-reflection, coaching, and observations of themselves and their peers teaching. The blue circle shows that fellows brought positive learning orientations to TeachMichigan primarily because of a desire for growth, for career advancement, to become a good teacher, and to avoid being a bad teacher. When teachers felt like these orientations – or hopes for learning – were being fulfilled through TeachMichigan, they were open to learning. Similarly, we found that value alignment between TeachMichigan and fellows was a strong driver for teacher learning, such that fellows were interested in TeachMichigan content because they perceived that the content helped them to fulfill their interests in areas such as pursuing racial or socioeconomic equity or supporting LGBTQIA+ students. These interactions between TeachMichigan as a system and individual fellows as their own systems were critical for fellow learning. When fellows desired learning activities that were not part of TeachMichigan’s model – such as feedback from in-person classroom observations – they were more resistant to learning because they felt frustrated that their needs were not being met. In such a

case, a fellow might feel that TeachMichigan was not helping them become a good teacher instead of a bad teacher, thereby furthering their frustration and making them more closed to learning. For these reasons, fellow learning was maximized when the fellow perceived that the learning activities within TeachMichigan were meeting their hopes to grow, advance their career, and become a better teacher. Fellows reported that self-reflection, coaching, and observation fulfilled these hopes, thereby enabling them to be open to these activities to support their learning.

Figure 6. Enhanced Model of TeachMichigan Teacher Learning Within Embedded Contexts



We found universal acknowledgement among the fellows we interviewed that their learning through TeachMichigan was improving their classroom teaching in some regard. Most fellows cited specific changes they had made to their teaching as a result of their learning through TeachMichigan, and almost all fellows connected these changes to improved experiences and learning for their students. This finding is not surprising, as improving teachers' instruction is the primary focus of the Early Career and NBC fellowships. However, our data confirm that according to the perspectives of teacher fellows, TeachMichigan is meeting this goal. Figure 6 illustrates this finding through the strong white arrow leading from the teacher to classroom-level change.

Applications of learning became more complex, however, once fellows moved outside of their own classrooms and attempted to impact change in their schools. The green school and district circles in Figure 6 capture sociocultural and organizational dimensions of schools and districts that emerged from our analysis as relevant to fellows' learning and application of learning outside their classrooms. Specifically, we found that fellows were enabled to apply their learning at the school level when they worked with other fellows, had positive relationships with their teaching colleagues,

worked in a positive school climate, and perceived TeachMichigan content as relevant to their local school context. We also found that fellows were more likely to learn from TeachMichigan when their school already provided adequate support for teachers so that fellows did not have unrealistic expectations of TeachMichigan filling an immense support gap. Finally, we found that many fellows had positive orientations toward learning through TeachMichigan because they perceived that professional development offerings in their local districts were relatively low in quality. In these myriad ways, teachers' experiences with learning and applying their learning from TeachMichigan interacted with the sociocultural and organizational conditions of their schools, providing powerful insights into the types of schools in which TeachMichigan can expect Early Career and NBC fellows to both learn and apply their learning to create change outside of their classrooms.

Implications and Recommendations for TeachMichigan

Many of our findings have strong implications for TeachMichigan. We present and discuss these implications below.

1. Supporting learning through self-reflection, coaching, and observation.

Because fellows reported the greatest learning through self-reflection, coaching, and observing themselves and their peers teach, we recommend that leaders within TeachMichigan share this finding with all their staff and encourage them to amplify these practices in programming when possible.

- a. Expanding opportunities for reflection.** Within the domain of self-reflection, NBC fellows noted that it was the NBC process that prompted them to reflect on their teaching. But they shared how their TeachMichigan coaches and NBC cohort peers assisted them in this reflection by holding them to high expectations for the quality of their NBC submissions, prompting them to articulate their rationales for instructional decisions, and providing feedback to support their reflection. We encourage TeachMichigan staff to explore how these same strategies can be applied to other fellowships and how these strategies can be expanded within the NBC fellowship.
- b. Strengthening relationships with coaches.** For coaching, many fellows spoke highly of their coaches, the support they provided, and the fundamental role that coaches played in their learning. But there were some fellows across both the Early Career and NBC cohorts who reported not knowing their coaches at all; some fellows were not even sure of their coaches' names. Given the centrality of coaching for fellow learning, we encourage TeachMichigan staff consider ways to make relationship-building among coaches and fellows a priority going forward.
- c. Increasing opportunities for fellows to observe teaching.** For observations of teaching, Figure 3 shows that fellows rated "Observation Visits to Other

Schools” as one of the most impactful forms of professional development even before they began TeachMichigan, and they reported in interviews that observing one another teach and giving and getting feedback on those observations supported their learning. This is not surprising as peer observation is considered a promising practice for instructional improvement (Ridge & Lavigne, 2020). We encourage the TeachMichigan team to continue utilizing this practice and investigate ways to increase its use where possible. For example, TeachMichigan might facilitate opportunities for fellows to observe in one another’s schools to expose fellows to different teaching contexts and practices and to use peer observation as a tool for building stronger relationships and networks.

2. Aligning fellows’ values with TeachMichigan values.

Our findings on the personal characteristics of TeachMichigan fellows – particularly the orientations that motivate them to pursue learning through TeachMichigan and the alignment of their values with TeachMichigan – are likely not surprising. TeachMichigan staff intentionally recruit and invite fellows whose orientations are aligned with TeachMichigan’s values and goals. However, the importance of this alignment cannot be overlooked when imagining how TeachMichigan might scale up to reach more teachers. If fellows’ values and orientations were not well aligned with TeachMichigan’s ideals – such as would be the case if TeachMichigan were offered to *all* teachers in a district, for example – the learning outcomes might not be as positive, as not all teachers’ values would be reflected in TeachMichigan and thus not all teachers would be open to the content and the ideals of TeachMichigan learning experiences.

3. Supporting collaboration among fellows in a school or district.

When it came to fellows maximizing their learning from TeachMichigan and applying that learning beyond their own classrooms, we found that the concentration of multiple fellows within a school or district was very beneficial. Fellows reported collaborating with other fellows who were also their colleagues both in improving their own teaching and in envisioning and implementing broader systemic change. While having other fellows in a fellow’s building did not necessarily lead to such changes, it enabled them. Even within contexts where multiple fellows work, fellows would likely benefit from structured support for working together, particularly to create change within their schools and districts.

4. Fostering positive relationships among teachers.

We also found that fellows only shared their TeachMichigan learning with colleagues in their buildings when they had positive interpersonal relationships with other teachers in their schools. Thus, a valuable focal area for learning among Sitting Leader and Systems Leader fellows could be strategies for supporting the development and maintenance of positive teacher-teacher relationships in their schools and districts.

5. Facilitating relationships among fellows within districts.

Relatedly, we found that new personal connections developed through TeachMichigan helped many fellows to build positive relationships with colleagues in their schools and districts. Fellows initiated or strengthened collegial relationships with one another through traveling to and attending TeachMichigan events together and through working on TeachMichigan tasks together. Knowing that such relationship-building can contribute to sharing of new learning within schools, TeachMichigan staff could devote time and attention to building and supporting relationships among fellows from the same district. We found that fellows often did not know the other fellows in their district at the outset of their TeachMichigan experience, illustrating the potential power of TeachMichigan as a structured bonding experience for fellows in the same district.

6. Helping schools and districts better support new teachers.

One strong finding in our analysis was that a number of Early Career fellows working in schools and districts without adequate support for teachers came to TeachMichigan hoping to fill the support gap. They expected TeachMichigan to provide one-on-one, in-person coaching that would support their learning and dramatically improve their teaching. However, this is not TeachMichigan's model for Early Career fellows, and some fellows felt let down by the absence of personalized coaching, which negatively impacted their orientation toward learning through TeachMichigan. In response to this finding, we recommend that TeachMichigan be very clear in their communication with Early Career fellows about what the learning model in this fellowship is and is not. In addition, we recommend that TeachMichigan support Sitting Leader and Systems Leader fellows in evaluating teachers' perceptions of support in their school or district and, where necessary, in developing structures and systems to support new and developing teachers.

7. Emphasizing takeaways for fellows in all school context.

Finally, regarding the relevance of TeachMichigan content to all contexts, we find it noteworthy that two fellows working in the same rural district had different perceptions about the applicability of insights from Detroit educators for their setting (see the data presented on page 28). This difference suggests that some fellows might need help seeing how various ideas apply to an array of settings. TeachMichigan staff might take some time during sessions to help fellows identify applicable takeaways for their own context. Additionally, TeachMichigan staff might more fully consider whether and how various offerings actually *do* apply across settings and whether speakers and presenters at convenings include perspectives from across the communities represented in TeachMichigan partner districts.

In addition to these specific recommendations, we hope that TeachMichigan leaders and staff take away from this report a stronger understanding of how the embedded systems of fellows' learning – the learning activities, personal orientations, and school contexts – shape their learning and their application of learning in their schools. As

this report shows, there are many ways in which these systems have interacted positively to support learning and application of learning among Early Career and NBC fellows in the 2023-2024 cohort. But taking a complex systems perspective to consider how a multitude of relevant forces interact to shape teacher learning can be a fruitful way to examine and improve learning experiences and outcomes.

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APPENDIX A

TeachMichigan Fellow Interview Protocol for Spring 2024

(For Current Teachers)

About You

1. I'm going to ask you to take just one minute to tell me about a bit about your teaching career. How long have you been teaching? How long have you been at this school? And, what do you teach?

TeachMichigan Fellowship

We're going to do a little role playing now. Imagine that I am a teacher here in your school. We know each other really well, and we are at the same stage in our careers. And, I come into your classroom after school one day to ask you about TeachMichigan because I'm considering applying. I'll start.

"Hi _____. I just attended an info session on the TeachMichigan fellowship, and I'm considering applying to the (Early Career, NBC, Aspiring Leaders) cohort. You're doing that, right?" [Yep.]

2. Do you think I should do it?
3. What made you decide to do it?
4. Is it everything you thought it would be?
5. What do you think you're getting out of it?
6. What are some of the downsides? (or "upsides" if they've been talking negatively)
7. It includes coaching, right? How has that been?
8. How are the PD sessions?
9. How does TeachMichigan compare to other PD?

TeachMichigan Stipend

10. As you know, the fellowship comes with a stipend of \$35,000 over three years. To what degree does this matter to you? Would you have signed up for this fellowship if the stipend did not exist? [Why or why not? Probe.]

Impact of TeachMichigan

We're curious to get information about how participating in the TeachMichigan Fellowship may be impacting your work as an educator. I have a stack of yellow index

cards. I'd like you to think back to when you decided to apply to TeachMichigan. Please record each way you thought participating in the Fellowship would impact you or your work as an educator. Record one idea on each card as a word or phrase.

[Allow time for interviewee to generate cards. Monitor and restate instructions if needed. If they get to 5 cards, tell them they can record 1-2 more ideas and then stop]

- Can you talk me through your cards?

Now that the fellowship is underway, in which of these areas has TeachMichigan actually impacted your work as an educator? Can you pull out these cards and place them to the right?

Are there any other areas you would like to add in terms of how TeachMichigan has impacted your work as an educator –either positively or negatively—that you didn't originally have in mind when you applied to TeachMichigan? If so, please add these on a blue index card and place on the right.

Now, considering all of the cards on the right

- How has TeachMichigan impacted each of these areas?
- [If some areas not impacted] What about these areas? Can you tell me a little more about why they remain on the left? Do you expect these areas will move to the right over time? Why/why not?

[Point to the cards on the right]: Finally, please sort your cards from top to bottom in terms of the most impactful to the least impactful. [Researcher – Take Photo.]

- Please talk me through how you sorted your cards.

School & Working Conditions

11. If you hadn't been invited to participate in TeachMichigan, would you have changed jobs this year? [If yes, describe.] [If no, why not?]
12. In a nutshell, how would you describe the students you teach and their families?
13. Imagine that a new teacher was coming to work at your school. How do you think they would experience the working conditions here?
14. Do you think that you are positioned to shape the working conditions for teachers in your school? [If yes, how? If no, why not?]
 - a. [If yes,] Is there anything you're gaining or learning through the TeachMichigan fellowship that would help you improve the working conditions here? [If yes, describe.]

Teaching Colleagues

15. How would you describe your relationships with your teaching colleagues?
 - a. Do you think your participation in the TeachMichigan fellowship has impacted your relationships? [If yes, how?] [If no, why not?]
16. How, if at all, do you and your teaching colleagues collaborate?
 - a. Has your participation in the TeachMichigan fellowship impacted how you collaborate? [If yes, how so?] [If no, why not?]
17. How do you think teachers in your school who are not part of TeachMichigan view the fellowship?

Specific Elements of the Fellowship

18. What types of networking opportunities have you experienced through TeachMichigan?
19. How valuable do you find these networking opportunities to be for you? [Explain.]
20. Another facet of TeachMichigan is the Innovation Grants. Have you heard about the innovation grants? What do you think about them?

Personal Perspective

21. What are your thoughts on the state of the teaching profession right now?

Additional

22. Is there anything else related to TeachMichigan that you'd like to share with me today?