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TeachMichigan Evaluation: A Summary of Year 1 Findings

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Innovation Collaborative**
RESEARCH WITH CONSEQUENCE

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TeachMichigan Evaluation: A Summary of Year 1 Findings

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This brief serves as a complement to the set of products EPIC has delivered to Teach for America Detroit in the first half of 2024 as part of its evaluation of TeachMichigan. In this brief we summarize the theory of change that guided TeachMichigan through the 2023-2024 academic year and describe the research activities to date related to EPIC's evaluation of TeachMichigan, which include a summary of data collection and an overview of the findings from each of the most recent reports submitted to TFA Detroit.

TEACHMICHIGAN'S THEORY OF CHANGE

The theory of change provides a roadmap of how TeachMichigan's activities are expected to lead to desired outcomes, guiding both implementation and evaluation efforts. The EPIC research team worked with Teach for America Detroit's TeachMichigan team to develop a visual representation of TeachMichigan's theory of change that shows the interconnections between TeachMichigan's core values, program components, the educational environment, and long-term outcomes, shown

in Figure 1. At the bottom of Figure 1 are the core values that motivate TeachMichigan. These values inform both the design and implementation of TeachMichigan and are infused throughout the intervention, as shown by the arrow that moves from the core values to the box in Figure 1 that represents the TeachMichigan program.

Figure 1. TeachMichigan Theory of Change
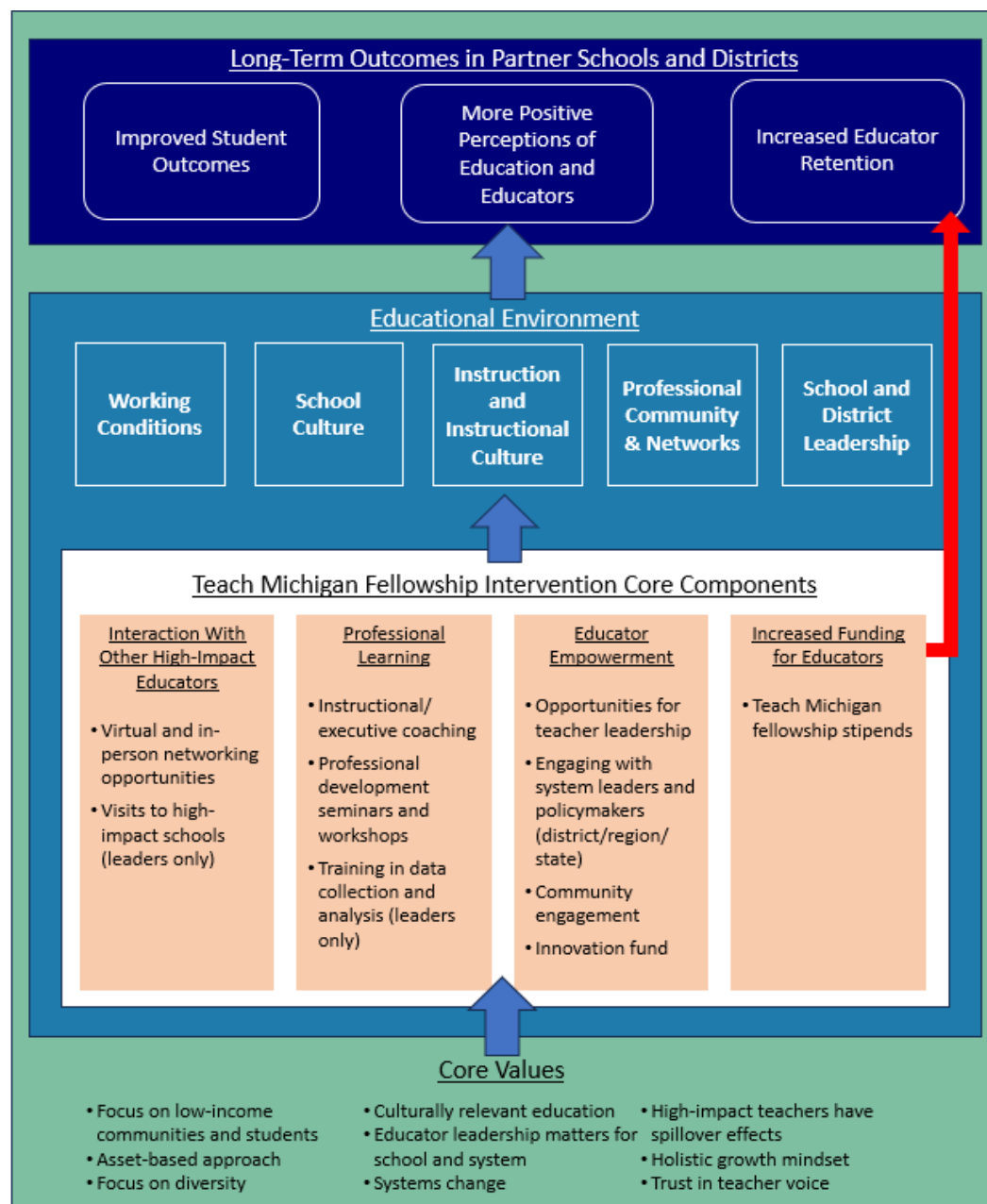
The white box near the middle of Figure 1 represents the TeachMichigan intervention, which includes four core components: interaction with other high-impact educators, professional learning, educator empowerment, and increased funding for educators, each represented by a light orange box. Inside of each box is a list of activities that

fellows take part in, or that are available to them, related to that core component. For instance, TeachMichigan increases funding for educators by providing $35,000 in stipends over the course of three years; it also promotes interaction between TeachMichigan fellows and other high-impact educators through virtual and in-person networking opportunities for fellows, and provides opportunities to visit high-impact schools to meet the educators working there.

Moving up from the white box, TeachMichigan posits that its core components will shape the educational environment in its partner schools and districts, while simultaneously being influenced by this environment. This bidirectional relationship between TeachMichigan and the educational environment is crucial for understanding how TeachMichigan aims to achieve its goals. Here, the educational environment includes:

- Working conditions – the characteristics of schools themselves along with characteristics of the educators who work there and the students they serve

- School culture – relationships among staff and between staff and students within a school

- Instruction and instructional culture – relationships between teachers, students, and content around student learning, along with beliefs about those relationships

- Professional community and networks – relationships between educators and colleagues in other schools

- School and district leadership – the way that school and district leaders make decisions that impact their students and staff, and the extent to which these decisions are shaped by input from teachers

This educational environment shapes the way that all educators work and all students learn, meaning that it impacts not only TeachMichigan fellows, but their colleagues and students as well. In Figure 1, the light blue box representing the educational environment envelops the white box representing the TeachMichigan intervention because the theory of change sees TeachMichigan 1) as operating within fellows' educational environment, and 2) improving long-term outcomes by changing the educational environment in partner schools and districts. In other words, TeachMichigan is intended to help fellows better function within their environment and also shape that environment in ways that promote positive teacher and student outcomes. The one exception to this is the core component of increased funding for educators in the form of stipends, which is directly connected to the outcome of increased educator retention. This direct link is based on research showing that financial incentives can increase teacher retention, especially in hard-to-staff subjects and schools. Unlike other program components that work through changes in the educational environment, the stipends are expected to have an immediate and direct impact on fellows' decisions to remain in the profession, independent of other environmental factors.

The top of Figure 1 shows the long-term outcomes TeachMichigan aims to improve by promoting change within the educational environment. These include student-level outcomes, teacher-level outcomes, and outcomes related to the educational profession. Student-level outcomes include things like attendance and chronic absenteeism, proficiency and test scores, and educational attainment such as graduation and college attendance. Educator-level outcomes explicitly include retention, but also implicitly include educator effectiveness as a means of improving student outcomes. Lastly, TeachMichigan holds that improved student- and educator-level outcomes will result in more positive perceptions of educators and the education profession.

RESEARCH ACTIVITIES TO DATE

The first year of EPIC's evaluation of TeachMichigan began in fall 2023 and concluded in spring 2024 with a focus on understanding the conceptualization of TeachMichigan, the ways in which TeachMichigan is being implemented, and fellows' perceptions of TeachMichigan's programming. In the sections below, we detail the data collected to study TeachMichigan and summarize the most recent set of reports in EPIC's ongoing evaluation of the initiative.

Data Collection Activities

To understand the conceptualization, implementation, and impact of TeachMichigan, EPIC has collected a range of qualitative, quantitative, and survey data, summarized below in Table 1.

Table 1. Data Collection Activities			
Data Type	**Collection Method**	**Participants/Sources**	**Topics/Content**
Qualitative Data	Interviews	District leaders in 7 TeachMichigan districts	Perceptions of TeachMichigan and its implementation
	Interviews	43 fellow interviews: 15 Early Career Educator fellows 15 National Board Certification fellows 8 Aspiring Leader fellows 5 Sitting Leader fellows	Fellows' perceptions of their schools and experiences with TeachMichigan's programming
	Interviews	8 interviews with Teach for America Detroit staff	Perceptions and experiences of how prospective fellows were recruited, identified, and invited to join TeachMichigan
	Focus Groups	Focus groups of non-fellow teachers who work with fellows in 7 districts	Educators' perceptions of their schools and of TeachMichigan

Table 1. Data Collection Activities			
Data Type	**Collection Method**	**Participants/Sources**	**Topics/Content**
Survey Data	Fall 2023 Fellow Survey	221 responses (95% response rate)	Fellows' perceptions of their educational environment, reasons for applying to TeachMichigan, and professional plans
	Spring 2024 Fellow Survey	207 responses (95% response rate)	Fellows' perceptions of their educational environment, experiences with TeachMichigan, and professional plans
	Michigan Policy Insiders Panel Round 12	153 responses	Policy elites' perspectives on teacher compensation in Michigan and policies related to teacher compensation.
	State of the State Survey Round 88	1000 responses	Public opinion on teacher compensation in Michigan
Quantitative Data	Fellow Application Roster	Data for all incoming 2023-2024 TeachMichigan applicants (n= 348)	Application materials, candidates' progress through the selection and invitation process.
	State Administrative Data	EPIC secured access to statewide administrative data through the Michigan Education Research Institute.	Student achievement, demographics, and attendance; teacher demographics, job assignments, evaluation ratings, and mobility

Summary of Recent Reports

Here we provide an abstract for each of the reports EPIC produced in the first 6 months of 2024 as part of its evaluation of TeachMichigan. These reports focus on the process used to select TeachMichigan fellows, the educational environment within TeachMichigan schools, fellows' professional learning in year 1, and a contextual analysis of how TeachMichigan's stipends impact fellows' compensation. Each abstract refers to the part of TeachMichigan's theory of change it examines, describes the data used, and summarizes key findings.

TeachMichigan Recruitment and Selection Process

This report examines the comprehensive process used to recruit and select fellows for invitation to join TeachMichigan's inaugural 2023-2024 cohort. It aligns with TeachMichigan's theory of change by focusing on how the program identifies and retains high-impact educators in poverty-dense schools, a crucial element in improving the educational environment and achieving long-term student and educator outcomes.

The report draws on internal documents from TeachMichigan, candidate applications, and seven interviews with individuals involved in the fellow recruitment and selection process, including TFA-Detroit senior leaders, program leaders, staff, and an alumni consultant. We use these data to provide a detailed overview of the multi-stage selection process.

Key findings reveal a rigorous and time-intensive selection process involving partner district recruitment, application submission and evaluation, candidate interviews, and collaborative decision-making with district partners. TeachMichigan defines "high-impact" educators based on four core pillars: professional learning community membership, authentic and impactful leadership, culturally relevant pedagogies and practices, and systems impact. Additionally, fellowship specific pillars were used to further refine this definition including high-impact teaching for Early Career Educators, reflective practitioner for National Board Certification candidates, and visionary leadership for Aspiring Leaders. This definition differs substantially from the criteria used in the state's teacher evaluation system, which focuses more on student learning outcomes and classroom observations.

The process aimed to identify both current high-impact educators and those with potential to become high-impact, reflecting a developmental approach to educator retention. This approach required TFA-Detroit to commit to developing strategies for strengthening human capital through their programming, going beyond merely recognizing talent to actively developing it.

The selection process resulted in 173 fellows being invited to join TeachMichigan. While invitation rates for Black (50 of 107, 47.7%) and White (102 of 207, 49.3%) candidates were similar, other racial groups experienced markedly different rates (e.g., 3 of 8 Asian candidates, 37.5%; 4 of 5 American Indian/Alaskan candidates, 80%). The smaller numbers of educators of color that applied led to a less diverse cohort overall.

Looking forward, TFA-Detroit plans several refinements to the process for future cohorts, focusing on efficiency, standardization, and scalability. The report concludes by discussing considerations for future selection cycles, including balancing the identification of current versus potential high-impact educators, the relationship between TFA-Detroit's selection criteria and state effectiveness ratings, and strategies for framing the fellowship stipend during recruitment.

The Educational Environment in TeachMichigan Schools

Within TeachMichigan's theory of change, the educational environment both shapes how TeachMichigan impacts fellows and is the conduit through which TeachMichigan aims to impact students, teachers, and schools. This report examines the educational environment in schools where TeachMichigan fellows work, focusing on working conditions, school culture, and school and district leadership.

The report draws on two main data sources: statewide student- and educator-level administrative data from the Michigan Department of Education, and a survey of TeachMichigan fellows conducted in September 2023. These data are analyzed using descriptive statistics to compare schools with and without TeachMichigan fellows and to examine fellows' perceptions of their educational environment.

A key finding is that TeachMichigan fellows tend to work in more challenging instructional environments than typical Michigan schools. Their schools serve higher rates of students who are from economically disadvantaged families and those classified as English learners, have higher rates of chronic absenteeism, and report lower average student performance. Despite these challenges, fellows generally report positive perceptions of their working conditions and school culture.

However, fellows' views on school and district leadership are somewhat less positive. While they feel comfortable speaking up, they report limited agency in classroom and school-level decision-making. Fellows believe leaders value their input but don't actively seek it or fully understand their challenges. Notably, sitting leader fellows consistently report more positive perceptions than other cohorts across various measures.

The report also identifies areas for potential improvement, including providing professional learning on addressing student attendance issues, increasing fellows' sense of agency in decision-making, and enhancing communication between school leaders and teachers about leadership opportunities. These findings provide a baseline for understanding the educational environments where TeachMichigan fellows work and offer insights for program refinement to better support fellows and achieve the program's goals.

Fellow Perceptions of Educator Learning in TeachMichigan

Professional learning is one of TeachMichigan's core components that aims to help fellows develop as educators and equip them to shape their educational environment. This report examines TeachMichigan fellows' perceptions of the professional development (PD) and coaching they receive through the program. To do that, we draw on interviews with 43 fellows across 9 school systems, conducted between February and May 2024. The EPIC research team also conducted field observations of various PD sessions, including in-person convenings and virtual workshops. We use these data to identify themes in fellows' experiences and perceptions.

A key finding is that fellows across all cohorts generally view TeachMichigan PD positively. They describe it as meaningful, applicable, and superior to other PD they have received. TeachMichigan's emphasis on collaboration, problem-solving, and social justice resonated with fellows, and many reported that the PD impacted their teaching practice, boosted their confidence, and renewed their commitment to education.

Cohort-specific findings highlight the value of video-based reflection for Early Career Educators, the transformative aspects of the National Board Certification process, and the practical leadership strategies gained by Aspiring Leaders. We find that the coaching component, particularly the collaborative problem-solving approach, was highly valued across cohorts. This approach typically involved fellows working in small groups to address real-world challenges presented by their peers. For Early Career Educators, this took the form of "video clubs" where fellows analyzed and provided feedback on each other's recorded lessons. Aspiring Leaders engaged in a consultancy protocol, discussing problems of practice brought by group members. Fellows appreciated the opportunity to gain diverse perspectives from colleagues across the state, often finding that seemingly different contexts shared similar challenges. Many reported being able to immediately apply insights from these sessions to their own work, regardless of whether their specific problem was the focus of discussion. While some fellows expected more traditional one-on-one coaching, most found value in this peer-driven, collaborative approach to professional growth.

While experiences were largely positive, the report also identifies areas for improvement. These include streamlining communication, addressing logistical concerns such as the timing of early release days, and balancing the needs of working parents. In terms of coaching, some fellows expressed a desire for clarification around the coaching model and some indicated they would appreciate more one-on-one coaching and in-person observations.

Our findings suggest several ways that TeachMichigan could further increase the value of professional learning for fellows. These include increasing opportunities for local and statewide collaboration, offering more choice in PD sessions, and providing more frequent in-person feedback for Early Career Educator fellows. Overall, our findings indicate that TeachMichigan's professional learning component is contributing to fellows' growth and satisfaction, aligning well with the program's theory of change.

TeachMichigan Fellows' Compensation in Context

TeachMichigan fellows receive $35,000 in stipends over the course of three years and is hypothesized by TeachMichigan's theory of change to be a key driver of increased teacher retention. While it is too early to estimate TeachMichigan's impact on retention, it is possible to examine how stipends change fellows' incentive to remain in their position. This report examines TeachMichigan fellows' base compensation and how that is impacted by TeachMichigan stipends, along with perceptions of their compensation.

To study fellows' compensation we use multiple data sources: publicly available data on teacher compensation from the Michigan Department of Education, district salary schedules and collective bargaining agreements, a survey of TeachMichigan fellows conducted in fall 2023, and interviews with 43 fellows across 9 participating school systems in spring 2024. These data were analyzed to compare TeachMichigan districts'

salaries with state averages and nearby districts, and to understand fellows' perceptions of their compensation.

Key findings reveal that TeachMichigan districts generally have higher starting salaries but lower average salaries compared to the statewide average and nearby districts. The TeachMichigan stipends substantially increase fellows' compensation, making them among the highest-paid teachers in their intermediate school districts. Fellows report being more satisfied with their total compensation (including the stipend) compared to their regular salary, though satisfaction levels are still modest overall. Early Career Educator fellows, in particular, view the stipends as especially meaningful.

We also find that fellows primarily plan to use their stipends for living expenses, debt repayment, and savings, rather than discretionary spending. This suggests that while the stipends make fellows' salaries more competitive, there may be implications for retention once the stipends end. These findings provide important context for understanding how TeachMichigan's compensation strategy might impact teacher retention.

Teacher Compensation in Michigan: Recent Trends and Public Opinion

In this report, we examine recent trends in teacher compensation in Michigan and public opinion on the issue. We align our analysis with ongoing policy discussions about addressing teacher shortages and supporting student learning by exploring how teacher pay in Michigan compares to other states and how the public views teacher compensation.

We draw on multiple data sources: national and state-level teacher salary data from the National Education Association, cost of living indices, and a survey of 1,000 Michigan adults conducted in January 2024. We analyze these data to compare Michigan teacher salaries with national averages and neighboring states, and to gauge public opinion on teacher pay.

Our key findings reveal that while Michigan's average teacher salary sits slightly below the national average, it has declined significantly since 1999-2000 when adjusted for inflation. We find that Michigan's starting teacher salaries lag behind both national averages and those in other Great Lakes states. However, we observe substantial public support for increasing teacher salaries in Michigan, particularly for early career educators. We find that the majority of Michiganders (76%) believe starting teacher salaries should increase, with the average respondent indicating that starting salaries should be nearly $10,000 higher than current levels.

We also find that recent policy efforts to increase teacher compensation in Michigan have been relatively modest compared to some other states. Our findings provide important context for understanding the current state of teacher compensation in Michigan and public sentiment on the issue. We believe these results can inform

ongoing policy discussions about strategies to address teacher shortages and improve the attractiveness of the teaching profession in Michigan.

Teacher Compensation in Michigan: Perspectives from Michigan's Policy Elites

In this report, we examine the views of Michigan's policy elites regarding teacher compensation in the state. We align our analysis with ongoing policy discussions about addressing teacher shortages and improving the teaching profession by exploring how those in positions to shape policy view current teacher pay and potential strategies to increase it.

We draw on data from a survey of 153 Michigan policy elites, including state legislators, legislative staff, high-ranking members of state agencies, lobbyists, think tank members, and political media members. This survey was conducted in spring 2024 through the Michigan Policy Insiders Panel (MPIP) administered by the Institute for Public Policy and Social Research at Michigan State University.

Our findings reveal strong support among policy elites for increasing teacher salaries in Michigan. We find that 86% of respondents support increasing starting teacher salaries and 71% support increasing overall teacher salaries. On average, respondents indicate that starting salaries should be over $11,000 higher and overall salaries should be over $9,000 higher than current levels. We also find broad support for various policy approaches to increase teacher compensation, with over 85% of respondents supporting monetary incentives for teachers in hard-to-staff schools and subjects.

Our findings provide important insights into how Michigan's policy elites view teacher compensation and potential strategies for improvement. We believe these results can inform ongoing policy discussions about addressing teacher shortages and enhancing the teaching profession in Michigan.