



# **A Survey of TeachMichigan Fellows: Fellows' Prior Career Intentions and Reasons They Applied to TeachMichigan**

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# **A Survey of TeachMichigan Fellows: Prior Career Intentions and Reasons They Applied to TeachMichigan**

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# A Survey of TeachMichigan Fellows

As part of a larger evaluation of TeachMichigan, the Education Policy Innovation Collaborative (EPIC) conducted a survey of TeachMichigan fellows in the fall of 2023. Fellows from all four TeachMichigan cohorts were included in this survey: early career educator (ECE) fellows, national board certification (NBC) fellows, aspiring leader (AL) fellows, and sitting leader (SL) fellows. Topics covered on this survey included fellows' career intentions before joining TeachMichigan, reasons why fellows applied to TeachMichigan, fellows' perceptions of their school and district, professional learning opportunities, and roles within their schools. This survey received a total of 221 responses, for a response rate of 95%. In this report, we draw on responses to a subset of items to examine 1) the reasons why fellows applied to TeachMichigan, and 2) fellows' career intentions prior to joining TeachMichigan. For these analyses, we exclude fellows who were part of Teach For America Detroit's pilot program for TeachMichigan that operated during the 2022-2023 school year because their responses are likely biased by their experiences in that pilot program. The resulting sample for this analysis is 166 respondents.

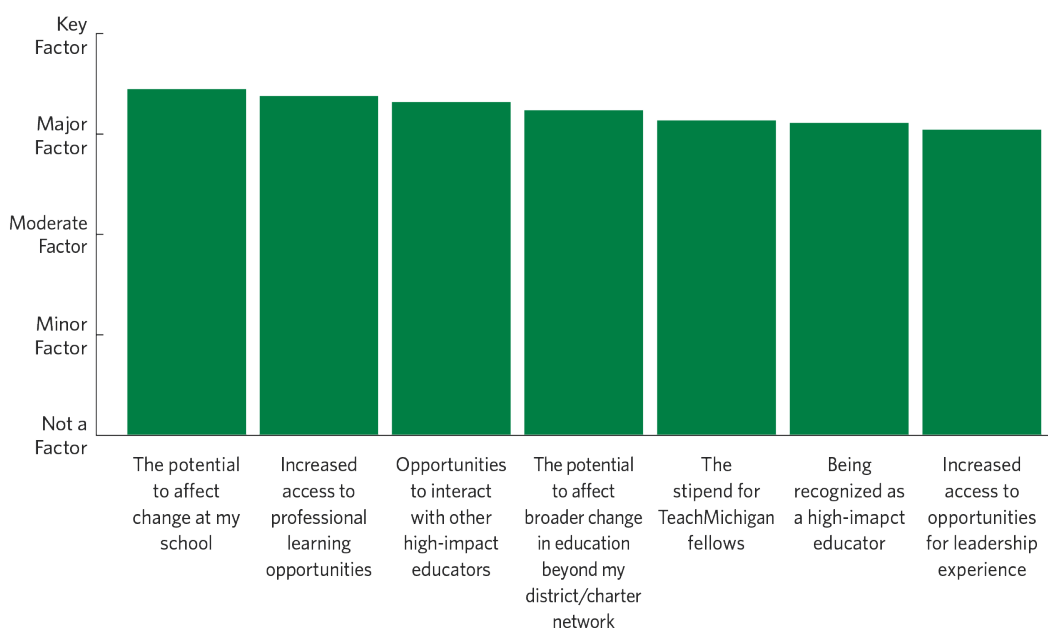
To briefly preview our results, we find that fellows valued all components of the TeachMichigan fellowship when deciding to apply, though what fellows saw as most attractive about the program varied across cohorts in ways that generally align with the context of their career stage and aims of their cohort. Looking at fellows' career intentions before applying to TeachMichigan, we find that nearly half of TeachMichigan fellows considered leaving their job between the 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 school years. Patterns in whether fellows considered leaving their position, and whether they actually applied to another position, are very similar across cohorts. However, there are significant differences in the kinds of positions that fellows considered and applied to.

## REASONS FELLOWS APPLIED TO TEACHMICHIGAN

Using this survey we aimed to identify the factors that shaped TeachMichigan fellows' decisions to apply to the program, along with how strongly each factor influenced their decision. We capture this information with three items. The first item consisted of a

list of the main components of TeachMichigan and asked fellows to indicate how strongly each influenced why they decided to apply to TeachMichigan. The list of components was based on the main elements of the TeachMichigan fellowship: the potential to affect change in their school, increased access to professional learning opportunities, opportunities to interact with other high-impact educators, the potential to affect broader change in education, the TeachMichigan stipend, being recognized as a high-impact educator, or increased access to opportunities for leadership experience. The response scale for this item consisted of five points that ranged from “not a factor” to “a key factor.” To understand the importance of each component in fellows’ decision to apply to TeachMichigan, we use the mean response across fellows, shown in Figure 1 below.

**Figure 1: Reasons Fellows Applied to TeachMichigan**



*Respondents were asked “We are interested in learning about why you applied to become a TeachMichigan fellow. From the following factors, please indicate how strongly each influenced your decision to apply to TeachMichigan.”*

Figure 1 illustrates that fellows viewed all aspects of TeachMichigan as at least a “major factor” in why they applied to the program. The two components with the highest average ratings are “the potential to affect change at my school” and “increased access to professional learning opportunities.” This suggests that fellows especially sought training in how to bring about change in their work and how to develop their craft as educators. The two components with the lowest average ratings are “increased access to opportunities for leadership experience” and “being recognized as a high-impact educator,” suggesting that fellows perceive recognition and experiences in new roles as comparatively less important.

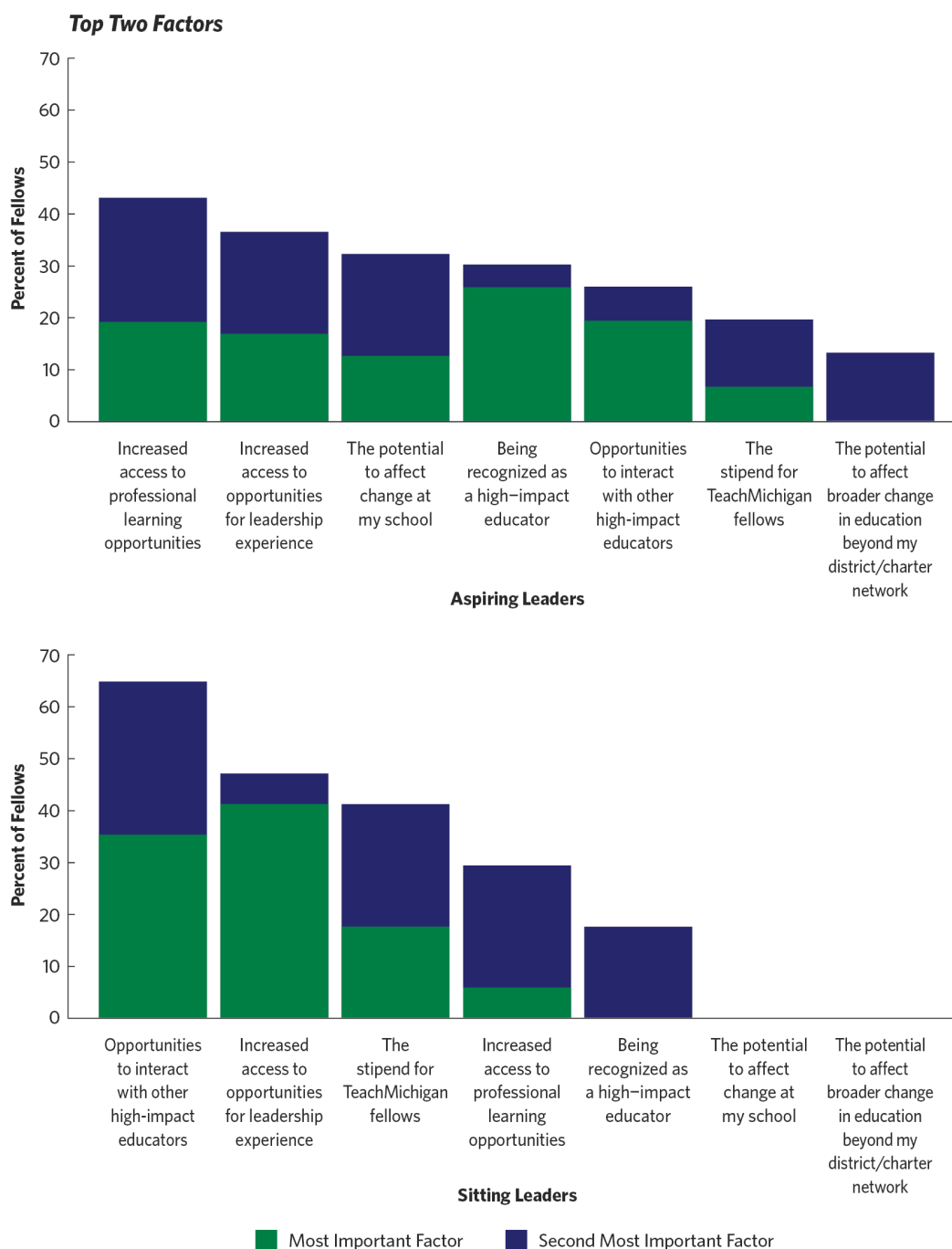
While the results in Figure 1 show that fellows generally perceived all components of TeachMichigan as attractive, it is unlikely that fellows gave more or less equal weight to all components when whether to apply. Anticipating that fellows may rate multiple factors as important in why they applied to TeachMichigan, fellows who identified multiple components as “major factors” and/or “key factors” were presented follow-up survey items prompting them to rank order these components so that we could identify the two most important factors for each fellow. For example, if a fellow selected both “the stipend for TeachMichigan fellows” and “being recognized as a high-impact educator” as “key factors,” they were subsequently asked to indicate which one was the most important in their decision and which was the second most important.

We find that what fellows found most attractive about TeachMichigan varied depending on which cohort they were in. Figures 2 and 3 shows the percentage of fellows who identified each component of TeachMichigan as either the most important factor or the second most important factor in their decision to apply, broken down by cohort. In many ways, the main reasons why fellows chose to apply to TeachMichigan are related to the context of their work and/or the aim(s) of each fellowship.

Looking at the responses of aspiring leaders, shown in the top of Figure 2, the highest ranked component was “increased access to professional learning opportunities,” followed by “increased access to opportunities for leadership experience.” This suggests that, as one might expect, aspiring leader fellows are attracted to the aspects of TeachMichigan intended to develop and prepare them to take on school leadership roles. For this group of fellows, the stipend and potential to affect broader change in education were least likely to be ranked by aspiring leaders as the most or second most important factor in their decision.

Sitting leaders appear to be drawn to the opportunity to build and expand their professional community through TeachMichigan. For this group, shown in the bottom of Figure 2, the highest ranked component of TeachMichigan is “opportunities to interact with other high-impact educators,” which was identified by nearly 65% of this group as either the most important factor or second most important factor in why they applied to TeachMichigan. The second most important factor in why sitting leaders applied to TeachMichigan was “increased opportunities for leadership experience.” Being that these fellows already serve in leadership roles within their school, they may see TeachMichigan as a way to prepare themselves for district-level positions.

Figure 2: Why Sitting and Aspiring Leader Fellows Applied to TeachMichigan, Top Two Factors

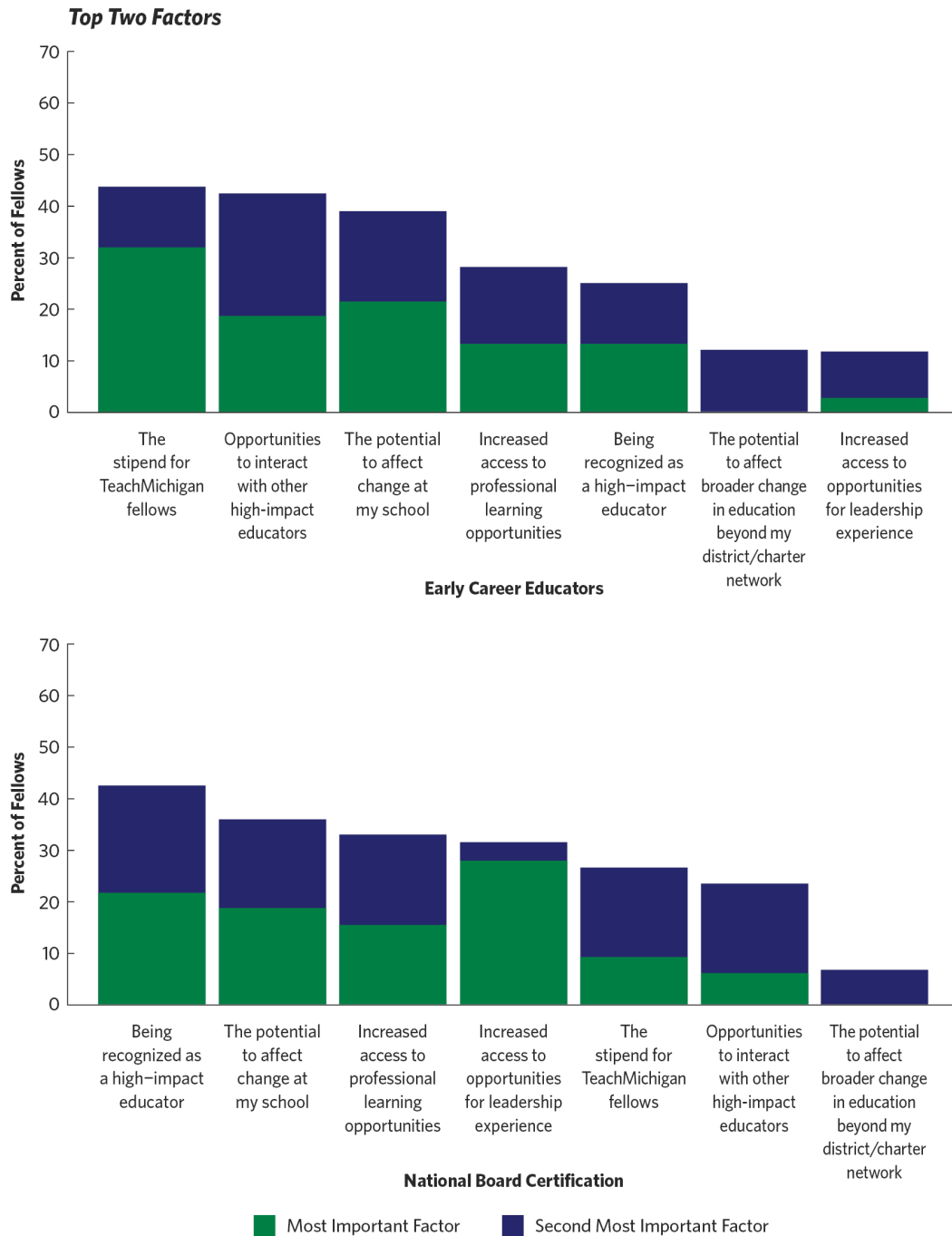


Respondents were asked "We are interested in learning about why you applied to become a TeachMichigan fellow. From the following factors please indicate how strongly each influenced your decision to apply to TeachMichigan."

The scale for this item is 1-Not a Factor, 2-A Minor Factor, 3-A Moderate Factor, 4-A Major Factor, 5-A Key Factor. If a respondent selected multiple key or major factors, they were asked to rank order those factors.



**Figure 3: Why Early Career Educators and National Board Certification Fellows Applied to TeachMichigan, Top Two Factors**



Respondents were asked “We are interested in learning about why you applied to become a TeachMichigan fellow. From the following factors please indicate how strongly each influenced your decision to apply to TeachMichigan.”

The scale for this item is 1-Not a Factor, 2-A Minor Factor, 3-A Moderate Factor, 4-A Major Factor, 5-A Key Factor. If a respondent selected multiple key or major factors, they were asked to rank order those factors.

For early career educators, shown in the top of Figure 3, the stipend for TeachMichigan fellows was the highest ranked component, with just over 40% of respondents in this cohort identifying it as the most or second most important factor in their decision. Because early career educators tend to have lower average pay than educators in other roles or with more experience, the stipend for fellows likely represents a larger share of their salary, which may make TeachMichigan particularly attractive for this group. However, early career fellows also selected “opportunities to interact with other high-impact educators” and “the potential to affect change at my school” as the most important reasons why they applied to TeachMichigan nearly as often as the stipend, suggesting that they also value opportunities to build community and make an impact in their school.

Slightly more than 40% of national board certification fellows selected “being recognized as a high-impact educator” among the two most important factors in why they applied to TeachMichigan, as seen in the bottom Figure 3. National board certification fellows are the only cohort that ranked recognition so highly as no other cohort ranked this factor higher than fourth. On this point, it is important to note that, to this group of fellows, recognition may come from being selected selection into TeachMichigan and from earning national board certification through the fellowship. National board certification fellows also seem to value the elements of TeachMichigan that aim to build educators’ capacity to make a school-wide impact, as more than 30% identified “the potential to affect change at my school” and “increased access to opportunities for leadership experience” in their top two reasons for applying to TeachMichigan.

Looking across cohorts reveals several interesting patterns. “Increased access to opportunities for leadership experience” ranked in the top two factors for both aspiring leaders as well as sitting leaders, and among national board certification fellows was selected as the single most important factor more than any other component of TeachMichigan. This implies that experienced educators are looking to advance their career and see TeachMichigan as a way to prepare themselves for a larger role. Additionally, “the potential to affect change at my school” ranked in the top three factors for aspiring leaders, early career educators, and national board certification fellows, highlighting that fellows who are not currently in a leadership role are looking for ways to make an impact beyond their classroom. At the same time, while fellows, on average, did report that “the potential to affect broader change in education beyond my district/charter network” as a “major factor” in why they applied to TeachMichigan, as seen in Figure 1, no fellows in any cohort indicated this was the most important factor in why they applied to TeachMichigan, and fewer than 15% in all cohorts indicated it was the second most important factor.

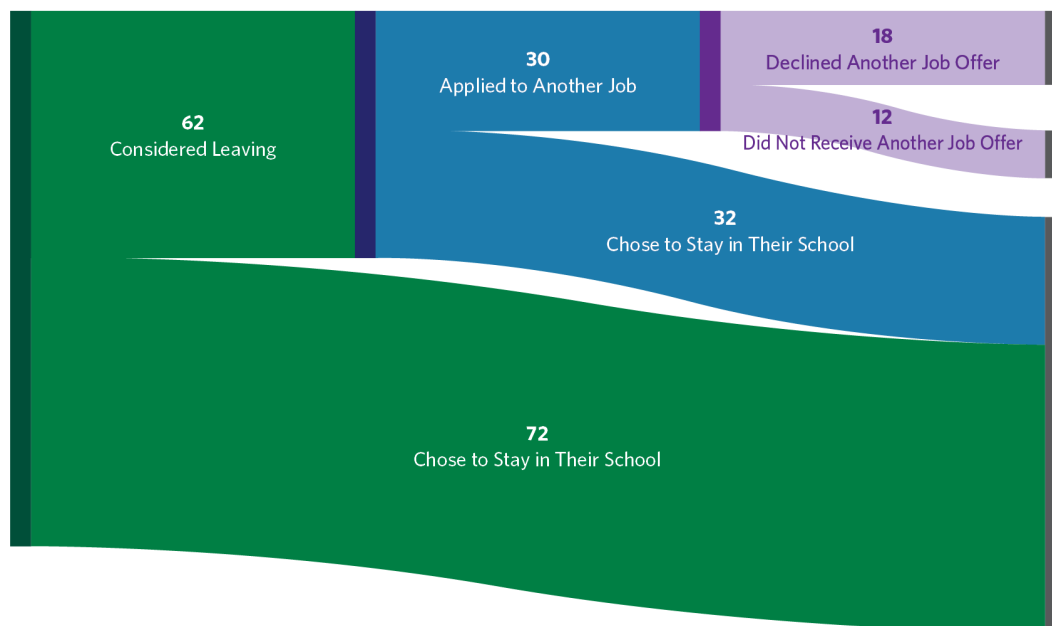
## FELLOWS' PRIOR CAREER INTENTIONS

TeachMichigan explicitly aims to promote teacher retention. To examine how being invited into TeachMichigan may have shaped fellows' career intentions, we draw from a set of survey items that asked all fellows if they considered leaving their job between the previous school year and the present school year. If fellows reported that they had considered leaving their job, the survey asked additional questions about whether they applied to another job in the same school, a job in a different school, or a job outside of education altogether. Finally, if a fellow reported that they had applied to at least one other job, the survey asked if they received any other job offer. To analyze these intentions, we drop survey responses from fellows who were part of the TeachMichigan pilot in the 2022-2023 school year because, having already experienced TeachMichigan, they may be less likely to have looked for other work. We also drop responses from fellows who reported that they started their current job in the 2023-2024 school year since they had experienced a job change immediately before joining TeachMichigan. This results in a sample of 134 fellows from all four cohorts.

Fellows' career intentions are illustrated in Figure 4. Starting on the left-hand side, the green bar represents our analytical sample of 134 fellows. Moving to the right, the next bar, in blue, represents the number of fellows who thought about leaving their job. This shows that just under half of all fellows, 46% (n=62), considered leaving their job between the 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 school years. Moving again to the right shows that, of this group who considered leaving their job, slightly less than half (n=30) actually applied to another job, represented by the purple bar, while the others chose to remain in the same position in their school. Finally, the top right side of Figure 4 shows whether the fellows who applied to at least one other job received any job offer. Of the fellows who applied, 60% received another job offer and declined it to remain in their role. In separate analyses not shown here, we find consistency in the pattern of fellows' career intentions across cohorts. This shows that a sizable number of fellows at least considered leaving their position and that a significant number of fellows who considered leaving their job applied for a new position. It will be important to examine fellows' career intentions, along with their actual employment trajectories, because turnover may occur up to two or three years after teachers consider leaving their position (Harbatkin et al., 2023).

Figure 4. Fellows' Career Intentions

134 Fellows



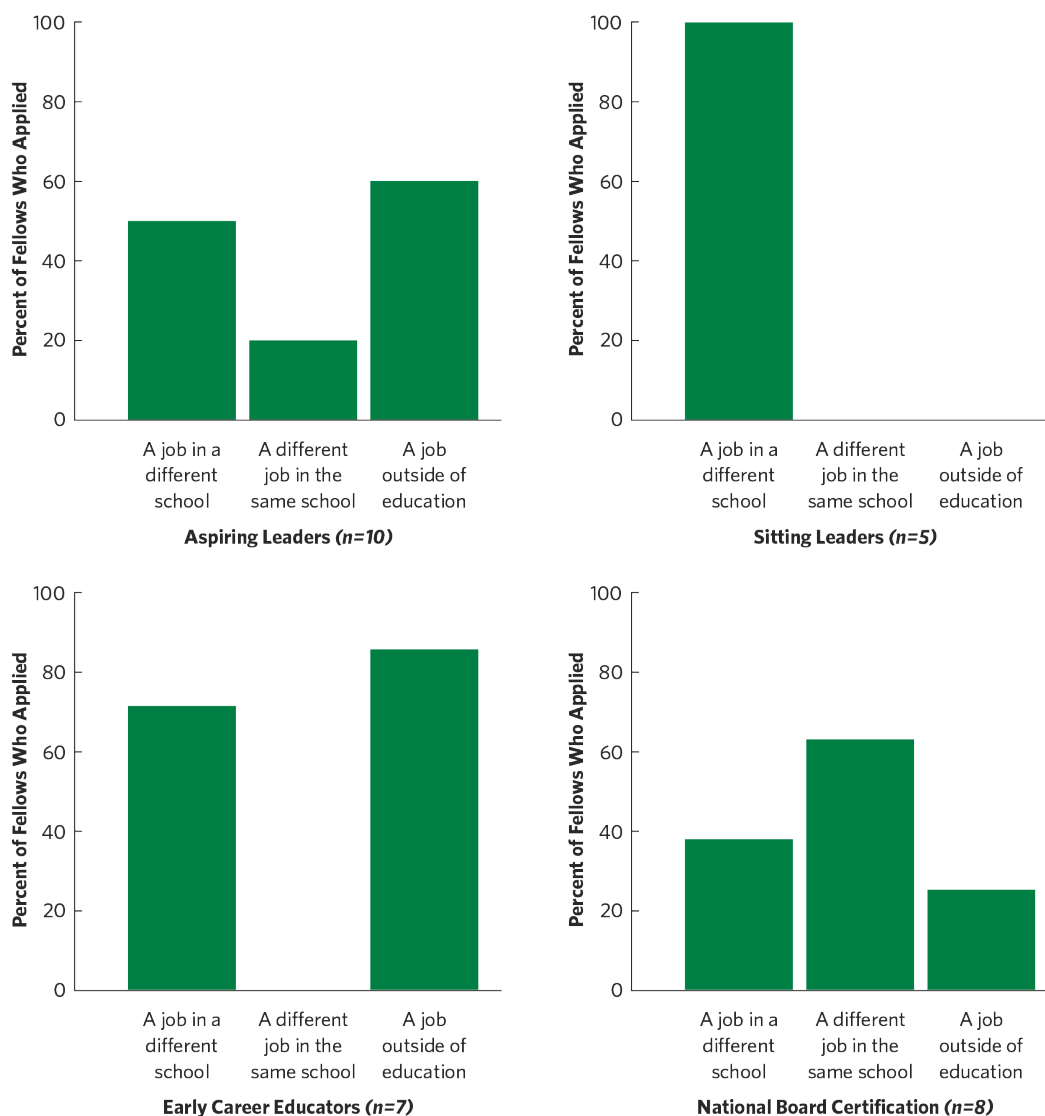
*Fellows were first asked “Between last school year and this school year, did you consider leaving your job?” If they answered yes, they were asked three questions: “Did you apply for a different job within your school?,” “Did you apply for a job in another school?,” and “Did you apply for a job outside of education?” If they answered yes to any of those three questions, they were then asked “Did you receive any other job offers?”*

While the pattern of fellows' career intentions is similar across cohorts, we do find differences between cohorts when looking at the kinds of positions fellows applied to. Figure 5 shows, among the 30 fellows who applied to at least one other job, the share of fellows who applied for a different position in the same school, a position in a new school, or a job outside of education, separately for each cohort. Note that percentages may sum to greater than 100 because fellows could report that they applied to multiple kinds of positions.

Starting with the top left of Figure 5, of the 10 aspiring leader fellows (out of 44 total fellows) who applied to any other job before joining TeachMichigan, 20% applied to a job in the same school and 50% applied to a job in a different school. Being that this group of fellows have signaled a desire to assume a leadership role, that they applied to other jobs within education is not surprising. However, 60% applied to a job outside of education. On one hand, this may give cause for concern since this is a group of relatively more experienced educators. On the other, though, this could be an early indicator that TeachMichigan encourages educators to remain in the profession given that these fellows ultimately remained in their position.

Moving to the top right of Figure 5, one can see that all of the sitting leader fellows who applied to another job (5 out of 17 fellows) applied to a position in another school. That nearly one-third (5/17) of sitting leader fellows applied for a position in a different school may be reflective of challenging working conditions for, or unique pressures faced by, leaders in districts with TeachMichigan fellows. It is notable that no sitting leader fellows applied to a job outside of education, suggesting a high level of commitment among this group. It is perhaps unsurprising that no sitting leaders applied to a different job in the same school as that would most likely constitute a demotion.

**Figure 5. Positions TeachMichigan Fellows Applied To, Of Fellows Who Applied to at Least One Other Position**



*If a fellow reported that they considered leaving their job between the prior school year and the current school year, they were asked "Did you apply for a different job within your school?," "Did you apply for a job in another school?," and "Did you apply for a job outside of education?"*

Turning to the bottom left of Figure 5, of the seven fellows who applied to another position (out of 33 total fellows), none applied to a different position in the same school while roughly 70% applied to a job in a different school and 85% applied to a job outside of education. This pattern may be due to several factors. It may be that early career educators did not have the experience or qualifications needed for other positions in their schools. At the same time, this pattern may speak to challenging working conditions in the high-need schools targeted by TeachMichigan.

National board certification fellows, shown in the bottom right of Figure 5, differ from all other cohorts in that they were far less likely to apply to a job outside their school and far more likely to apply to a different job in the same school. Out of the 8 national board fellows who applied to any other job (out of 40 total fellows), just 25% applied to a job outside of education and only 38% applied to a job in a different school. Nearly two-thirds applied to a job in the same school, suggesting that even when fellows from this cohort considered leaving their position, they remained committed to their school.

## TAKEAWAYS AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings presented here reveal several key takeaways about TeachMichigan fellows and what attracted them to the program. First, fellows saw value in all key components of TeachMichigan. While different aspects of TeachMichigan were more and less attractive to fellows in different cohorts, there are nevertheless noteworthy themes that emerge. One is that fellows in the sitting leader, aspiring leader, and national board certification cohorts all placed significant weight on “increased access to opportunities for leadership experience.” Another is that fellows in the early career educator, aspiring leader, and national board certification cohorts were especially attracted by “the potential to affect change at my school.” This suggests that TeachMichigan fellows are particularly looking for ways to have an impact outside their classroom. At the same time, fellows across all four cohorts placed considerably less weight on having an impact beyond their district, suggesting that fellows may have put somewhat less thought into systems-level change at the time they applied to TeachMichigan. Interestingly, while the stipend for TeachMichigan fellows is large, at \$35,000 over the course of three years, only early career educator fellows identified the stipend among the two most attractive elements of the fellowship, implying that the professional development and support elements of TeachMichigan are at least as important as the additional compensation fellows receive. Second, a significant share of TeachMichigan fellows are at risk of leaving their school or the profession. Nearly half of all fellows considered leaving their job after the 2022-2023 school year, and nearly one in four fellows applied to another position. Though some of this may be due to fellows looking to take on leadership roles, such as aspiring leaders applying to leadership positions, turnover of any kind can be disruptive for students. And at the same time, many fellows, especially in the early career educator and aspiring leader cohorts, sought to leave the profession, suggesting that specialized supports may be needed for these groups.

These takeaways have several implications for how the TeachMichigan program could be structured to meet the aims of both the program itself and its fellows. First, it will be important for TeachMichigan staff to foster fellows' leadership capacities and, where possible, work to promote opportunities for fellows to exercise them. Second, to the extent that TeachMichigan aims to promote systems-level change, programming may be needed to increase buy-in for that part of its mission. Third, building systems of support and providing training in wellness and/or self-care may be needed to achieve TeachMichigan's goal of reducing teacher turnover, especially for early career educator and aspiring leader fellows, who are much more likely to signal that they may leave the profession.

## REFERENCES

Harbatkin, E., Nguyen, T., Strunk, K. O., Burns, J., & Moran, A. (2023). *Should I stay or should I go (later)? Teacher intentions and turnover in low-performing schools before and during the COVID-19 pandemic*. (EdWorkingPaper: 23-815). Retrieved from Annenberg Institute at Brown University: <https://doi.org/10.26300/d7dh-kq82>