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# The Educational Environment in TeachMichigan Fellows' Schools

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# The Educational Environment in TeachMichigan Fellows' Schools

TeachMichigan aims to improve student and educator outcomes and increase teacher retention in poverty dense schools. The TeachMichigan theory of change recognizes that these outcomes are shaped by the environment in which educators work. As such, the fellowship seeks to position fellows to improve aspects of the educational environment, which is composed of five key elements: 1) working conditions, 2) school culture, 3) instruction and instructional climate, 4) professional community and networks, and 5) school and district leadership.

TeachMichigan's programming provides fellows with the knowledge and skills to improve specific elements of the educational environment in their schools and districts. By examining the educational environment in fellows' schools, we can gain insight into how these educators view the educational environment in their respective school contexts and learn more about how these perspectives differ between educators with different levels of experience and authority. Additionally, it is important to examine the educational environment where fellows work at the outset of the TeachMichigan program to serve as a basis of comparison for future research. We do that here by looking specifically at three elements of the educational environment in schools where TeachMichigan fellows work: working conditions, school culture, and school and district leadership.

In the sections that follow, we first discuss the data and methods used in this report, then describe what the data tell us about the working conditions, school culture, and school and district leadership in TeachMichigan fellows' schools. We conclude with a discussion of the educational environments in which TeachMichigan fellows work and the implications of these environments for TeachMichigan's programming and intended outcomes.

Overall, we find that TeachMichigan fellows work in schools that likely have more challenging instructional environments than the typical school in Michigan. However, fellows tend to have fairly positive outlooks on the working conditions and culture in their schools. Notable exceptions to this are their perspectives on the challenges of student attendance and access to resources for innovation. We do find that these results vary by fellowship cohort and across partner districts. Fellows are less positive about their agency and opportunities for leadership in their schools and their perceptions of district leadership. Although they feel confident in their own abilities to speak up and innovate, they do not feel that they have significant agency in decision-making that impacts their schools and classrooms. Their perspectives on district and board leadership both suggest that fellows think their leaders value them but do not actively seek out their input or understand their experiences. Again, many of these results vary by cohort and/or district. These findings, how they diverge across subgroups, and what these results tell us about the educational environments in fellows' schools are unpacked in the sections that follow.

## DATA AND METHODS

We rely on two sources of data for this report. The first is statewide student- and educator-level administrative data provided by the Michigan Education Research Institute. Educator-level data include teacher race and ethnicity, teachers' years of teaching experience, teacher mobility, and school characteristics. Student-level data include student demographics, including race and ethnicity as well as socio-economic, English learner, and special education status, and student outcomes, including chronic absenteeism and achievement on state-wide assessments. We use these data to describe the characteristics of the students and teachers in the schools where TeachMichigan fellows work and compare them with other schools in the state. "Schools with TeachMichigan Fellows" include any school where at least one TeachMichigan fellow had at least one teaching assignment and we identify all other schools as "schools without TeachMichigan fellows." For instance, if a fellow is a music teacher who provides some instruction in one elementary school and one middle school in their district, both of those schools would be identified as "TeachMichigan schools" even if no other fellows work at either school. We use this definition because TeachMichigan aims to bring about systems-level change, which could in theory be catalyzed by a single fellow.

Our second source of data is a survey of TeachMichigan fellows we conducted in September 2023, shortly after the beginning of the 2023-2024 school year. We received 221 survey responses, a response rate of 95%, and asked fellows about a range of topics, including school and district leadership, leadership opportunities, school culture, working conditions, educator empowerment, professional learning, instructional culture, professional community, compensation, and reasons for applying to TeachMichigan. Because this data is only available for TeachMichigan

fellows, this data does not allow comparisons to educators who are not participating in The TeachMichigan fellowship program, but it will allow us to track fellows' perceptions of working conditions in their schools over time. In this report, we focus on the sets of items that capture fellows' perceptions about their school environment, including working conditions, school culture, and leadership. Responses to these items were recorded using a 5- or 6-point Likert scale. We provide additional detail on the items and their response scales below in the relevant sections.

In our analysis of both administrative and survey data, we examine all fellows who were active as of fall 2023. This includes the fellows who entered TeachMichigan in fall 2023 for their first year of fellowship as well as the set of fellows who were part of a TeachMichigan pilot that began in fall 2022. In total, there were 235 fellows as of fall 2023: 60 who began in fall 2022 and 175 who started in fall 2023. This includes 61 Early Career Educator (ECE) fellows, 68 National Board Certification (NBC) fellows, 73 Aspiring Leader (AL) fellows, and 19 Sitting Leader (SL) fellows. We use data from all fellows in this report because this approach allows us to broadly examine the characteristics of schools where all fellows work. Additionally, the analyses presented here serve as a baseline or reference point for future analyses that examine changes over time. In future reports, we may focus on specific subsets of fellows to more deeply understand the implementation and impact of TeachMichigan.

Our analysis centers on descriptive statistics. In most cases, we report means to characterize what is "typical" of the schools and districts where TeachMichigan fellows work and fellows' perspectives on their educational environment. To illuminate various aspects of fellows' educational environments, where relevant we examine differences across schools with and without TeachMichigan fellows, differences across the districts where TeachMichigan fellows work, and differences between the fellowship cohorts within TeachMichigan.

## WORKING CONDITIONS

In this section we examine the organizational conditions that shape fellows' abilities to carry out their duties and drive school improvement efforts. We consider two questions:

1. How do working conditions in schools with TeachMichigan fellows compare to working conditions in schools without TeachMichigan fellows?
2. How do fellows perceive the working conditions in their schools?

To answer the first question, we draw on student- and educator-level administrative data from the Michigan Education Research Institute. We compare student, school, and teacher characteristics in Michigan schools with TeachMichigan fellows and without TeachMichigan fellows. By analyzing student and teacher demographics, student outcomes, school urbanicity, and teacher experience and mobility, we are able

to offer insight into the populations these schools serve, the working conditions in the schools, and the unique challenges that they face.

To answer the second question, we draw on results from a survey we administered to TeachMichigan fellows in fall 2023, early in the school year. In this section, we focus on the items about working conditions in fellows' schools, specifically behavior management and hindrances to school improvement efforts. These perspectives serve as a baseline of fellows' perceptions of the conditions in their schools and will allow us to measure if and how these conditions change as the fellowship progresses.

In the sections that follow, we compare TeachMichigan fellows' schools to schools without TeachMichigan fellows. TeachMichigan fellows' schools refers to all of the schools in Michigan where TeachMichigan fellows work. Schools without TeachMichigan fellows refers to all of the schools in Michigan without any TeachMichigan fellows on staff. First, we examine student and school characteristics across these two groups, including student demographics, student outcomes, and school urbanicity. We then compare teacher characteristics in TeachMichigan fellows' and schools without TeachMichigan fellows, with a focus on teacher demographics, experience, and mobility. Finally, we turn to the survey data to analyze fellows' perspectives on the working conditions in their schools. Overall, we find that although TeachMichigan fellows tend to work in schools with what are likely more challenging conditions, the fellows have fairly positive perspectives on their working conditions, with some notable differences across cohorts and districts.

## Student and School Characteristics

First, we look at state level student panel data from the 2022-2023 school year to better understand the school and student characteristics in schools with TeachMichigan fellows and schools without TeachMichigan fellows. Specifically, we look at student demographics, student outcomes, and school urbanicity. These comparisons help to shed light on the conditions in schools where TeachMichigan fellows work relative to the schools in the rest of the state. Because we are examining working conditions as a school level issue, our student characteristic data for schools with and without TeachMichigan fellows was generated by taking the school level mean for every traditional public and charter school in Michigan and then averaging together the results for schools with TeachMichigan fellows and schools without TeachMichigan fellows.

Generally, we find that TeachMichigan fellows work in more racially diverse schools and serve students with higher needs. Compared to schools without TeachMichigan fellows, schools with TeachMichigan fellows have, on average, higher rates of chronic absenteeism, lower student achievement, more English learners, and more economically disadvantaged students. This suggests that TeachMichigan fellows tend to serve a more diverse population and work in more challenging instructional

environments. Table 1 shows the means for schools with and without TeachMichigan fellows for each of these characteristics.

Table 1. Mean School Characteristics for Schools With TeachMichigan Fellows and Schools Without TeachMichigan Fellows			
	School Characteristic	Schools Without TM Fellows	Schools With TM Fellows
Student Demographics (Percentages)	Female	47.41	49.59**
	White	65.04	20.22***
	Black or African American	17.61	57.99***
	Latine	8.67	11.01*
	Asian	2.64	3.43
	Native American or Pacific Islander	0.86	2.59***
	Two or More Races	5.18	4.75
	Economically Disadvantaged	60.01	83.46***
	English Learners	6.41	9.96**
	Students with Disabilities	19.73	16.10*
Student Outcomes	Chronic Absenteeism	32.68	54.56***
	SAT Reading	456.09	427.92**
	SAT Math	433.19	400.60**
	MSTEP ELA/Reading z-score <sup>1</sup>	-0.08	-0.43***
	MSTEP Math z-score <sup>1</sup>	-0.09	-0.54***
School Urbanicity	Urban Schools	20.90	66.67***
	Suburban or Town Schools	54.30	21.21***
	Rural Schools	24.59	11.11**
Observations <sup>2</sup>	-	3,339	99

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

Source: Urbanicity obtained from the Educational Entity Master, all other data are from the Michigan Education Research Institute.

<sup>1</sup> Z-scores are calculated at the student level within each grade, subject, and year to have a mean of 0 and standard deviation of 1. Consistent with the approach used throughout this table, we first aggregate Z-scores to the school level to create a measure of typical student achievement at each school. When then take a simple average of these school-level measures, which are the figures presented in this table. Variation across schools in the number of students along with the mean and distribution of their achievement allows the school-level means for both groups to be negative.



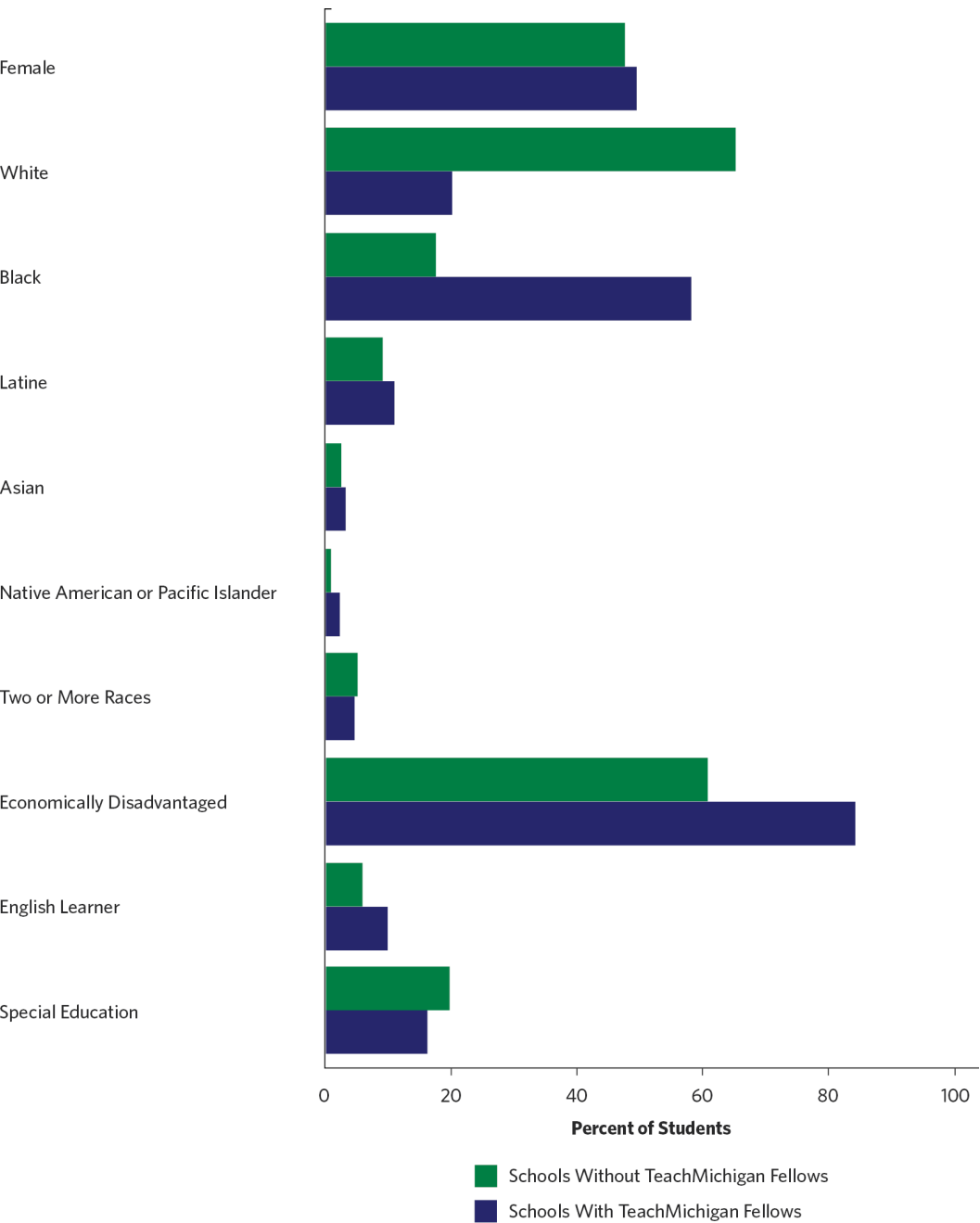
<sup>2</sup> *The number of observations shown here includes schools that are included anywhere in this table. Some variables are not available for all schools (for instance, high schools will not have MSTEP scores and elementary schools will not have SAT scores) and so different variables will have a different number of observations.*

The differences between schools with and without TeachMichigan fellows are statistically significant across most demographic groups represented here. These groups diverge in a few notable ways. First, schools with TeachMichigan fellows serve a more racially and ethnically diverse student population than schools without TeachMichigan fellows (see Figure 1). Schools with TeachMichigan fellows have on average about 1/3 the number of White students and 3 times as many Black students. The fact that TeachMichigan fellows tend to work in more racially diverse schools reflects the fellowship's intentional focus on diversity emphasized in the core values of the TeachMichigan theory of change.

Second, we can see that schools with TeachMichigan fellows typically serve more economically disadvantaged and English learner students than schools without TeachMichigan fellows, but fewer students with disabilities (see Figure 1). TeachMichigan schools have on average about 1.4 times as many economically disadvantaged students and 1.5 times as many English learners. This suggests that TeachMichigan fellows work in schools that provide a wider range of services to their students than the average school without TeachMichigan fellows. Additionally, the students in schools with TeachMichigan fellows likely face greater disadvantages due to social and economic inequality, often placing greater responsibility on teachers and schools to address student needs.

Interestingly, TeachMichigan schools tend to serve about 20% fewer students with disabilities. Both public and charter schools with TeachMichigan fellows serve fewer students with disabilities than the average Michigan school without TeachMichigan fellows.

Figure 1. Student Demographics in Schools With TeachMichigan Fellows and Schools Without TeachMichigan Fellows



Data for this graph comes from the MERI Student Panel 2022-2023 school year.

We also see significant differences in student outcomes between schools with and without TeachMichigan fellows. Indicators like chronic absenteeism and student achievement on standardized tests can provide insight into the instructional environment in schools and the types of challenges that educators are facing.

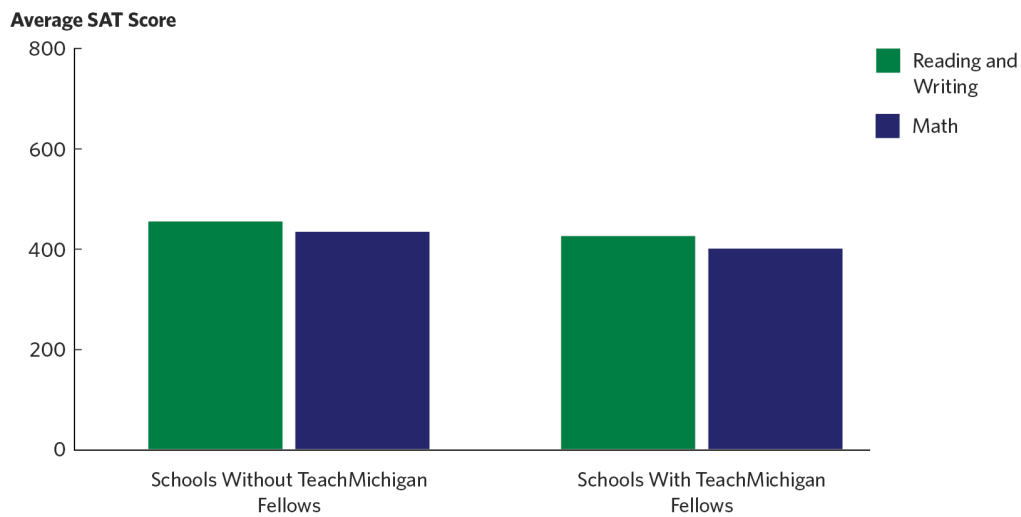
In Table 1, we see that average rates of chronic absenteeism, measured as the percentage of students who miss 10% or more days of school, are statistically significantly higher in TeachMichigan fellows' schools. In schools without TeachMichigan fellows, the average rate of chronic absence is 33%. In schools with TeachMichigan fellows, it is 1.6 times higher at 55% ( $p < 0.001$ ). This disparity points to what is likely a more challenging instructional context in schools with TeachMichigan fellows.

Chronic absenteeism has been shown to negatively impact the academic achievement of both chronically absent students and their classmates (Gershenson et al., 2017; Gottfried, 2019). The resulting disruption to the classroom learning environment likely makes teachers' jobs more challenging as they work to meet the needs of students who have missed substantial instructional content and may be less familiar with the norms and routines of being in school. As the causes of chronic absenteeism are often complex and linked to social and economic disparities (Singer et al., 2021), the higher rates of chronic absenteeism in TeachMichigan schools suggest that fellows serve a higher need student population.

Table 1 also demonstrates that fellows tend to work in schools with lower average performance levels than what is typical in Michigan schools without TeachMichigan fellows. These differences are presented graphically in Figure 2. Figure 2 shows average raw SAT scores, measured on a scale from 200 to 800. Because the SAT is taken in 11th grade, these values only compare high schools with and without TeachMichigan fellows. Figure 2 also shows average standardized MSTEP English Language Arts (ELA) and Math scores. Here, the data reflects standard deviations from the mean. These values compare schools with and without TeachMichigan fellows serving grades three through seven (students in grade 8 take the PSAT rather than the MSTEP).

Compared to schools without TeachMichigan fellows, average SAT scores in schools with TeachMichigan fellows are 29 points lower in reading and 33 points lower in Math. The standard deviation in SAT scores is approximately 50 points, meaning that students in schools with TeachMichigan fellows score, on average, about half a standard deviation lower on the SAT than in schools without TeachMichigan fellows. We see a similar difference in MSTEP scores, with students in schools with TeachMichigan fellows scoring, on average, about half a standard deviation lower in both reading and math. This suggests that TeachMichigan fellows work in more instructionally challenging conditions, likely under pressure to make larger achievement gains with their students.

Figure 2. Average Student SAT Scores in Schools With TeachMichigan Fellows and Schools Without TeachMichigan Fellows



Data for this graph comes from the MERI Student Panel 2022-2023 school year.

Lastly, we consider the differences in school context between schools with and without TeachMichigan fellows. Table 1 indicates that, compared to schools without TeachMichigan fellows, schools with TeachMichigan fellows are statistically significantly more likely to be in urban areas and less likely to be in suburban and rural areas. The proportion of urban schools with TeachMichigan fellows is about three times that of schools without TeachMichigan fellows. However, the proportion of suburban and rural schools with TeachMichigan fellows is about half that of schools without TeachMichigan fellows.

As TeachMichigan has made it a priority to target schools serving more diverse populations with higher needs, it is not surprising that a greater proportion of TeachMichigan fellows work in schools serving urban areas. These schools also tend to have more challenging instructional environments than schools in suburban areas, in part because of a combination of the factors described above. The student populations in urban areas often have higher rates of economically disadvantaged and English learner students, are more likely to be impacted by social and economic inequality, face more barriers to attendance, and, because of a combination of these and other factors, demonstrate lower performance on standardized tests. This means that the schools and educators serving students in urban areas are typically working to overcome a multitude of barriers to student learning.

Importantly, rural schools face some similar challenges. Given TeachMichigan's intentional work to include rural districts in the first year of the fellowship, it is possible that, in the future, the proportion of rural schools with TeachMichigan fellows might increase.

Overall, we see that TeachMichigan fellows tend to work in schools with more instructionally challenging environments than a typical Michigan school without TeachMichigan fellows. Fellows' schools serve higher rates of economically disadvantaged and English learner students, see higher rates of chronic absenteeism, and report lower average student performance. The educators in these schools are likely under increased pressure to make large instructional gains while simultaneously working to provide the supports their students require and account for the myriad challenges their students experience.

## Teacher Characteristics

We examine state level teacher panel data from fall 2022 and fall 2023 to better understand the teacher characteristics in TeachMichigan and non-TeachMichigan schools. These comparisons provide additional insight into the conditions in schools where TeachMichigan fellows work. As we did with the student characteristics, teacher characteristic data for schools with and without TeachMichigan was generated by taking the school level mean for every traditional public and charter school in Michigan and then averaging together the results for schools with TeachMichigan fellows and schools without TeachMichigan fellows.

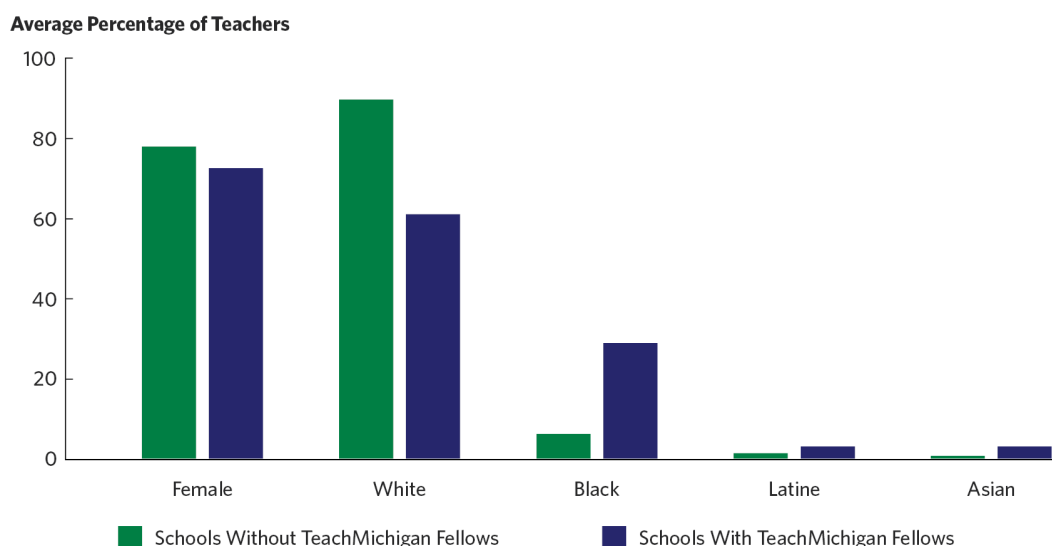
We find that TeachMichigan fellows, on average, work in schools with more racially diverse and less experienced instructional staff. Compared to schools without TeachMichigan fellows, the teachers in schools with TeachMichigan fellows are more likely to reflect the diverse student populations that they serve. These schools are thus better equipped to deliver culturally relevant pedagogy, a core value in TeachMichigan's theory of change, because the students can benefit from learning from educators who reflect their own identities. However, schools with TeachMichigan fellows also have higher proportions of new and early career educators and experience greater turnover. Therefore, they also face the challenges of a less experienced instructional staff and additional obstacles to building and retaining institutional knowledge.

Table 2. Mean Teacher Characteristics for Schools With TeachMichigan Fellows and Schools Without TeachMichigan Fellows			
	Teacher Characteristic	Schools without TM Fellows	Schools with TM Fellows
Teacher Demographics (Percentages)	Female	78.00	72.53**
	White	89.80	60.97***
	Black or African American	6.32	28.89***
	Latine	1.49	3.23***
	Asian	0.94	3.14***
Teacher Experience (Percentages)	First Year Teacher	5.61	10.60***
	0- 4 Years of Experience	24.45	35.88***
	5-9 Years of Experience	15.86	17.09
	10- 14 Years of Experience	13.14	10.47*
	15 + Years of Experience	46.55	36.55***
Teacher Mobility (Percentages)	Entering	11.67	20.47***
	Returning	78.85	71.28***
	Exiting	10.90	15.00**
	Transfer within district	3.10	6.01**
	Transfer between districts	4.41	5.21
Observations	-	3,339	99

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

The differences between schools with and without TeachMichigan fellows are statistically significant across all demographic groups represented here. Most notably, we can see that schools with TeachMichigan fellows have a more diverse teaching staff than schools without TeachMichigan fellows (see Figure 3). Compared to schools without TeachMichigan fellows, schools with TeachMichigan fellows have on average about 2/3 the number of white teachers and nearly 5 times as many Black teachers. The teachers in these schools are more likely to reflect the diverse student populations that they typically serve, creating more opportunities for teachers and students to build relationships over shared identities. That TeachMichigan fellows tend to work in schools with more racially diverse students and staff reflects the fellowship's intentional focus on diversity and culturally relevant pedagogy emphasized in the core values of their theory of change.

**Figure 3. Teacher Demographics in Schools With TeachMichigan Fellows and Schools Without TeachMichigan Fellows**



*Data for this graph comes from the MERI Teacher Mobility Panel, Fall 2023.*

Data on teacher experience and teacher mobility allow us to gain additional insight into fellows' working conditions. We find that on average schools with TeachMichigan fellows have a more inexperienced pool of teachers and higher levels of staff instability. In Table 2, we see statistically significant differences in the proportion of first year teachers, teachers with zero to four years of experience, teachers with 15 or more years of experience, teachers entering the profession, returning to their school, exiting the profession, and transferring within their district.

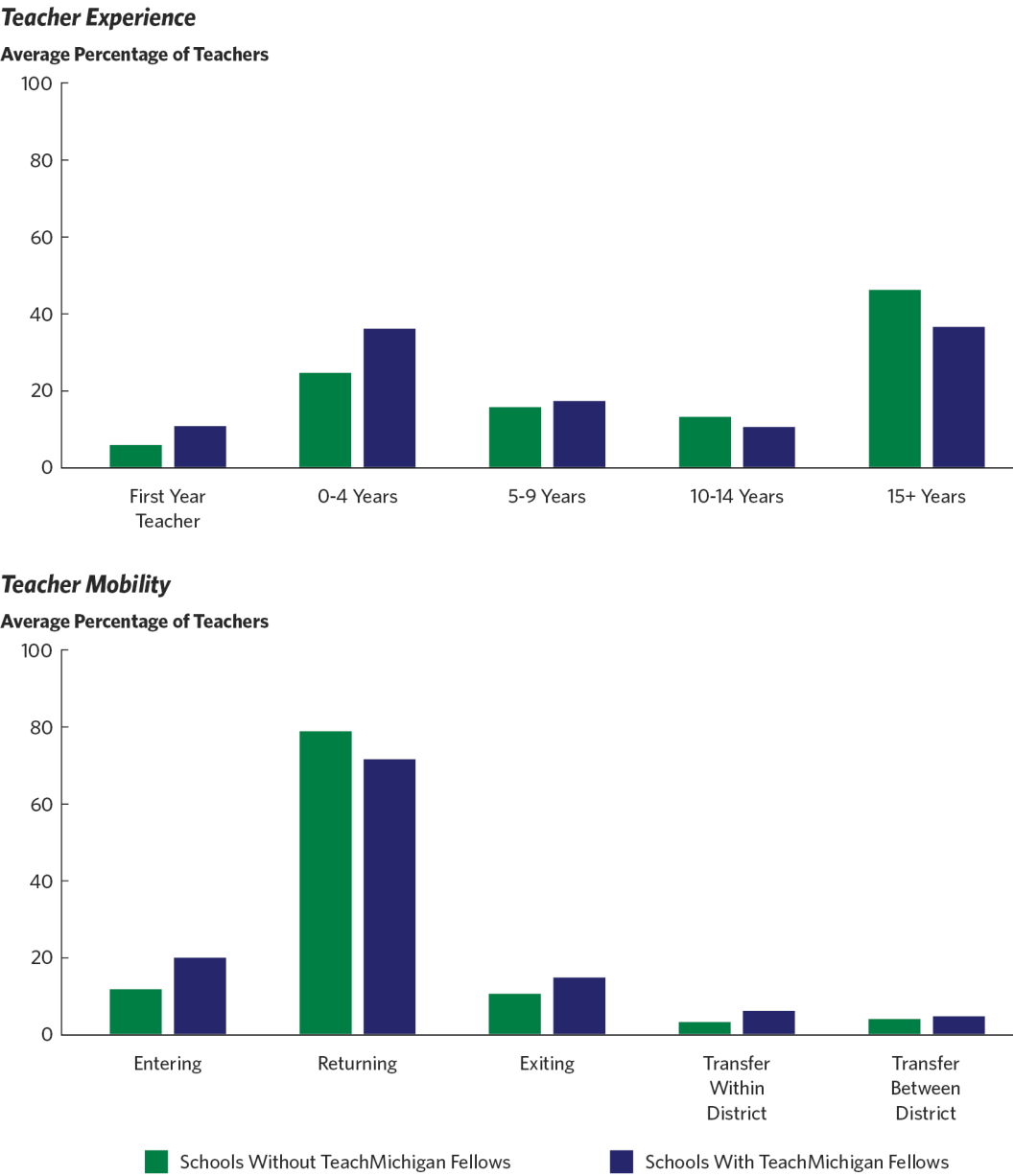
Looking first at experience, we see that schools with TeachMichigan fellows have on average a more inexperienced pool of teachers than schools without TeachMichigan fellows (see Figure 4). TeachMichigan schools have nearly twice as many first-year teachers, about 50% more teachers with zero to four years of experience, and about 20% fewer teachers with 15 or more years of experience.

Examining teacher mobility, we see that, in schools with TeachMichigan fellows, more teachers are entering the profession, fewer teachers are returning to the same school, more teachers are exiting the profession, and more teachers transferred into their school from another school within the same district. Specifically, fellows' schools have about 1.6 times as many entering teachers, 1.3 times as many exiting teachers, twice as many teachers transferring in from other schools in the district, and about 10% fewer returning teachers.

The mobility data use a combination of fall 2023 and fall 2022 data. Returning and exiting values use fall 2022 data. A teacher is returning if they are in the same school in both fall 2022 and fall 2023. They are considered exiting if they are teaching in fall

2022 but not observed in the fall 2023 data. The entering and transfer values use fall 2023 data. A teacher is entering if they are teaching in fall 2023 but not observed in the fall 2022 data. Transfers within and between districts measure whether a teacher teaching in fall 2023 was in a different school in the same district or different district in fall 2022. Because we use two different years of teacher data with both forward and backward-looking measures, the mobility numbers in Figure 6 do not sum to 100%.

Figure 4. Teacher Experience and Mobility in Schools With TeachMichigan Fellows and Schools Without TeachMichigan Fellows



Data for this graph comes from the MERI Teacher Mobility Panel, Fall 2023 and Fall 2022.



These values suggest that TeachMichigan fellows tend to work in schools with lower average levels of teacher experience and higher levels of teacher churn. This indicates that students in TeachMichigan schools are more likely to have a novice and possibly less effective teacher in their classroom. More teachers in these schools are still developing foundational instructional practices and are likely less effective on average. For teachers, this may translate into additional burdens on teachers with more experience and teachers who have been in the same school for longer—categories that TeachMichigan’s AL and NBC fellows likely fall into. With higher rates of turnover, it is also likely that TeachMichigan schools face more challenges in building institutional knowledge and sustaining school improvement efforts, perhaps making the process of onboarding new educators even more challenging. While this suggests that TeachMichigan schools may, on average, have more challenging working environments than non-TeachMichigan schools, the higher turnover rates also point to an opportunity for TeachMichigan to improve teacher retention.

The fact that TeachMichigan schools have a slightly higher proportion of teachers who transferred there from another school in their district does point to the possibility that teachers are intentionally transferring into TeachMichigan schools. Although we cannot say this with certainty, it is possible that TeachMichigan may already be having some effect in attracting fellows to higher need schools.

## Fellow Perspectives on Working Conditions

In this section, we draw on results from the fall TeachMichigan fellow survey to better understand fellows’ perspectives on working conditions in their schools. Specifically, we ask about behavior management and, more broadly, about various organizational conditions that impact school improvement efforts. Fellow perceptions are reported using mean scores to reflect a typical fellows’ response to each item.

We find that fellows overall paint a somewhat positive picture of working conditions in their schools. However, there is variation in these perspectives across cohorts and districts. On average, fellows somewhat agree that their schools work to manage student behavior and maintain an orderly environment. They also view challenges related to resources and staff as only slight or moderate hindrances to school improvement. However, more substantial barriers were identified in relation to student and family contexts, and time constraints. These areas were perceived by fellows to present a “moderate” to “great hindrance” to achieving improvement goals, on average.

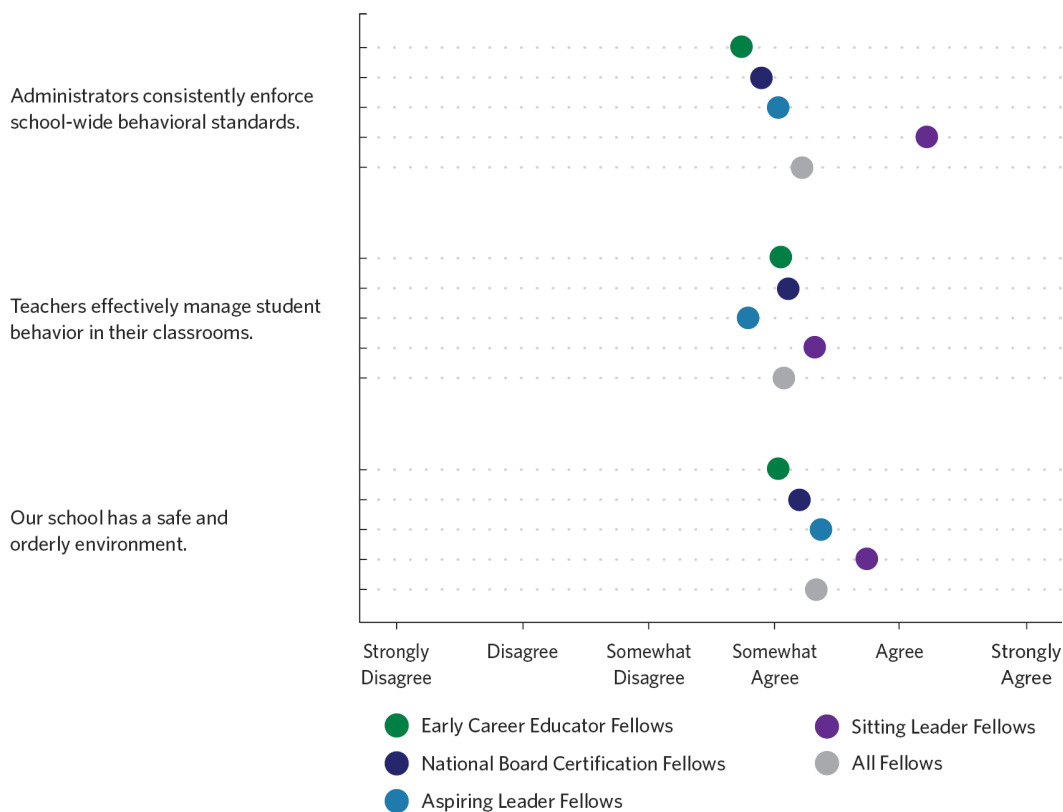
To begin, we examine fellows’ perceptions of behavior management and learning environments in their schools overall and between cohorts. Next, we look at the extent to which various challenges related to resources, staffing, students and families, and time constraints are perceived by fellows as hindrances to achieving their school’s improvement goals. We then delve into how fellows’ perceptions of hindrances to school improvement efforts varied between Early Career Educator (ECE), Aspiring Leader (AL), National Board Certification (NBC), and Sitting Leader (SL) cohorts and across TeachMichigan partner districts.

## Behavior Management

In our survey, we aimed to identify fellows' perceptions of behavior management in their schools. Fellows were asked the degree to which they agreed with the following statements: "teachers effectively manage student behavior in their classrooms," "administrators consistently enforce school-wide behavioral expectations," and "my school has a safe and orderly environment." Responses were recorded on a six-point scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Figure 5, below, shows mean responses for each item for all fellows and by cohort.

**Overall fellow perceptions.** Figure 5 illustrates that on average fellows have a positive view of behavior management in their schools. The data shows fellows perceive educators somewhat fulfill their roles in behavior management at their schools, reporting they "somewhat agree" that both teachers effectively manage student behavior, and administrators enforce school-wide behavioral expectations. Additionally, fellows report that they "somewhat agree" to "agree" that their schools have safe and orderly learning environments. These findings may suggest that fellows observe some room for improvement in behavior management strategies, but current practices are generally resulting in safe and orderly school environments conducive to student learning.

Figure 5. Perceptions of Behavior Management in Fellows' Schools



Source: Fall 2023 TeachMichigan Fellow Survey. All data collected by Education Policy Innovation Collaborative.

**Differences across cohorts.** When we disaggregate the data by cohort, we observe notable differences based on fellows' experience and educator roles. Figure 5 highlights how ECE fellows' perceptions differ markedly from their more experienced peers. These less experienced fellows hold a less positive perspective on behavior management in their schools, reporting lower levels of agreement than fellows in the NBC or SL cohort that teachers effectively manage student behavior. ECE fellows also reported less agreement than other cohorts being the only cohort to fall between "somewhat agree" to "somewhat disagree" on this item. Additionally, they report the least agreement that their school has a safe and orderly environment. This suggests that educators may have higher expectations for behavior management earlier in their careers, and perceptions of effective behavior management increase with experience. Additionally, the data may indicate early career educators could benefit from more training in effective behavior management strategies to create safe and orderly learning environments in their schools.

Figure 5 also shows that AL fellows are the most critical of teacher behavior management, reporting less agreement that teachers are effectively managing student behaviors in comparison with all other cohorts. This may suggest that they feel teachers could do more in managing student behavior in the classroom. Conversely, AL fellows report greater agreement of administrative behavior enforcement than ECE or NBC fellows. They also have the most positive perception of a safe and orderly school environment, second only to SLs. These differences in perceptions between aspiring leaders and their classroom teaching colleagues may suggest that these fellows are looking at behavior management issues through a dual teaching and administrative lens resulting in their perceptions shifting out of alignment with other classroom teaching oriented fellows.

SL perceptions on behavior management items differ considerably from fellows in all other cohorts. These fellows hold a more positive view on behavior management at their schools than fellows in classroom teaching oriented cohorts. Most notably, SL fellows report the greatest agreement that administrators enforce school-wide behavioral expectations, being the only fellows to report they "agree" to "strongly agree" on this item. Additionally, these fellows report the greatest agreement across cohorts that teachers effectively manage student behavior in their classrooms and are the only fellows leaning toward "agree" on the item measuring the perception of the school having a safe and orderly environment. The differences between SL perspectives and those of fellows in all other cohorts may indicate that administrators may have overly positive perceptions of behavior management in their schools.

**Differences across districts.** Table 3 displays the mean response for each behavior management item by TeachMichigan partner district. Districts are blinded consistent with our commitment to not identify individual districts in our survey analyses. We observe notable variation in perceptions of behavior management across TeachMichigan partner districts, indicating considerable differences in working

conditions across contexts. The mean scores fall in two distinct ranges on the agreement scale: between 3 ("somewhat disagree") and 4 ("somewhat agree"), and between 4 ("somewhat agree") and 5 ("agree"). We see the greatest variation on perceptions of a safe and orderly environment and administrative enforcement of behavioral expectations.

The information presented in Table 3 suggests that administrators are taking different approaches to behavior management across districts, and their actions considerably impact the perceptions of the learning environments in their schools. For example, in District J where fellows report lower agreement on administrators consistently enforcing behavioral expectations (3.29), they also report lower agreement that their school has a safe and orderly environment (2.86). In comparison, in District H where fellows report higher agreement that their administrators consistently enforce behavioral expectations (4.80), they also report higher agreement that their school has a safe and orderly environment (4.50). This may indicate that increasing the consistency of administrative enforcement of behavior expectations could positively affect the perception of a safe and orderly school environment in their schools. Creating more orderly learning environments could in turn positively affect student outcomes in alignment with TeachMichigan's theory of change.

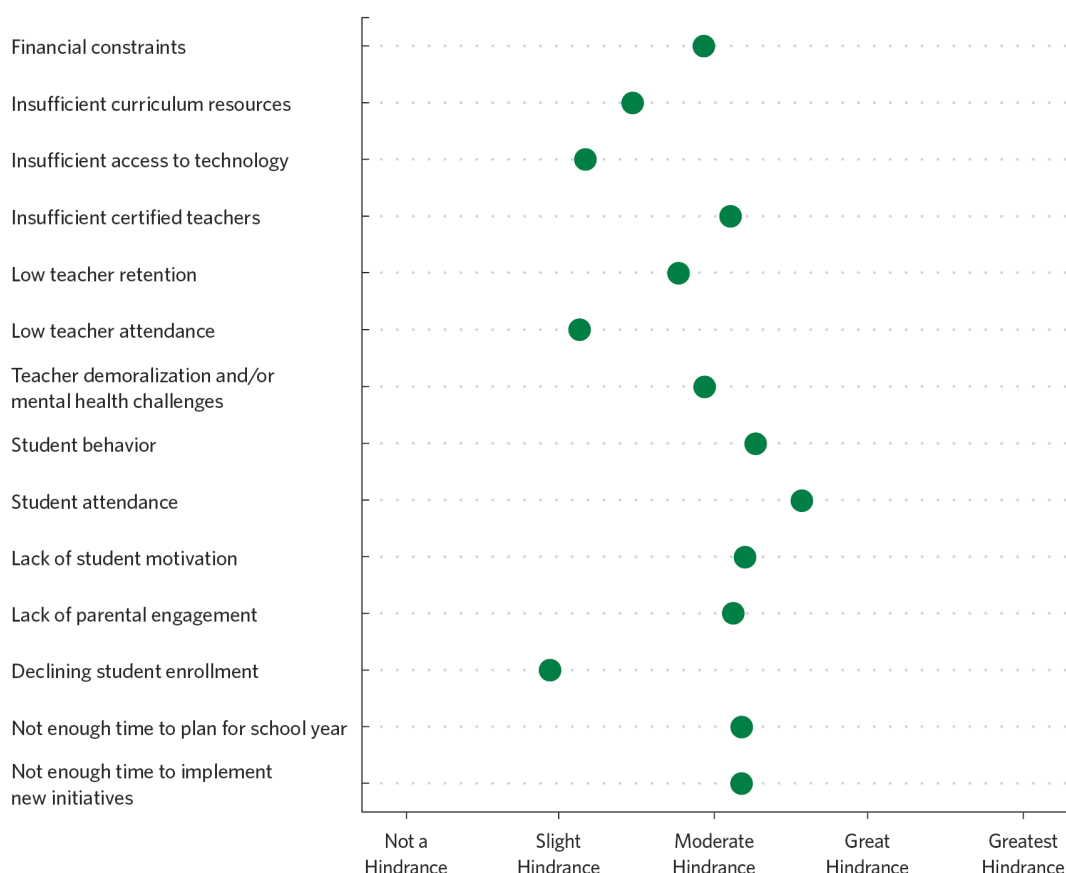
<b>Table 3. Fellows' Perceptions of Behavior Management by District</b>			
<b>District</b>	<b>Our School Has a Safe and Orderly Environment</b>	<b>Teachers Effectively Manage Student Behavior in Their Classrooms</b>	<b>Administrators Consistently Enforce School-Wide Behavior Expectations</b>
District A	4.10	4.27	3.93
District B	4.39	4.07	4.00
District C	4.76	4.20	4.56
District D	4.00	3.59	3.68
District E	4.05	3.95	3.77
District F	4.58	4.11	4.21
District G	3.90	4.20	3.00
District H	4.50	4.90	4.80
District I	3.57	4.00	3.71
District J	2.86	3.14	3.29
District K	3.75	4.25	2.50

*Source: Fall 2023 TeachMichigan Fellow Survey. All data collected by Education Policy Innovation Collaborative.*

## Hindrances to Achieving School Improvement Goals

To identify fellows' perceptions of the challenges posed by a range of organizational conditions, fellows were asked to report the degree to which 13 possible obstacles hindered their schools' ability to achieve its improvement goals. Items included hindrances related to school resources, staffing and teacher-related factors, student and family contexts, and time constraints. Responses were recorded on a five-point scale ranging from "not a hindrance" to "greatest hindrance." To understand the degree of hindrance posed to fellows, we use the mean responses plotted in Figure 6 below. Overall, fellows indicated that most of these obstacles were only moderate hindrances to school improvement. Notable exceptions were student attendance, which ranked closer to a great hindrance, and insufficient curriculum resources, low teacher attendance, and declining student enrollment, which were all, on average, only slight hindrances to improvement in fellows' schools.

**Figure 6. Hindrances to Achieving School Improvement Goals – All Fellows**



Source: Fall 2023 TeachMichigan Fellow Survey. All data collected by Education Policy Innovation Collaborative.

### **Overall fellow perceptions.**

***School resources.*** Fellows were asked to report the extent to which they perceive financial constraints, insufficient curriculum resources, or insufficient access to technology hinder their schools' ability to achieve improvement goals. Figure 6 shows that on average, fellows across cohorts indicated that insufficient access to technology was a "slight hindrance", while insufficient curriculum resources posed a "slight" to "moderate hindrance." However, financial constraints were perceived as the greatest resource barrier to achieving school improvement goals with fellows reporting it as a "moderate hindrance." These results suggest that many fellows serve in under-funded schools which likely negatively impacts fellows' work beyond the schools' ability to achieve its improvement goals.

***Staffing and teacher-related factors.*** Fellows were asked to report the degree to which staffing, and teacher-related factors posed hindrances to achieving improvement goals at their schools. Specifically, we asked fellows about the challenges posed by an insufficient supply of certified teachers, low teacher retention, low teacher attendance, and teacher demoralization and mental health. Figure 6 shows of these factors, an insufficient supply of certified teachers posed the biggest hindrance, being the only staffing and teacher-related hindrance fellows reported to be a "moderate" to "great hindrance" on average. Fellows reported low teacher retention and teacher demoralization as generally "moderate hindrances." The smallest hindrance was low teacher attendance, posing only a "slight hindrance."

The data may indicate that improving teacher retention, a main goal of the TeachMichigan fellowship program, could positively impact partner district schools by reducing hindrances to achieving their improvement goals. Also, it is important to note that demoralization and mental health issues were reported as a greater hindrance to school improvement goals than low teacher retention or low teacher attendance. This indicates that TeachMichigan's focus on teacher wellness is warranted. Providing TeachMichigan fellows with wellness content in their programming may allow for leadership-oriented fellows to be better positioned to see, call out, and attend to issues of teacher wellness in their schools, particularly when school-wide implementation strategies are included. Additionally, issues connected to teachers' mental health are likely closely connected to issues of teacher retention. This suggests that greater attention to teachers' mental health needs can positively impact both teacher retention and school improvement goals.

***Student and Family Contexts.*** Fellows were asked to report the degree that they perceive challenges related to students and families hinder their schools' ability to achieve school improvement goals. Specifically, we asked fellows about the challenges posed by student behavior, student attendance, lack of student motivation, declining student enrollment, and lack of parent engagement. Figure 6 shows on average, fellows indicated that student enrollment was only a "slight hindrance", while student behavior, lack of student motivation, and lack of parent engagement were "moderate"

to “great” hindrances. Fellows perceived student attendance as the biggest hindrance to school improvement, reporting it closer to a “great” hindrance.

Of note is that parent engagement is perceived to be less of a hindrance to improvement than student context hindrances including attendance, behavior, and motivation to learn. This may suggest that a focus on improving student context hindrances will have the greatest impact on achieving school improvement goals. TeachMichigan professional learning opportunities (e.g., instructional coaching, professional development sessions) could provide educators with an opportunity to learn strategies to increase student engagement, motivation to learn, and in turn affect student attendance. This could positively impact working conditions in fellows’ schools, and result in improved student outcomes, in line with the theory of change.

**Time.** Fellows were asked the extent to which they believe that challenges related to time to plan for the school year and time to implement new initiatives hinder achievement of their schools’ improvement goals. The data in Figure 6 shows that on average, fellows indicated that not having enough time to plan for the school year and to implement new initiatives were a “moderate” to “great hindrance” to improvement. Fellows perceive lack of time provided to plan for the school year to be a slightly greater hindrance than lack of time to implement new initiatives. This suggests that all fellows could benefit from additional professional learning opportunities targeting planning or initiative implementation strategies provided in their TeachMichigan programming. This could alleviate the time constraints fellows face in planning for the school year by reducing the amount of time this requires. Additionally, providing fellows with better implementation strategies could result in greater enactment of the content provided from their TeachMichigan programming, positively affecting the achievement of their schools’ improvement goals.

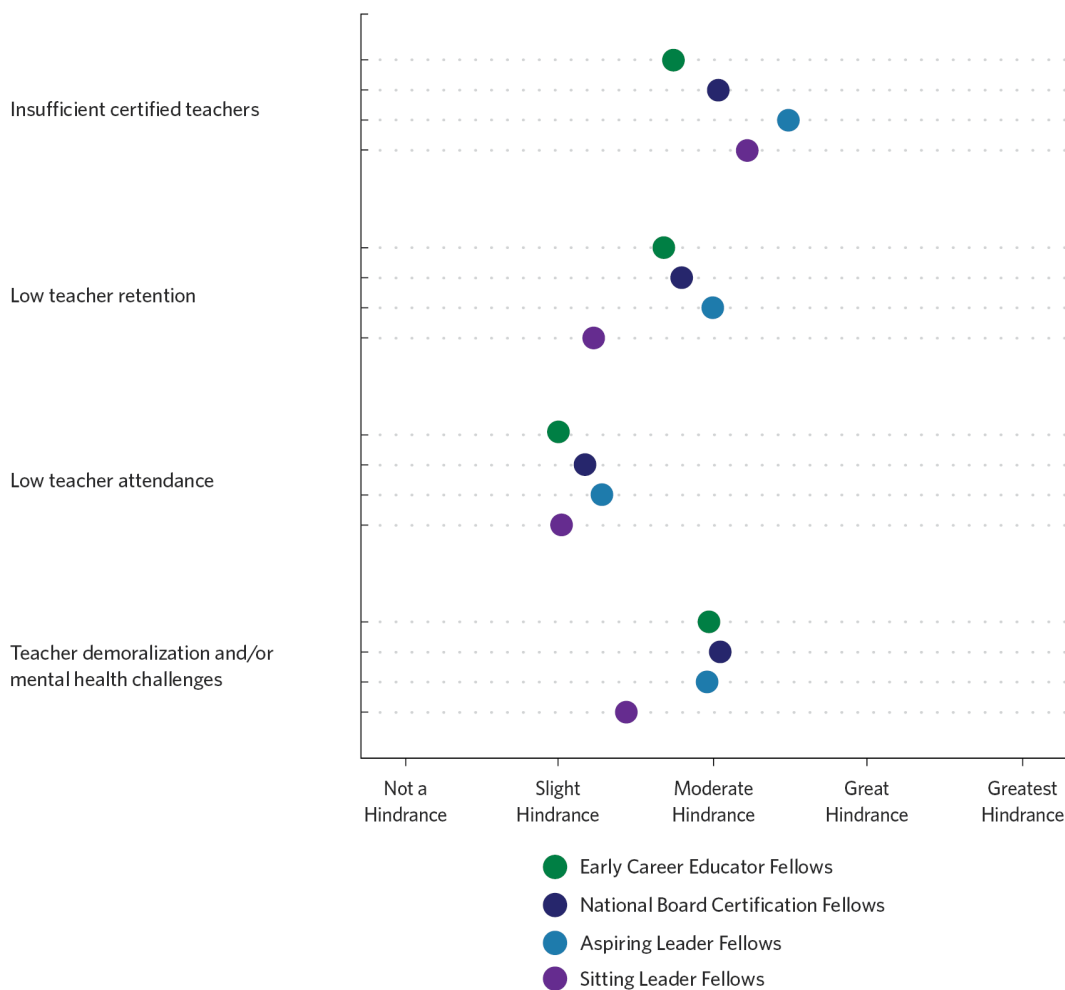
### ***Differences between cohorts.***

**Staffing and teacher-related factors.** Figure 7 illustrates some notable differences in the perceptions of the hindrances posed by staffing and teacher-related factors between SL fellows and classroom teaching oriented cohorts. SL fellows report low teacher retention to be more of a “slight hindrance” compared to the perception of more of a “moderate hindrance” held by fellows in other cohorts. This difference in perceptions may suggest that TeachMichigan’s goal of teacher retention could have the most positive effect on improving working conditions for classroom teaching-oriented fellows in their schools.

Additionally, SL fellows differ on their perspective of the hindrance posed by teacher demoralization and mental health challenges. While SL fellows perceive this as only a “slight” to “moderate” hindrance, fellows in other cohorts perceive it to be more of a “moderate” hindrance. This difference in perceptions may indicate that SL fellows underestimate the challenges associated with demoralization and mental health

facing teachers in their schools. By making efforts to support their teachers' mental health needs, administrators may be able to improve overall working conditions for teachers in their schools.

**Figure 7. Staffing and Teacher-Related Hindrances to Achieving School Improvement Goals**



Source: Fall 2023 TeachMichigan Fellow Survey. All data collected by Education Policy Innovation Collaborative.

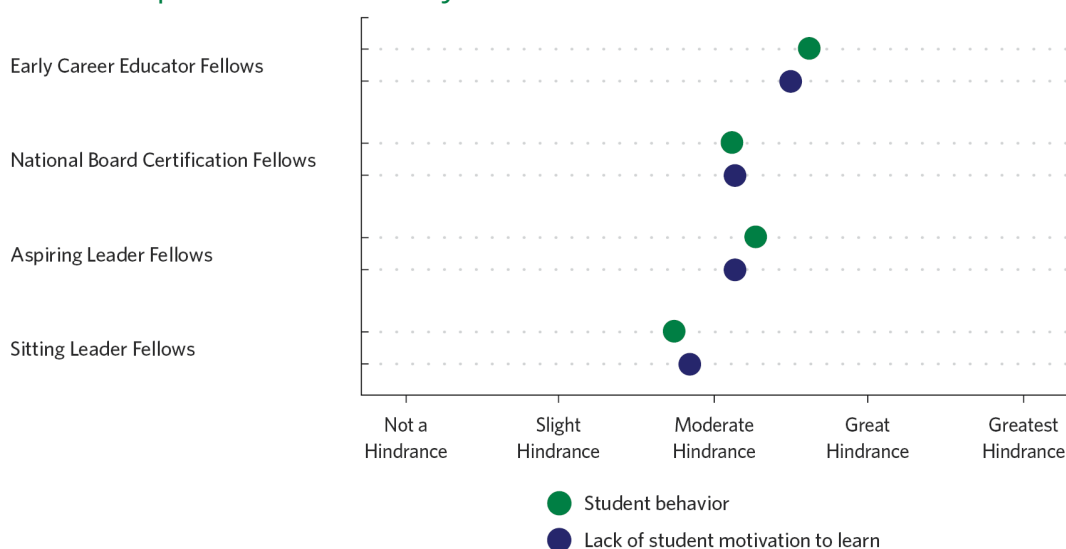
**Student and family contexts.** Perceptions of the hindrances posed by student behavior and a lack of student motivation varied considerably by cohort. Figure 8 shows that while both NBC and AL fellows perceived these as a “moderate” to “great hindrance”, ECE fellows viewed these as bigger hindrances reporting them to be closer to a “great hindrance.” This indicates that less experienced educators perceive managing student behavior and motivating student engagement as greater challenges than their more experienced colleagues. This may suggest that increasing the amount of professional learning opportunities (e.g., instructional coaching, professional development) targeting



behavior management and instructional methods in the Early Career Educator fellowship programming could improve working conditions for these fellows in their schools, thereby supporting the overall goal of retaining these educators.

SL fellows' perceptions on the hindrance posed by student behavior and lack of student motivation differ considerably from fellows in all other cohorts. Figure 8 shows that SL fellows perceive these student context hindrances as less of a barrier to achieving school improvement goals reporting them as only “slight” to “moderate hindrances.” These differing perceptions from other cohorts may indicate that administrators underestimate the challenges posed by student context hindrances to classroom teachers. It may also suggest that administrators should work to support early career educators by providing them opportunities to learn effective behavior management strategies and engaging instructional methods to improve working conditions for these fellows in their schools.

**Figure 8. Student Context Hindrances to Achieving School Improvement Goals by Cohort**

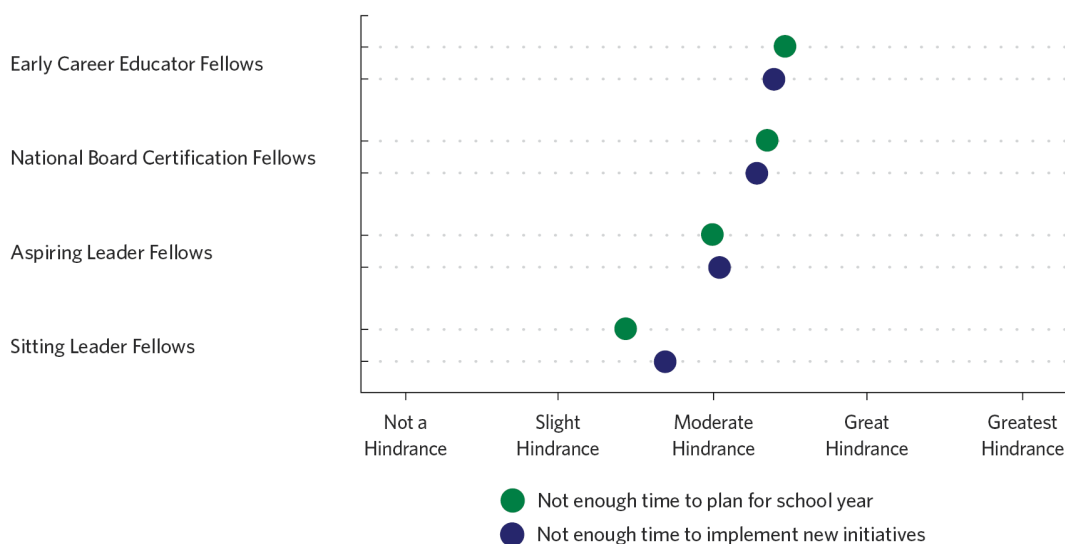


*Source: Fall 2023 TeachMichigan Fellow Survey. All data collected by Education Policy Innovation Collaborative.*

**Time.** Figure 9 shows that both ECE and NBC fellows, who primarily serve as classroom teachers, believe they do not have enough time to plan for the school year or implement new initiatives noting these areas posed a “moderate” to “great hindrance” to achieving school improvement goals. Notably, early career educator fellows reported time challenges to be a greater hindrance than all other fellows, which may indicate that less experienced educators have heightened needs for additional planning time. AL fellows reported both not having enough time to plan for the school year and to implement new initiatives as only a “moderate hindrance” to achieving school improvement goals. The difference in perceptions between AL fellows and fellows in other cohorts may stem

from the lens with which they view the problem since AL fellows are either in roles outside the classroom or have administrative aspirations. In a similar vein, SL fellows perceived time challenges to be less of a hindrance than all other cohorts. These fellows perceived not having enough time to plan for the school year or implement new initiatives as only “slight” to “moderate” hindrances. The considerable difference in perceptions between leaders and classroom teacher fellows suggests administrators may not fully understand the planning time needs of classroom teachers in today’s high-poverty schools. This suggests that additional professional learning opportunities should be provided to fellows in the SL and AL cohorts in their TeachMichigan programming targeting improvement of working conditions for teachers in their schools. This could include strategies for meeting their teachers’ planning time needs, including the creation of protected time before the school year starts and during the school day for planning. Programming should highlight the heightened planning time needs of early career teachers.

**Figure 9. Time Constraint Hindrances to Achieving School Improvement Goals by Cohort**

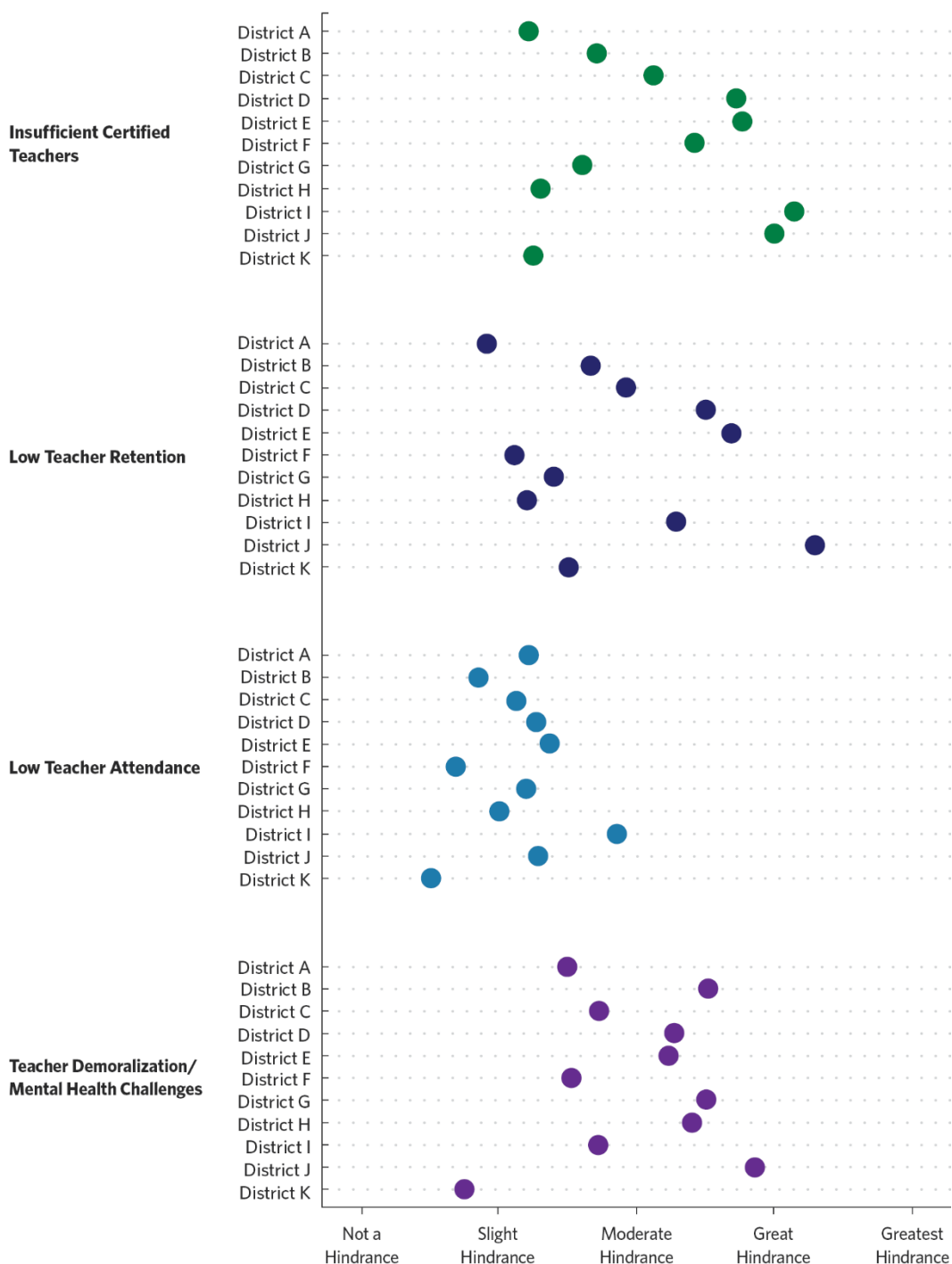


Source: Fall 2023 TeachMichigan Fellow Survey. All data collected by Education Policy Innovation Collaborative.

### ***Difference across districts.***

**Staffing and teacher-related factors.** Figure 10 plots the mean hindrance levels for staffing and teacher-related factors disaggregated by district. We observe notable variation in perceptions across TeachMichigan partner districts, indicating the unique challenges these factors pose to districts on achieving school improvement goals.

Figure 10. Staffing and Teacher-Related Factor Hindrances to Achieving School Improvement Goals



Source: Fall 2023 TeachMichigan Fellow Survey. All data collected by Education Policy Innovation Collaborative.

Considerable variation can be observed in the perceptions of the hindrances posed by an insufficient number of certified teachers and low teacher retention across districts. Fellow perspectives within districts range from these staffing issues presenting a “slight” to “moderate hindrance” up to a “great” or “greatest hindrance.” Also, we see that these perceptions tend to align within districts, indicating that these issues are related, and both pose a similar challenge to districts in achieving improvement goals. The data also suggests that the hindrance posed by staffing issues relating to a shortage of certified teachers and teacher retention varies across district contexts. This could suggest that by targeting recruitment and selection efforts within specific districts (or specific schools) that face more considerable staffing challenges the TeachMichigan fellowship program could have a greater impact on working conditions in those districts, potentially leading to higher rates of teacher retention. Additionally, considerable variation can also be observed in perceptions of the hindrance posed by teacher demoralization and mental health challenges across districts. Fellow perspectives within districts range these teacher wellbeing related issues presenting a “slight” to “moderate hindrance” up to a “great hindrance.” Interestingly, these perceptions do not follow the same pattern as perceptions of hindrances related to staffing challenges. This may indicate that working conditions contributing to teacher wellbeing do not necessarily relate to staffing challenges within schools.

## SCHOOL CULTURE

How fellows perceive the social conditions within their schools plays a key role in their professional experience and student outcomes. The social conditions within schools, including school culture, the principal's leadership, and relationships between colleagues have been shown to be contributing factors to teachers' job satisfaction, retention, and student achievement (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Johnson et al., 2012; Simon & Johnson, 2015). School culture encompasses the degree of trust, respect, openness, and commitment to student achievement characterized by the educational environment (Johnson et al., 2012). Two of TeachMichigan's long term outcome goals are to increase teacher retention and improve student outcomes. To achieve these outcomes, the core components of the intervention seek to position fellows to positively affect the school and instructional culture in their schools.

In this section we examine fellows' perceptions on their school's culture. We also examine the extent to which fellows believe they are equipped with the knowledge and capacity to drive innovation within their schools. We first focus on school culture broadly, examining fellows' perceptions of the elements of their school that influence how educators interact with one another and with their students. We look at fellows' responses across cohorts, disaggregated by cohort, and disaggregated by TeachMichigan partner district. Then, aligning with TeachMichigan's goals around teacher innovation, we look specifically at the degree to which a culture of innovation is supported in fellows' schools by looking at responses across cohorts. We follow with

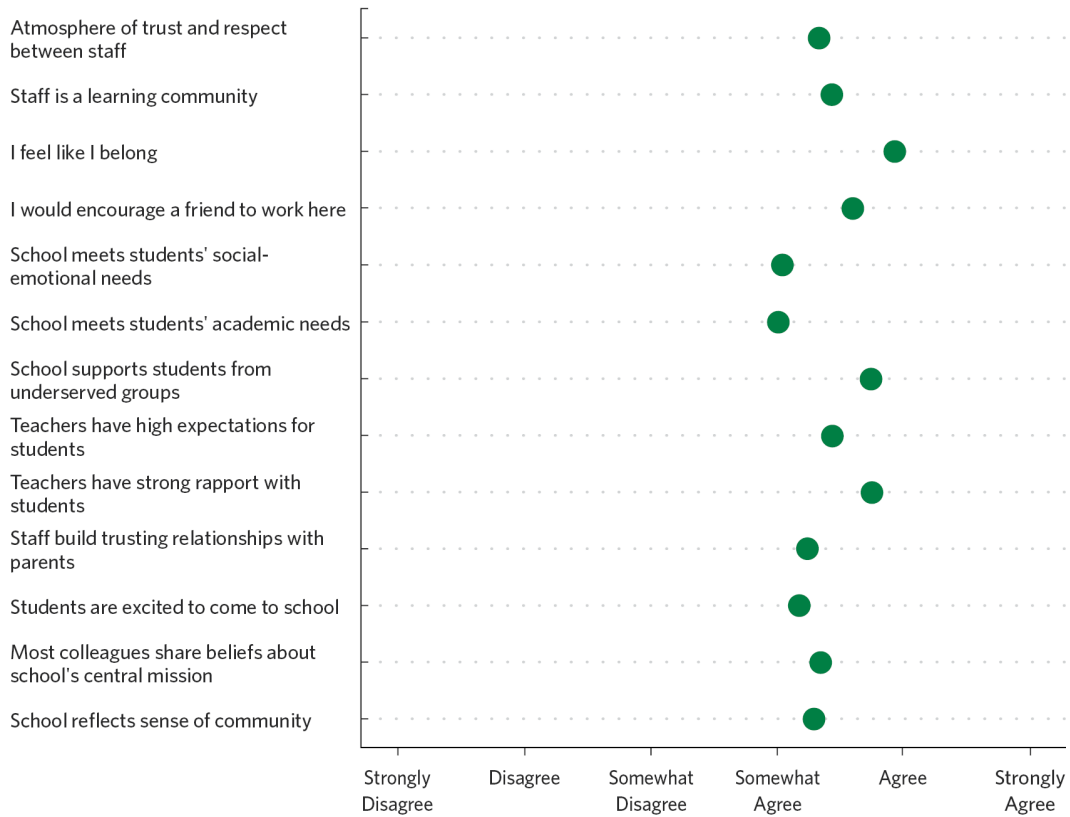
an analysis of fellows' perceptions on feeling equipped with the knowledge and resources to drive innovation in their schools using mean responses across and between cohorts. We do not compare results across districts on these items because we find similar responses across districts.

To briefly preview our findings, we find that fellows lean toward a more positive description of their school culture, on average indicating that they "somewhat agree" to "agree" with the various measurements of culture, collegiality, and trust in their schools. However, perceptions of school culture vary across district contexts. Fellows across partner districts reported between "somewhat disagree" and "somewhat agree" to "agree" and "strongly agree" on a combined measure of their school culture. Regarding innovation, fellows on average indicate that they "somewhat agree" to "agree" that their schools promote a culture of innovation and that they have the capacity in terms of knowledge and resources to innovate in their classrooms. Fellows are more neutral however, falling between "agree" and "disagree", on having access to resources to impact working conditions and innovate at the school level. Looking at fellows' perceptions of the presence of a culture of innovation at their schools and feeling prepared to innovate by cohort reveals SL fellows have markedly different perceptions than fellows in all other cohorts. SL fellows reported higher levels of agreement on all items, except on having the resources to innovate, where they were similar to NBC and AL fellows. We find no notable differences across districts.

## Fellow Perspectives on Aspects of School Culture

Our survey sought to measure fellows' perceptions of their school culture. We capture this information by asking fellows their level of agreement for thirteen items that capture perceptions of students' attitudes about school; the extent to which their school reflects a sense of community, meets students' needs, and supports historically underserved students; fellows' sense of belonging, trust, and mutual respect; their expectations for and relationships with students and families; and the degree to which their suggestions for improvement are encouraged. The response scale for these items consisted of six points that ranged from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." To understand the perceptions of fellows across cohorts we use the mean responses plotted in Figure 11 below.

Figure 11. Aspects of School Culture – All Fellows



Source: Fall 2023 TeachMichigan Fellow Survey. All data collected by Education Policy Innovation Collaborative.

### Overall Fellow Perspectives

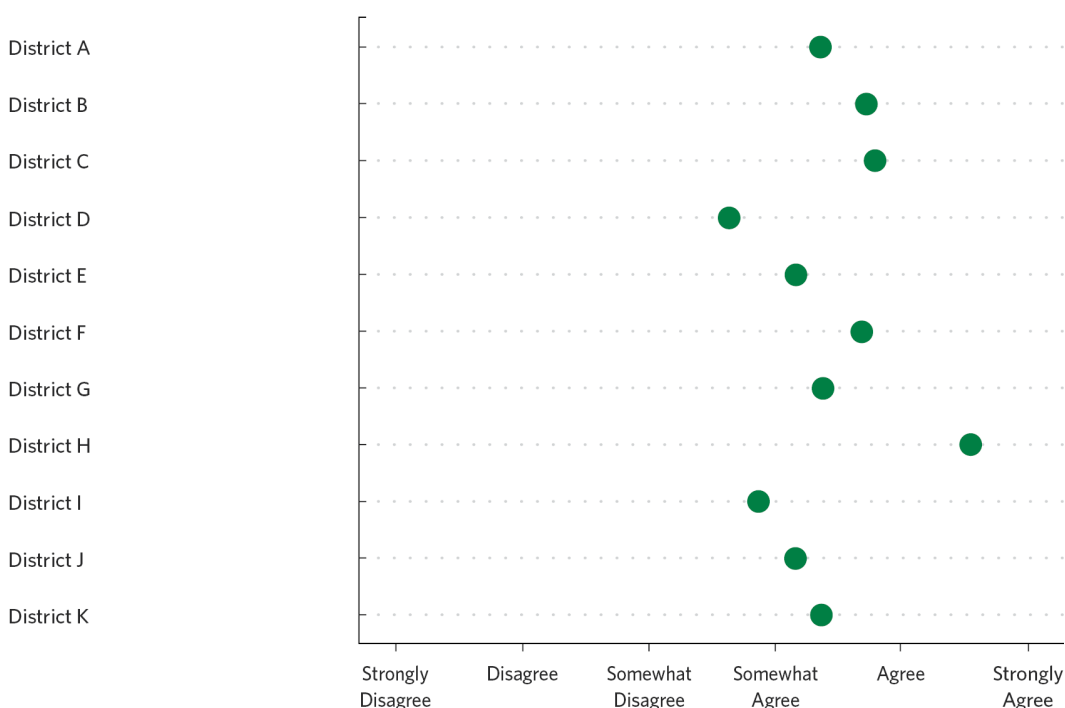
Figure 11 illustrates that fellows hold a positive perception of the culture at their schools. On average, fellows report they "somewhat agree" to "agree" on all factors relating to school culture. The three items with the highest agreement ratings were "I feel like I belong," "school supports students from underserved groups," and "teachers have a strong rapport with students." This suggests fellows perceive a positive connection to both their schools and the students they serve. Also, fellows perceive their schools to be making efforts to support students from historically marginalized backgrounds (e.g., economically disadvantaged, students of color, English learners, etc.).

The two components of school culture with the lowest agreement ratings measure fellows' perceptions of whether their schools meet students' academic and social-emotional needs. This suggests that while fellows perceive positive support for underserved groups, they see room for growth in improving outcomes for all students. Improving student outcomes is a long-term goal for TeachMichigan highlighted in the theory of change. Looking for change in this measure over time could shed light on the effectiveness of the fellowship in driving systems-level change within TeachMichigan fellows' schools.

## Differences Across Districts

To analyze perspectives on school culture across districts, we first created a mean school culture score for each respondent, combining all 13 aspects of school culture. The data displayed in Figure 12 represents the district average of this combined value. These values reflect what a typical TeachMichigan fellow in each district would report on average across these items. Figure 12 highlights these differences with fellow perceptions ranging from between “somewhat disagree” and “somewhat agree” to between “agree” and “strongly agree.” However, fellows in most districts have a fairly positive perception of their school culture, falling between “somewhat agree” and “agree.” Fellows in two districts report more negative perceptions, falling between “somewhat disagree” and “somewhat agree.” Fellows in one district report holding a very positive perspective of their school culture falling between “agree” and “strongly agree.” This indicates that fellows hold markedly different perceptions of school culture between districts. As school culture has been shown to be a predictor of teacher retention, these findings may suggest that improving school culture in districts reporting more negative perceptions could positively impact efforts of teacher retention.

Figure 12. Aspects of School Culture by District



Source: Fall 2023 TeachMichigan Fellow Survey. All data collected by Education Policy Innovation Collaborative.

## Fellow Perspectives on Culture of Innovation

Through our survey, we aimed to gauge fellows’ beliefs regarding the presence of a culture that promotes innovation in their schools. We captured this information using

three items asking fellows their level of agreement with statements relating to whether teachers welcome innovative ideas, leaders welcome innovative ideas from teachers, and if it is okay for teachers to try new ideas in teaching and learning in their schools. The response scale for these items consisted of six points that ranged from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” To understand the perceptions of fellows across cohorts we use the mean response.

### Overall Fellow Perspectives

Figure 13 shows fellows reported they “somewhat agree” to “agree” on all items relating to their perception of a culture of innovation at their schools. The item with the highest average rating was “it is okay for teachers to try new ideas in teaching” suggesting fellows perceive a culture which allows risk taking and the implementation of innovative ideas in teaching and learning practices. This positive perception could facilitate the successful implementation of the professional development offered by TeachMichigan, as fellows may feel more comfortable experimenting with new strategies in their schools. The item with the lowest average rating in items measuring the culture of innovation was “teachers welcome innovative ideas” followed by “leaders welcome innovative ideas from teachers.” This suggests that while fellows perceive support for implementation from both administrators and teachers, they perceive slightly more support from administrators. This finding is important as classroom teachers may require administrative support and encouragement to implement new ideas in their classroom, including those learned through TeachMichigan professional development opportunities.

**Figure 13. Culture of Innovation – All Fellows**



*Source: Fall 2023 TeachMichigan Fellow Survey. All data collected by Education Policy Innovation Collaborative.*

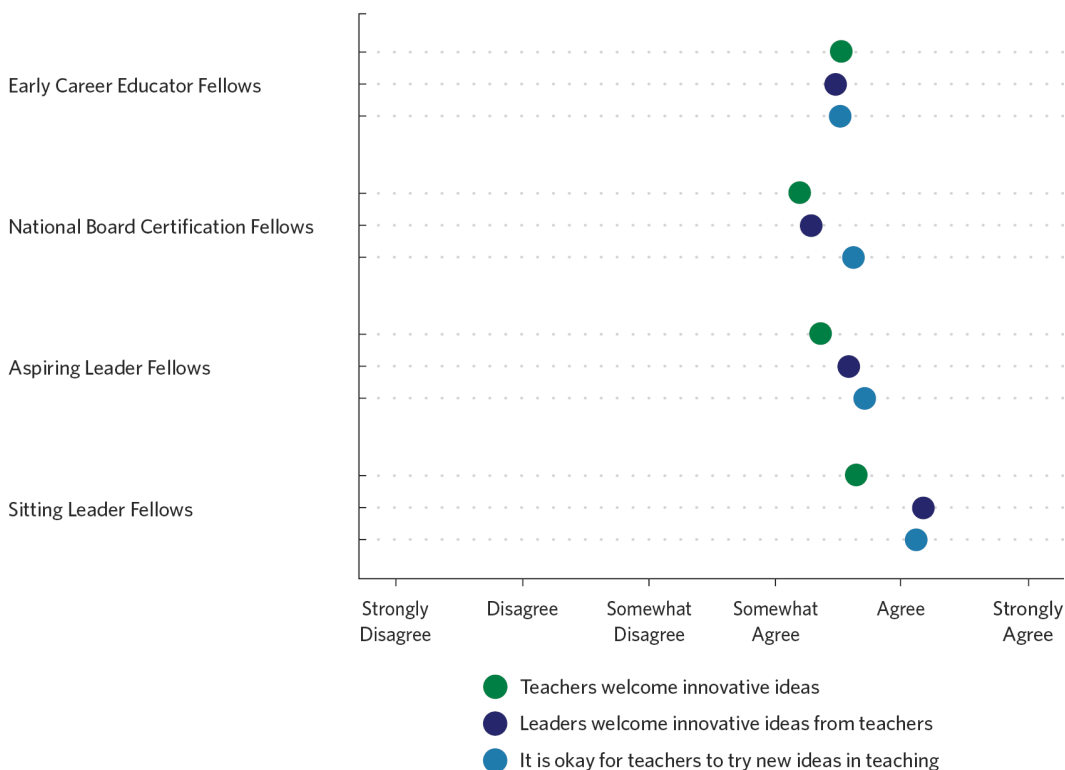
### Differences Between Cohorts

Figure 14 shows there is little variation across classroom teaching oriented cohorts on agreement regarding the presence of a culture of innovation in their schools. ECE, NBC, and AL fellows all report similar levels of agreement ranging from “somewhat agree” to “agree.” However, there is noticeable variation between SL fellows and fellows in other cohorts. SL fellows report higher levels of agreement, ranging from “agree” to “strongly agree” that leaders in their schools welcome innovative ideas from teachers and that it is okay for teachers to try new ideas in teaching. The differences



between the levels of agreement between these current school leaders and classroom teachers may indicate either a lack of effective communication between administrators and teachers about promoting a culture of innovation, or an overly positive view held by leaders of their schools' culture of innovation. These findings suggest that clear communication by school leaders encouraging innovative teaching practices may positively impact teachers' perceptions of the culture for innovation in their schools.

Figure 14. Culture of Innovation by Cohort



Source: Fall 2023 TeachMichigan Fellow Survey. All data collected by Education Policy Innovation Collaborative.

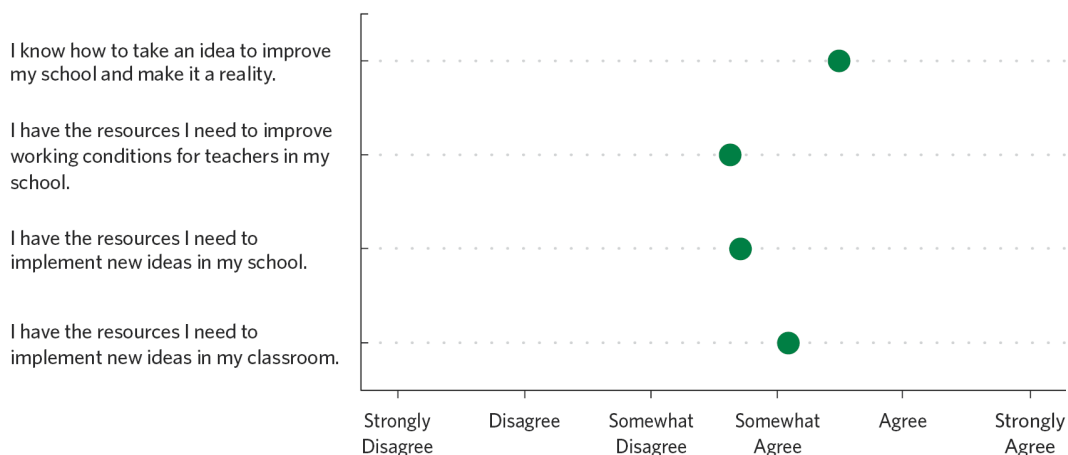
## Fellow Perspectives on Capacity for Innovation

Using our survey, we aimed to gauge the extent fellows felt equipped with the knowledge and resources to implement new ideas in their schools and classrooms. We captured this information using three items asking fellows their level of agreement with statements relating to the extent to which fellows agreed they know how to take an idea to improve their school and make it a reality, 2) and the extent to which they have the resources they need to improve working conditions for teachers in their school, implement new ideas in their school, and implement new ideas in their classrooms. The response scale for these items consisted of six points that ranged from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.”

### Overall Fellow Perceptions

Figure 15 illustrates how regarding fellows' perceptions of their capacity for innovation, the greatest agreement was reported on knowing how to take an idea to improve their school and make it a reality followed by having the resources they need to implement ideas in their classroom. On average fellows reported they "somewhat agree" to "agree" with these statements, indicating they feel fairly comfortable with their ability to innovate in their classrooms and having the resources to do so. However, regarding having resources to improve working conditions and implement new ideas in their schools, fellows were more neutral, falling between "somewhat disagree" and "somewhat agree." This suggests that while fellows feel comfortable with their ability to innovate in their classrooms, they feel less prepared to do so at the school level. These results were consistent across cohorts.

**Figure 15. Capacity for Innovation - All Fellows**

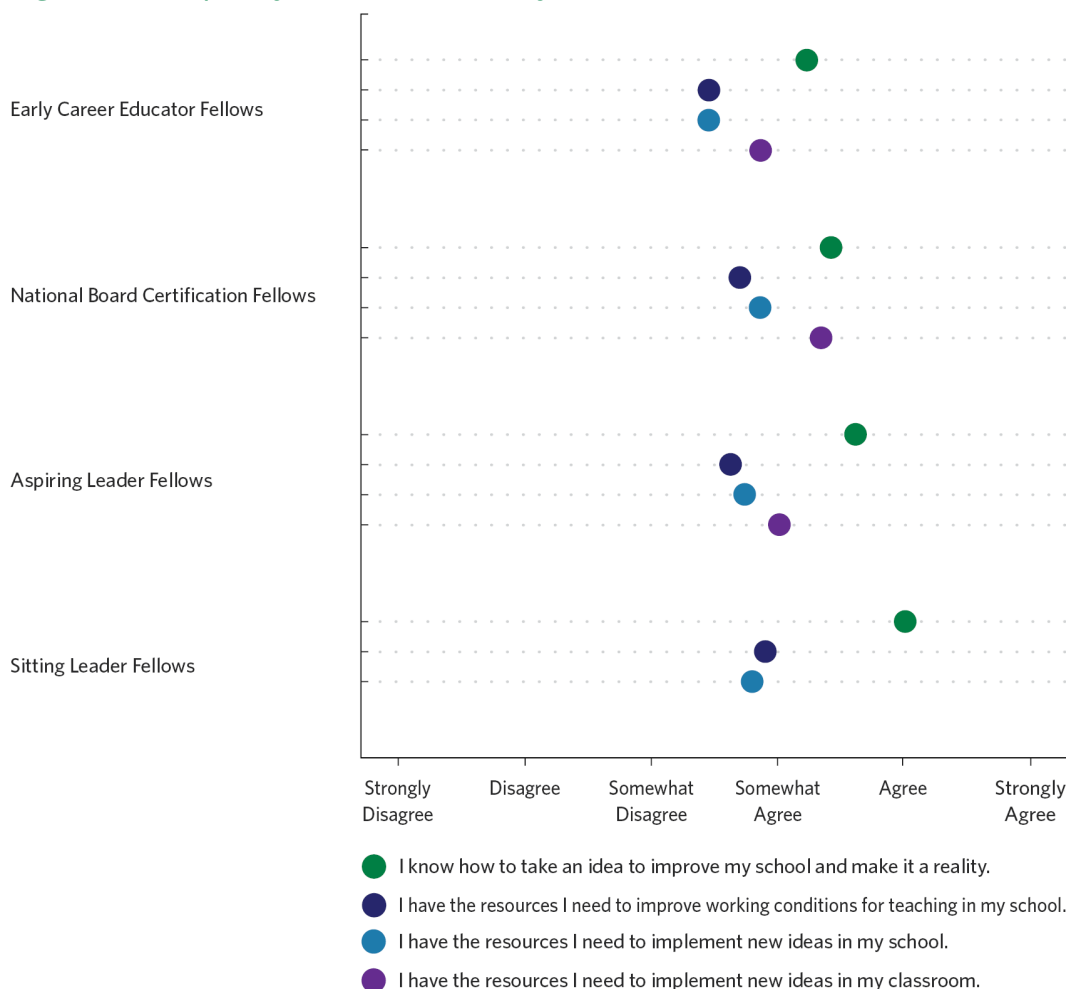


*Source: Fall 2023 TeachMichigan Fellow Survey. All data collected by Education Policy Innovation Collaborative.*

### Differences Between Cohorts

Figure 16 highlights the difference across cohorts regarding fellows' ability to take an idea to improve their school and make it a reality. While all cohorts report they "somewhat agree" to "agree" they have the knowledge to drive innovation, the level of agreement varies based on educator experience. ECE fellows report less agreement than their more experienced colleagues in the NBC Cohort and the AL cohorts. SL fellows express the highest level of agreement, reporting they "agree." These findings suggest that less experienced educators feel less confident in their ability to drive school change. ECE fellows may benefit from additional professional learning which focuses on providing the skills and knowledge necessary to drive change, especially during the second year of the fellowship.

Figure 16. Capacity for Innovation by Cohort



Source: Fall 2023 TeachMichigan Fellow Survey. All data collected by Education Policy Innovation Collaborative.

## SCHOOL AND DISTRICT LEADERSHIP

Leaders play a key role in shaping the educational environment in schools and recent research has demonstrated a link between school leadership and teachers' employment decisions. When choosing where to work, teachers consider administrative support generally, and in particular around issues with student behavior and interactions with parents (Johnston, 2021; Viano et al., 2021). And when teachers perceive their administration as being less supportive, they are more likely to both disengage with their work and leave their school (Harbatkin et al., 2023). Two of TeachMichigan's core components, professional learning and educator empowerment, are designed to shape school and district leadership. TeachMichigan's sitting leader (SL) fellows are current administrators who receive intensive professional learning to enhance their leadership skills and in turn improve the leadership climate within their school. TeachMichigan also

aims to empower educators by 1) providing opportunities for early career, national board, and aspiring leader fellows to engage with their school and district leadership around the issues that are important to them, and 2) creating opportunities for teacher leadership. Providing spaces for teachers to engage with leaders is intended to elevate issues to leadership that will improve the educational environment while teacher leadership is intended to help teachers take ownership of, and therefore improve, the environment within their school.

In this section, we examine four facets of school and district leadership: fellows' perspectives on decision-making power, the extent to which fellows are encouraged to take on leadership roles, fellows' participation in leadership activities, and fellows' perspectives on leadership and support. To do this, we analyze responses to our fellow survey that was administered in fall 2023, around the time educators began their fellowship. Being that these data are from the early stages of TeachMichigan's implementation, the analyses present here should be thought of as a "baseline" of the school and district leadership fellows experienced at the outset of their fellowship, before TeachMichigan's programming was able to impact leadership in the schools and districts where fellows work.

To briefly preview our findings, we observe that fellows' perceptions of school and district leadership are less positive than for other elements of their educational environment. We find that on average fellows seem to think that leaders trust and value their perspectives, but don't necessarily understand their challenges or do enough to incorporate educators into decision-making processes. Fellows fall between "somewhat agree" and "agree" on whether teachers are encouraged to lead, are trusted as educational experts, and are trusted to make decisions about instruction. However, fellows have more neutral views on whether their schools have effective mechanisms for group decision making and whether teachers have an appropriate level of influence on decision making, reporting between "somewhat disagree" and "somewhat agree." We also find that fellows in all cohorts participate in leadership activities, but that ECE fellows participate at much lower rates than NBC and AL fellows

## Fellow Perspectives on Decision Making Power

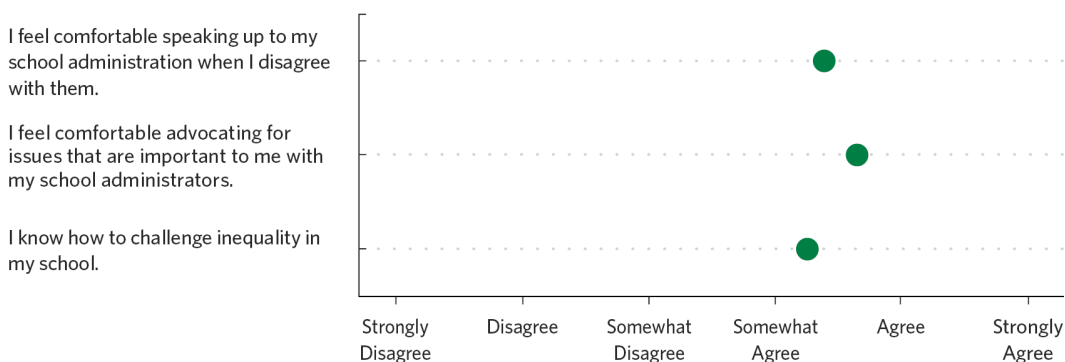
Research indicates that when teachers believe that they have some influence on decision-making in their schools, they are less likely to turn over (Jackson, 2012; Johnson et al., 2012; Rave et al., 2022). We gauge teacher<sup>1</sup> fellows' perceptions of their decision-making power in their schools using a set of items from our fall fellow survey that asked fellows about their level of agreement with statements relating to their level of comfort with speaking up, their sense of agency in classroom decision-making, and their sense of agency in school-level decision-making. These items used a 6-point Likert scale that ranged from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." To understand how perceptions may vary between cohorts and explore differences in the typical response from fellows between cohorts, we use the mean response.

## Overall Fellow Perceptions

**Speaking up.** “Speaking up” refers to the extent to which teachers believe they can raise concerns or issues of importance to leadership. When teachers feel comfortable doing so, this provides an avenue for them to take ownership of, and improve, their environment. When teachers are not able to speak up, or when leadership is not receptive to their concerns, teachers may feel less connected to their school or district, and leaders may become disconnected from important issues that in turn negatively impacts students and staff. Additionally, TeachMichigan holds that the professional development and training fellows receive will have a systemic impact on the schools and districts where they work. An environment where fellows are more comfortable speaking up may be more conducive to this kind of change.

To evaluate teachers’ comfort with speaking up, our survey asked if they feel comfortable speaking up to school administrators when they disagree with them, if they feel comfortable advocating for issues and concerns that are important to them, and if they know how to challenge inequity in their schools. On average, fellows reported that they “somewhat agree” to “agree” with each these items, as shown in Figure 17. Comparing responses across items, teachers’ report slightly greater comfort with advocating for issues that matter to them. This suggests that fellows tend to feel comfortable raising issues in their schools, which may be an important precursor to the systemic change TeachMichigan’s aims to bring about.

**Figure 17. Teachers’ Comfort With Speaking Up – All Fellows**

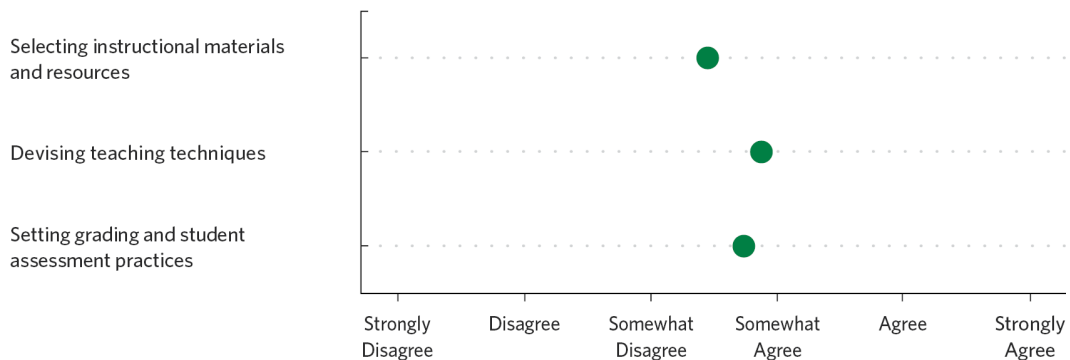


Source: Fall 2023 TeachMichigan Fellow Survey. All data collected by Education Policy Innovation Collaborative.

**Agency in classroom decision making.** Having agency allows teachers to deliver instruction in ways that are aligned with their individual style and strengths and that is aligned with student needs. Similarly, when teachers face too many constraints around their practice, they may be less effective with their students. To measure teachers’ sense of agency, our survey included items that asked teachers about their involvement in making decisions that impact their classrooms, such as selecting instructional materials, devising teaching techniques, and setting grading and assessment practices. Figure 18 shows fellows were generally neutral on these items,

falling on average between “somewhat disagree” and “somewhat agree.” Fellows reported they perceived agency in devising teaching techniques and setting grading and assessment practices closer to “somewhat agree” and selecting instructional resources closer to “somewhat disagree.” This suggests that fellows perceive some agency in choosing the teaching methods they employ in the classroom, but less agency in selecting the materials and resources they use in their classroom. This misalignment may create challenges for fellows to implement the professional learning they receive through TeachMichigan as new instructional strategies may require new materials and resources to be most effective.

**Figure 18. Teachers' Agency in Classroom Decision Making – All Fellows**

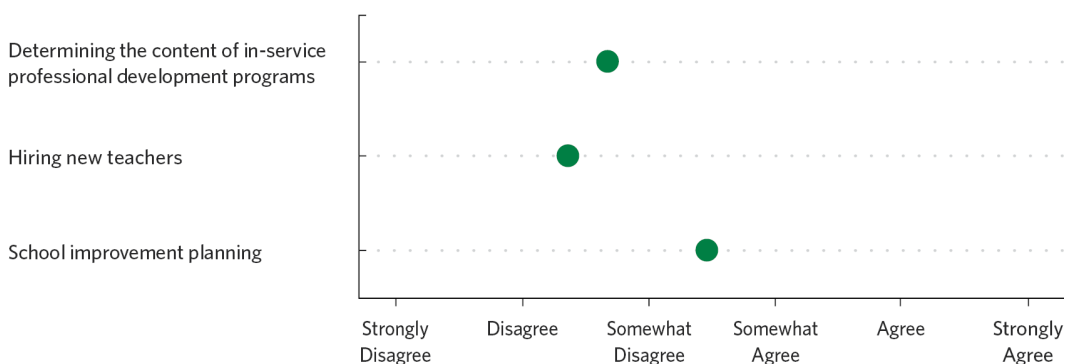


Source: Fall 2023 TeachMichigan Fellow Survey. All data collected by Education Policy Innovation Collaborative.

**Agency in school-level decision-making.** Having agency in decisions made at the school-level allows teachers to impact their broader educational environment in ways that can improve student learning. For example, a more cohesive staff may result from teachers playing a role in staffing decisions. Teachers may also have greater buy-in to their school's mission if they help develop their school's improvement goals. Additionally, providing teachers with choice over the content of in-service professional development programs can help them select professional development that aligns best with their needs and the needs of their students. To measure teachers' sense of agency in school-wide decision-making, our survey included items that asked teachers about involvement in making decisions that impact the entire school, such as determining the content of professional development programs, hiring new teachers, and school improvement planning. Generally, fellows feel that they do not play a significant role in schoolwide decision-making, as depicted in Figure 19. This is the first case in which we see fellows, on average, indicating that they “disagree” or “somewhat disagree” across all items. Of these, fellows particularly disagree that they play a role in hiring new teachers and deciding the content of professional development but are more neutral about whether they play a role in school improvement planning. This points to a potential area of tension in how change that starts at the classroom level can come to have a larger systemic impact. If teachers have a role in selecting staff and professional development opportunities, they can help to build a staff that shares

their vision and commitment to change. On the other hand, environments where teachers have less say in school-level decisions may complicate efforts to build momentum around new initiatives or practices.

**Figure 19. Teachers' Agency in School-Level Decision Making – All Fellows**



*Source: Fall 2023 TeachMichigan Fellow Survey. All data collected by Education Policy Innovation Collaborative.*

## Encouragement to Take on Leadership Roles

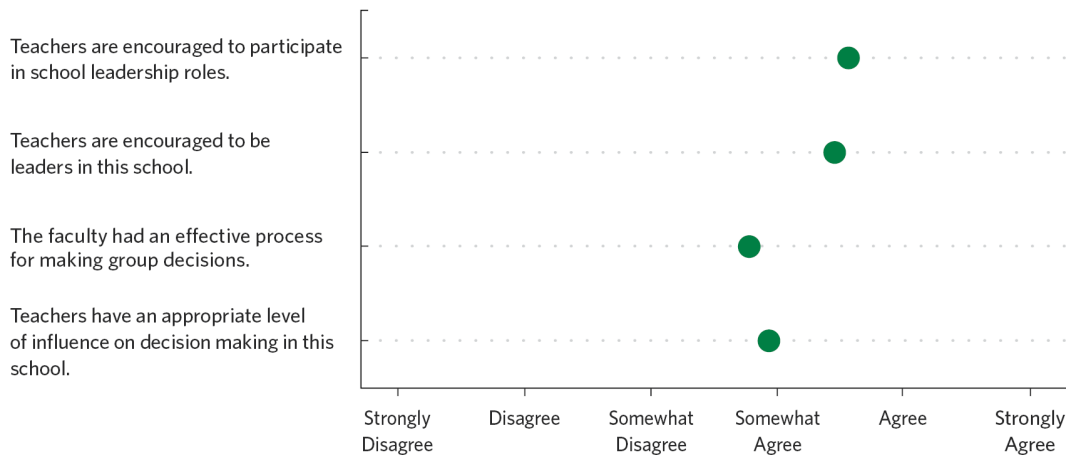
Along with providing input on school-level decisions, educators can shape the educational environment at their school exercising themselves such as by assuming leadership roles and working with other staff to make collective decisions. Exercising leadership can enhance educators' voice in school decisions and promote staff and student wellbeing. Given this, along with TeachMichigan's including educator empowerment as a core component, it is therefore important to understand whether fellows feel encouraged to assume leadership in their school as this may be an indicator of fellows' comfort stepping into a leadership role and/or how receptive their school is to greater teacher voice. We gauge fellows' perceptions of the level of encouragement to take on leadership roles in their schools using a set of items in our fall survey that asked fellows about their level of agreement with statements relating to teachers being encouraged to be leaders and take on leadership roles, the faculty having an effective process for making group decisions, and teachers having an appropriate level of influence on decision making in their schools. These items used a 6-point Likert scale that ranged from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree."

### Overall Fellow Perceptions

Figure 20 shows fellows held a fairly positive perspective on the degree to which teachers are encouraged to be leaders and take on formal leadership roles in their schools. On average, fellows reported they "somewhat agree" and "agree" on these items, though they were more neutral on whether the faculty have an effective process for making group decisions and whether teachers have an appropriate level of influence, falling just below "somewhat agree." This may indicate that while fellows

feel encouraged to take on leadership roles, they may not feel they have a meaningful impact within their school. Teachers who feel that teachers who are elevated to leadership roles have little impact may feel discouraged from taking on these positions themselves, which runs counter to TeachMichigan's aim to empower educators. On this point, future qualitative work may help to illuminate the interplay between space for teacher leadership and the efficacy of collective decision-making to potentially identify examples of how teachers can be more connected to school decision-making.

**Figure 20. Encouragement to Take on Leadership Roles and Participate in School Decision Making**



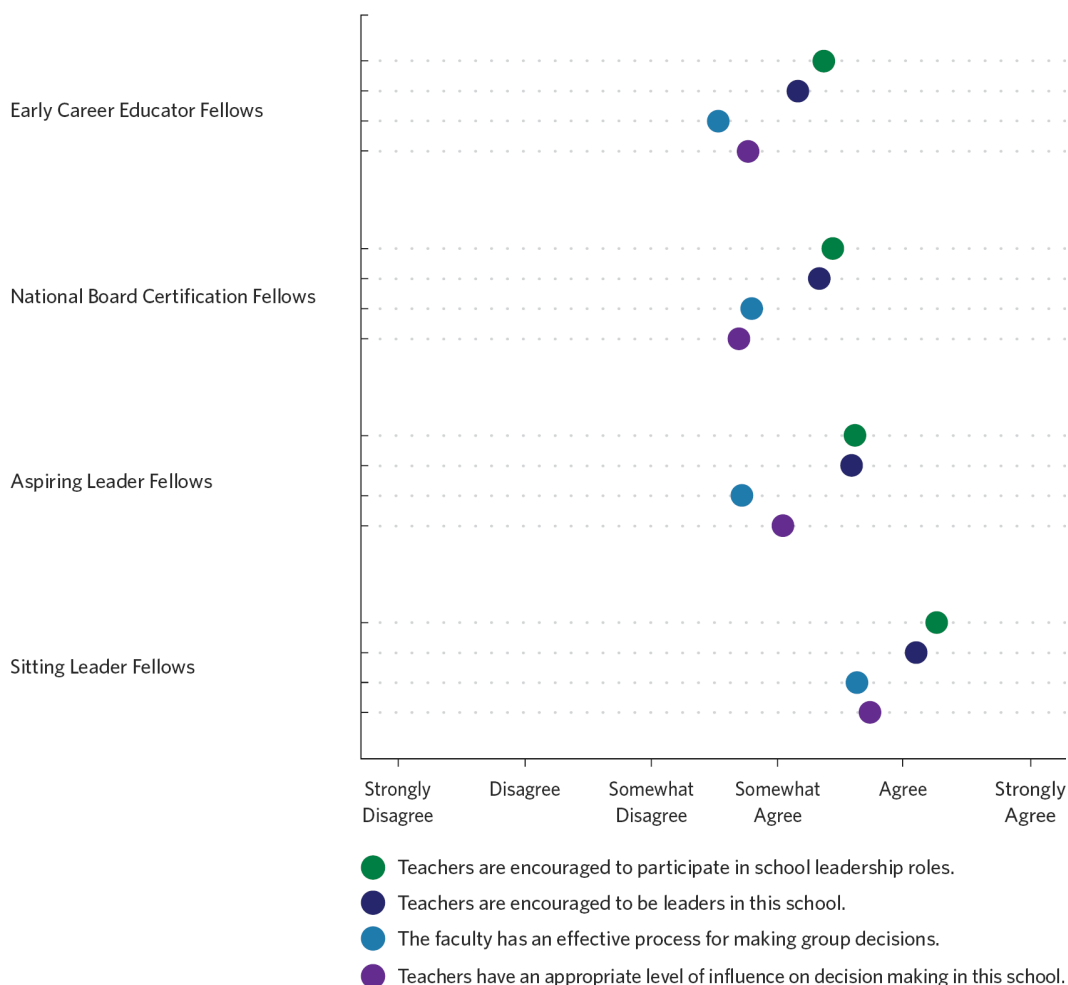
*Source: Fall 2023 TeachMichigan Fellow Survey. All data collected by Education Policy Innovation Collaborative.*

### Differences Between Cohorts

Figure 21 shows variation between cohorts in fellows' perceptions of whether they are encouraged to take on leadership roles or be leaders in their schools. This shows that SL fellows hold markedly different perspectives on both teachers being encouraged to take on leadership roles or be leaders in their schools. SLs fall slightly above "agree" on the items that ask whether teachers are encouraged to be leaders in their schools and whether encouraged to participate in school leadership roles. SLs, relative to other cohorts, also report a higher level of agreement that teachers have an appropriate level of influence on decision making in their schools, and that the faculty has an effective process for making group decisions. This disconnect between SLs and the other cohorts could be the result of several factors. First, it may be that school leaders are not effectively communicating their openness to teachers taking on greater leadership, and so educators underestimate how their leadership would be received by administration. It may also be that SLs and educators in the other cohorts have different ideas about the appropriate level of influence teachers should have on school decisions as these responses are consistent with SLs believing teachers should play a somewhat smaller role in school decisions.



Figure 21. Encouragement to Take on Leadership Roles and Participate in School Decision Making by Cohort



Source: Fall 2023 TeachMichigan Fellow Survey. All data collected by Education Policy Innovation Collaborative.

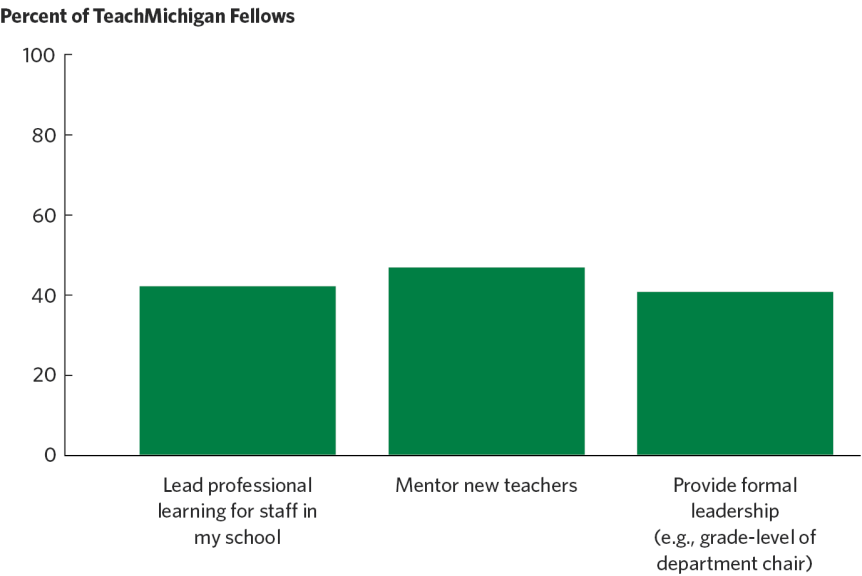
## Teachers' Participation in Leadership Activities

Earlier sections explored fellows' comfort raising issues to their leadership and perceptions about the extent to which they are encouraged to take on leadership. Here, we examine the way(s) in which fellows show leadership in their schools using a set of items from our survey that asked fellows to report whether they participated in specific leadership activities at their school. These include leading professional learning activities, mentoring new teachers, and serving in a formal leadership role such as a grade-level, content/department, or committee chair. To understand the level of fellow participation in leadership activities we use the percentage of teachers who reported participating in each form of leadership.

Overall Fellow Perceptions

Less than 50% of teaching fellows report participating in any of the leadership activities at their schools. We find that 42% of fellows report leading professional learning, 47% report mentoring new teachers, and 41% report serving in formal teacher leadership roles. At the same time, a sizable share of fellows do serve in some leadership capacity, meaning that fellows may be in a position to promote school-wide change. Being provided opportunities for teacher leadership is a key component of TeachMichigan’s theory of change, it will be important to examine responses to these items in future administrations of the survey to gauge whether more fellows take on leadership roles.

Figure 22. Teachers’ Reported Participation in Leadership Activities – All Fellows



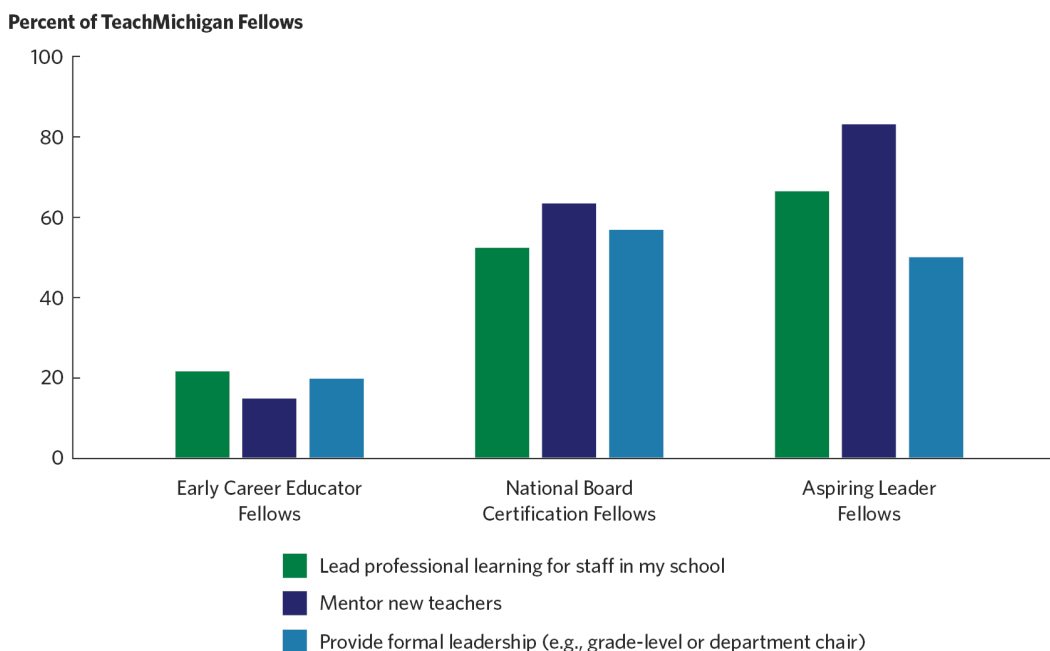
Source: Fall 2023 TeachMichigan Fellow Survey. All data collected by Education Policy Innovation Collaborative.

Differences Between Cohorts

We see significant variation in the extent to which teachers in different cohorts report participating in leadership activities, shown in Figure 23. ECE fellows are much less likely to participate in any of the three leadership activities: 22% lead professional learning, 15% mentor new teachers, and 20% serve in a formal leadership role. This may be related to ECE fellows’ weaker agreement that they are encouraged to take on leadership roles, shown above. It may also be that ECEs do not yet feel they have the skills and experience to take on leadership positions or have sufficient experience that they are prepared for leadership. NBC and AL fellows, on the other hand, participate in leadership activities at much higher rates as at least 50% report serving as a leader in some form: 52% of NBC fellows and 67% of AL fellows lead professional learning in

their schools, 63% of NBC fellows and 83% of AL fellows mentor new teachers, and 57% of NBC fellows and 50% of AL fellows serve in formal teacher leader roles. As AL and NBC fellows report greater overall participation in school leadership positions, further empowerment for these fellows may require the creation of new leadership positions in their schools or expanding the influence their current leadership roles. For ECE fellows, professional development opportunities preparing them to take on leadership roles early in their careers may facilitate greater participation in leadership activities in their schools.

**Figure 23. Teachers' Reported Participation in Leadership Activities – By Cohort**



*Source: Fall 2023 TeachMichigan Fellow Survey. All data collected by Education Policy Innovation Collaborative.*

## Fellow Perspectives on Leadership and Support

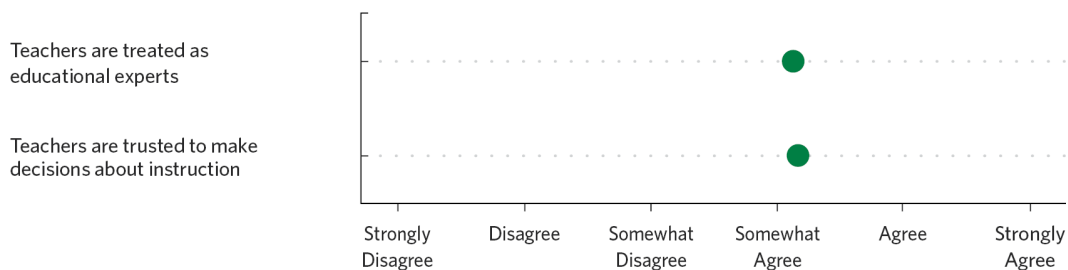
In this section, we examine fellows' beliefs about the extent to which they are trusted to make decisions about educational issues and how receptive their school and district leadership are to input from teachers. We find that, on average, fellows seem to think that leaders somewhat trust and value their perspectives, but don't necessarily understand their challenges or do enough to incorporate educators into decision-making processes.

### Are Fellows Trusted as Educational Experts?

Educators develop significant expertise about their subject areas and pedagogy. While leaders must confront a range of issues in addition to instruction, educators' expertise is relevant to a number of important decisions leaders make about their schools and districts. Additionally, leaders' decisions can have a significant impact on teachers' work. Leaders may therefore be wise to consider educators' input where relevant as this could lead to better decision-making and make educators feel valued by their leaders. To understand the extent to which fellows believe they are seen as educational experts, our survey asked fellows the extent to which they are treated as educational experts and trusted to make decisions about instruction. Here, we all examine how these perspectives vary across fellows by comparing the average response across cohorts.

Figure 24 displays the average response across all fellows to questions that asked their level of agreement with statements that teachers in their school are treated as educational experts and that teachers in their school are trusted to make decisions about instruction. On average, fellows indicated that they somewhat agree with both items, suggesting that fellows do feel some recognition of their expertise, but don't feel fully embraced by leadership.

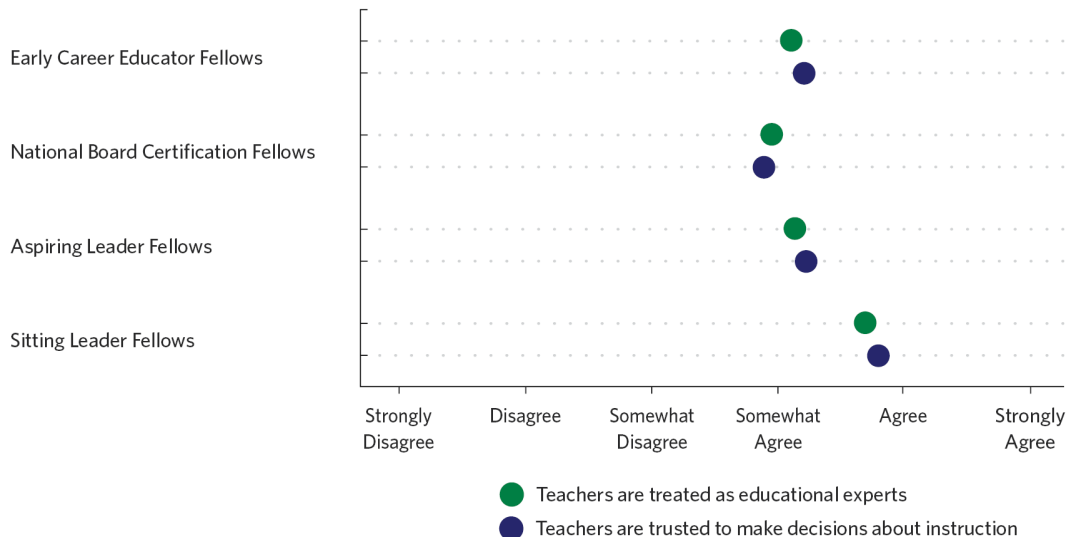
**Figure 24. Are Educators Trusted as Educational Experts? – All Fellows**



*Source: Fall 2023 TeachMichigan Fellow Survey. All data collected by Education Policy Innovation Collaborative.*

Disaggregating responses by cohort, shown in Figure 25, reveals an interesting pattern. For both items, ECE, NBC, and AL fellows all reported similar levels of agreement with both statements. Sitting leaders, however, were more likely to agree that teachers in their school are treated as educational experts and trusted to make decisions about instruction. This may be the result of several phenomena. It may be that most educators are not aware of how much trust leaders have in them. It may also be that leaders believe they are making decisions in ways that trust their staff, but educators do not share this view. Both the overall responses and responses across cohorts may change over time as TeachMichigan facilitates greater interaction between ECE, NBC, and AL fellows and their leaders and SL fellows develop leadership skills that help them draw on the expertise amongst their staff.

Figure 25. Are Educators Trusted as Educational Experts?



Source: Fall 2023 TeachMichigan Fellow Survey. All data collected by Education Policy Innovation Collaborative.

### Receptivity to Teacher Input<sup>2</sup>

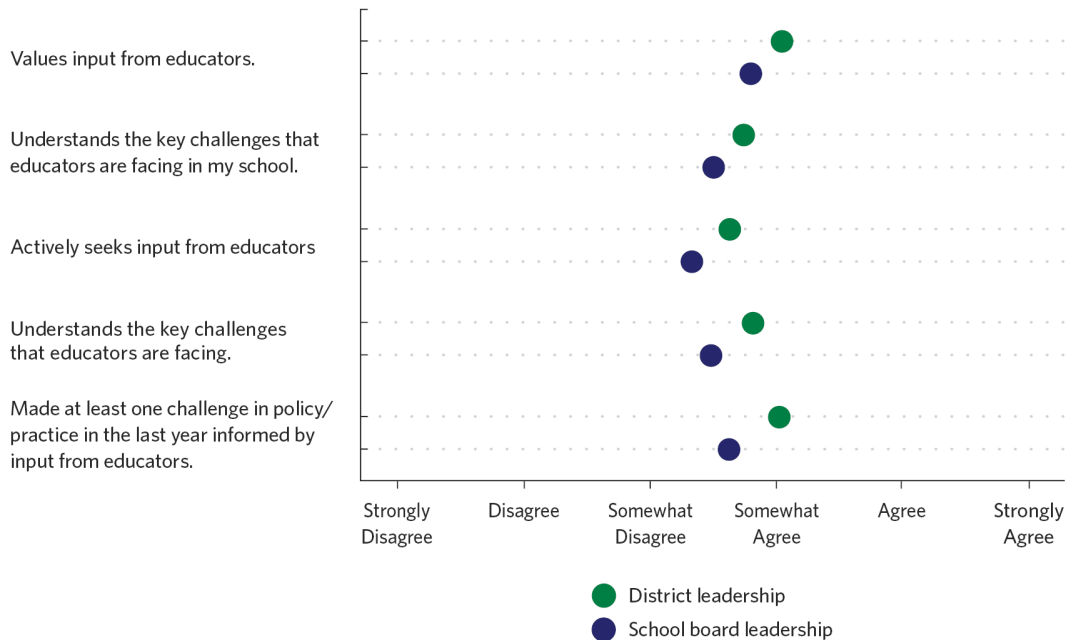
Leaders can also draw on input from their staff in ways that go beyond their professional expertise. For example, leaders may consult educators' input on schedules, student discipline, and how to best use discretionary funds, among other issues. To understand the extent to which fellows believe their input is valued more generally, our survey included a set of questions that asked fellows to indicate their level of agreement with statements that their superintendent<sup>3</sup> and board: value input from educators, actively seek input from educators, understand the key challenges faced by educators in their school and in the district, and has made policy changes informed by educators from the district.

Figure 26. shows the average response to each item across all fellows, with the top panel displaying how fellows responded to items about their superintendent and the bottom panel displaying how fellows responded to items about their board. Across these two sets of items, one can see that fellows gave generally similar responses about their district leaders and school boards, though perceptions of school boards were slightly more negative. Average responses across all items fall between somewhat disagree and somewhat agree, suggesting that fellows don't have a strong opinion about whether or not their district leadership considers educators' input in their decision-making. At the same time, fellows reported greater agreement that both their superintendent and board value input from educators and that they have made at least one policy change within the previous year that was informed by educator input. Responses show less agreement with statements that their superintendent and board understand educators' needs and actively seek out educator input. This

difference implies that there could be a disconnect in which fellows believe that district leaders do not well understand their needs and don't take active steps to solicit their input, but that their input is valued and sometimes used to make decisions.

**Figure 26. Perceptions of Leadership – All Fellows**

***I believe that my superintendent/charter district director, or majority of my school board...***



*Source: Fall 2023 TeachMichigan Fellow Survey. All data collected by Education Policy Innovation Collaborative.*

Looking across cohorts, shown in both panels of Figure 27, reveals a generally similar pattern of responses across items and in terms of differences in perceptions between their superintendent and board, though there are some important distinctions. First, NBC fellows report the lowest levels of agreement with all statements that pertain to both their superintendent and board. Being that national board certification recognizes excellent teacher and one may assume that the educators who pursue certification are more effective than average, it may be that NBC fellows believe they have greater expertise than many of their colleagues and are not recognized for it.

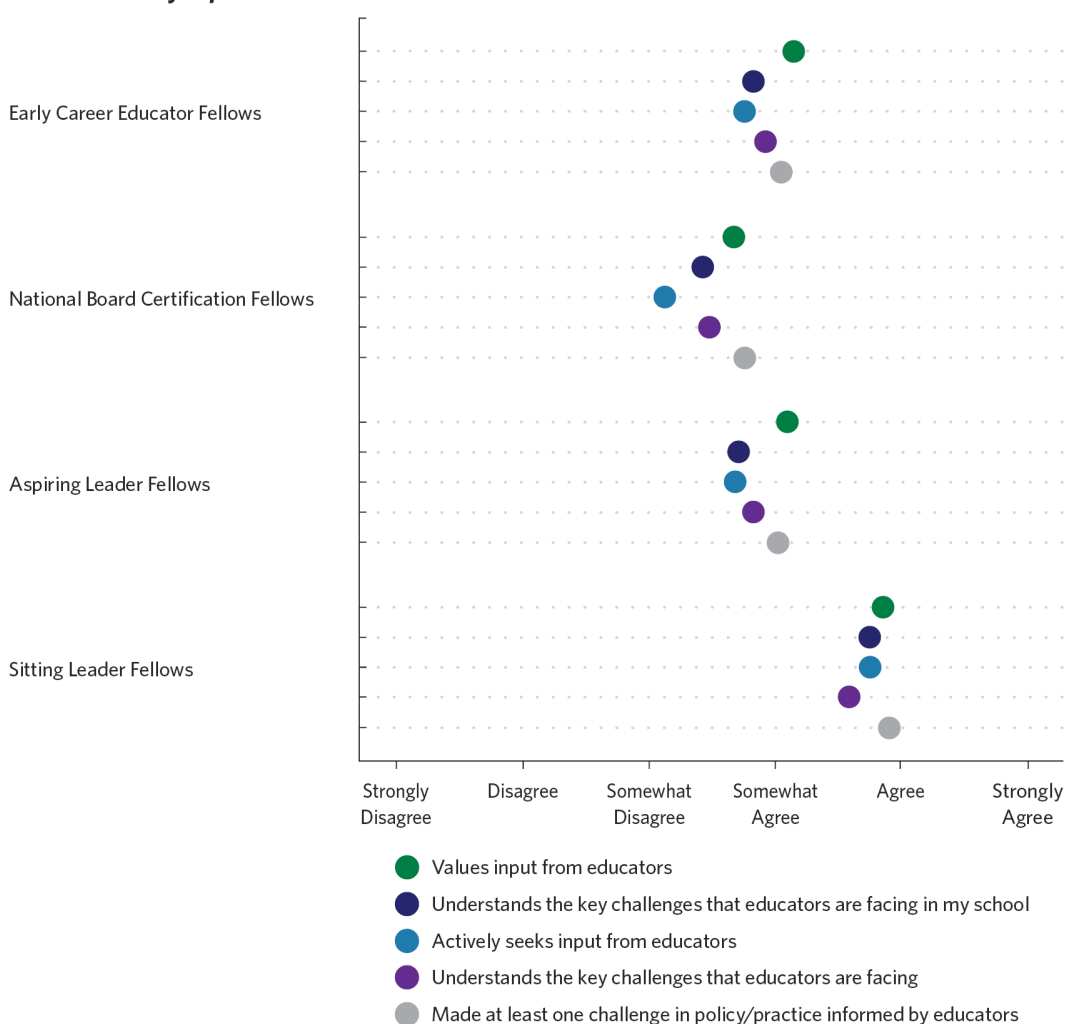
Second, SL fellows reported greater agreement with all items, and also gave more positive and consistent responses to items that asked about their superintendent. Higher average responses may be the result of several things. It may be that sitting leaders overestimate how receptive their superintendent and board members are to educator input, though it may also mean that ECE, NBC, and AL fellows are not aware of the ways in which their input is valued and used by their superintendent and board. Sitting leaders' more positive and consistent responses regarding their superintendent relative to their board may be the result of the relationships between

superintendents and building administrators that provides greater insight into how educator input is used to make decisions.

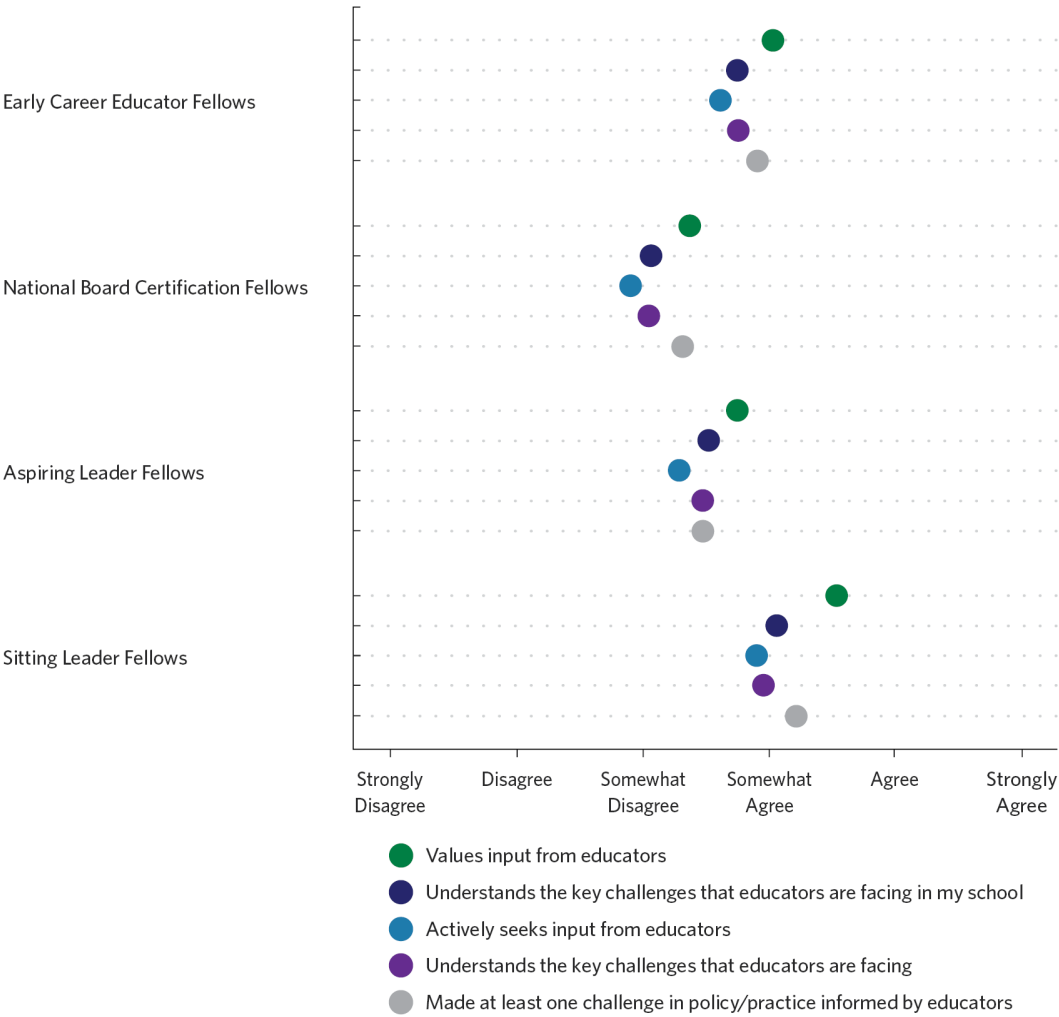
Low average responses across this domain suggests that most fellows, especially those in the ECE, NBC, and AL cohorts, do not feel an especially strong connection with their district's leadership. Given the important role of district leaders in setting policies that shape the educational environment, these weaker connections may have implications for the extent to which TeachMichigan is able to facilitate systems-level change. At the same time, these results represent a baseline that could change in response to the core components of TeachMichigan, namely creating opportunities for educators to engage with leaders and policymakers.

**Figure 27. Perceptions of Leadership – By Cohort**

*I believe that my superintendent or charter district director...*



***I believe that the majority of my school board...***



*Source: Fall 2023 TeachMichigan Fellow Survey. All data collected by Education Policy Innovation Collaborative.*

## Discussion of Fellows' Leadership Perspectives

Our findings on fellows' leadership perspectives reveal some important themes. First, there appears to be a disconnect between school leaders and teachers regarding the influence they see teachers having over schoolwide decisions. Second, while a considerable number of fellows participate in leadership activities in their schools, teachers do not feel they have enough influence over schoolwide decisions. This suggests school leaders may not have effectively communicated the ways in which teachers can play a role in school leadership activities, leaving teachers unaware of how they can shape decisions at the school level. This may also indicate that the leadership positions teachers hold do not provide them with the power to drive meaningful systems-level change.



Our findings suggest that the TeachMichigan fellowship program could facilitate positive change in schools through enhancing educator empowerment. This could be achieved by providing professional learning opportunities to all fellows that enhance communication on teacher leadership activities at their schools. Effective communication between school leaders and teachers could promote the development of an understanding of the role teachers can play in schoolwide decision-making and help determine ways to increase the power of teacher leadership positions. Additionally, increased communication between school leaders and teachers could potentially increase teachers' perceptions of their agency in schoolwide decision-making and encourage more teachers to aspire to leadership positions in their schools.

## DISCUSSION

Overall, we find that TeachMichigan fellows are working in schools that likely have more challenging educational environments than schools without TeachMichigan fellows. When asked about their perceptions of their school environments, however, fellows seem more focused on issues related to leadership and agency than with working conditions and school culture.

While state administrative data suggests that TeachMichigan fellows are in schools with challenging working conditions, fellows themselves reported fairly positive perspectives on working conditions and culture in their schools. Student attendance was flagged as the most challenging hindrance to school improvement efforts among fellows. While current TeachMichigan programming does not focus explicitly on student attendance, given the increase in issues around attendance across Michigan and the impact it can have on working conditions, this may be an important area for TeachMichigan to focus on with fellows going forward.

The notable exception to the relatively positive perceptions on working conditions were the ECE fellows. This group reported more challenges related to behavior management, student motivation, and time. These challenges may be reflections of ECE fellows' limited time in the classroom and may change as they become more experienced educators. We may also see these perspectives change as the ECE fellows build expertise through TeachMichigan's professional learning which focuses, in part, on foundational instructional practices like behavior management and student engagement.

Regarding leadership and agency, fellows felt positively about their confidence in speaking up but were less enthusiastic about their current impact on classroom and school level decision-making. Fellows' perceptions of district and board leadership both suggest that fellows think their leaders value them, but do not actively seek out their input or understand their experiences. TeachMichigan's theory of change reflects the value placed on creating opportunities for leadership for their fellows and connecting fellows with system level leaders. Finding ways to increase fellows' sense

of agency and involvement in decision-making at the classroom, school, and district level will likely go a long way toward improving fellows' perceptions of their educational environments.

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## END NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> These questions were specifically geared toward teachers. Although most ECE, NBC, and AL fellows are classroom teachers, some AL fellows who serve as deans, coaches, social workers, or counselors. They were excluded from this part of the analysis.

<sup>2</sup> For charter schools, we asked about the management organization that oversees their schools.

<sup>3</sup> Superintendents for traditional public schools and charter school district directors for charter schools.