

Genocide Education in Massachusetts Middle & High Schools

Year Two Update: Statewide Landscape Analysis and Grant Evaluation



Acknowledgments

We want to acknowledge and give a special note of appreciation to students, teachers, and district staff who took the time to participate in this study by taking part in focus groups and surveys.

We recognize how emotional and challenging the topic of genocide is, especially for those who may belong to a community directly affected by genocide or have loved ones who lost their lives to genocide.

Students shared candidly about their experience learning about genocide, including lessons learned, approaches to learning that felt most impactful, challenges, and suggestions for improvement. District staff and teachers played a key role in coordinating the scheduling of these student focus groups, as well as taking time out of their busy schedules to participate in teacher and district staff focus groups.

We are also grateful to the rest of our MC² Education team, including Elisabet García and Kyla Brown, and for the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education staff - Miesha Keita, Kendra Winner, Rebekah Judson, and Reuben Henriques - who collaborated deeply with our team on this evaluation to better understand genocide education in the Commonwealth.

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Introduction

In 2021, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts passed [Bill H. 692, An Act Concerning Genocide Education](#), which requires districts to implement genocide education instruction in middle and high schools. The bill also provided grant funding to support genocide education in a subset of districts that apply for and receive the grant.

In 2023, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), contracted MC² Education (MC²) to conduct a landscape analysis and evaluation of the DESE [Genocide Education Grant](#) over four years. In 2024, the MC² team produced a [report](#) about the first year of the evaluation, which we believe to be the first state-level landscape analysis of how genocide education is implemented across a state and its districts. As states – including Massachusetts – continue their efforts to require genocide education, learning how districts and teachers implement genocide education can help us understand what is working and what merits improvement as the field strives for remembrance, recognition, and prevention of genocide.

In the 2024-25 school year, our evaluation included a second administration of a survey for district leaders, as well as focus groups with students, teachers, and community partner groups engaged in genocide education across the state. With these new data, we are able to continue addressing the research questions of our multi-year evaluation. This summary memo provides an update based on all data collection in the 2024-25 school year.

This report is organized by data source. We begin by discussing survey data and subsequently discuss focus group data from different participants. For each data source, we describe our sample and methods, section-level key takeaways, and detailed findings that include examples of participant voice. We end with a discussion of themes from the 2024-25 school year. ■



District Leader Survey

Sample and Methods

Our goal for the survey was to obtain a sample representative of both Genocide Education Grant recipient districts and all other Massachusetts traditional public and charter districts serving middle and/or high school students. In the 2023-24 school year, we created the survey sample by first including all the districts who received a Genocide Education Grant in Fiscal Year 2024 (FY24), who we refer to as “grantee districts”, and subsequently using a random selection approach to select districts who did not receive a grant in FY24 (“non-grantee districts”). Our sample of 193 districts for the 2024-25 analysis includes the districts in our 2023-24 sample as well as additional districts that had since received Genocide Education Grants. The online survey link was sent to district leaders of all 193 districts in February 2025, and follow-up emails were sent regularly until the survey closed in early March 2025. A total of 59 responses were collected from 57 districts across the Commonwealth.

59

Survey Respondents

Thirty-five respondents were from non-grantee districts (those who did not receive Fund Code 215 grant funds in FY25), and 24 were from grantee districts (those who did receive Fund Code 215 grant funds in FY25). These 24 grantees represent about 57% of the total group of 42 FY25 grantees across Massachusetts.

Our 2024-25 respondent districts are similar on measurable characteristics (such as urbanicity, charter status, proportion of low-income students, teacher retention, and number of students) to the overall sample of 193 districts ([Exhibit 1](#)), which is in turn comparable to the state as a whole on those measurable characteristics (see [prior report](#)).

Exhibit 1: Comparability of Survey Respondents to Full Sample of Districts

		% of 2025 Respondents	% of Full Sample
District Type	Public	85%	84%
	Charter	14%	16%
# of Students	< 1000 (Tier 1)	20%	22%
	1000-6000 (Tier 2)	68%	69%
	> 6000 (Tier 3)	10%	9%
Title 1 Status	Title 1 District	100%	97%
	Non-Title 1 District	0%	3%
Locale/Urbanicity	Rural	10%	11%
	Suburban	80%	78%
	Urban	8%	11%
Proportion of Low Income Students	0-30%	42%	42%
	31-60%	41%	40%
	61-90%	15%	19%
Teacher Retention Rates	31-60%	3%	5%
	61-80%	19%	19%
	81-100%	76%	76%
Expenditure per Pupil	\$10,000-\$20,000	66%	69%
	\$20,001-\$30,000	31%	29%
	>\$30,000	2%	3%

n = 59 respondents
n = 193 full sample

Source: DESE District Profiles and National Center for Education Statistics
Locale Lookup Tool

Read as: "85% of the 59 survey respondents from 2025 are public school districts, compared to 84% of the 193 districts in the full survey sample."

Throughout this report, when appropriate, we show both 2023-24 and 2024-25 survey data side by side. However, we are only halfway through this four-year evaluation. Any trends we observe across these first two years may or may not continue in future data collection, as they reflect two snapshots in time of district perspectives on genocide education in Massachusetts.

A Note About New Methods

The study team used ChatGPT 4o to support the creation of these and other high-level takeaways throughout the report. The team independently drafted takeaways, then asked the AI system to read the report section and tell us what it believes the high-level takeaways are. The team then compared our takeaways to the ChatGPT 4o output, and combined and edited the takeaways where necessary.





What We Learned

Genocide Education is Common, yet is Unevenly Distributed across Grades and Subjects¹

Districts across Massachusetts are widely integrating genocide education into their curricula, most often within required or elective social studies and history courses. Some English Language Arts courses, both required and elective, include genocide-related content. However, exposure to genocide education topics is concentrated in high school—particularly in grades 9 through 11—with limited instruction in middle school and 12th grade. The relatively less frequent inclusion in middle school grades is congruent with feedback we heard from teachers in focus groups about the challenges they experienced discussing genocide in a developmentally appropriate fashion with younger students.

Grant Funding has a Strong Impact on District Capacity and Growth²

Districts that received a Genocide Education Grant were far more likely to report expanding their genocide education offerings compared to non-grantees. These districts were also more likely to report investing in new strategies to sustain or grow their programming, including developing curriculum, providing teacher training, and forming community partnerships. In contrast, most non-grantee districts reported maintaining existing levels of instruction, with few indicating plans to grow their programming. These findings suggest that the targeted grant funding enables districts to deepen and broaden their genocide education efforts.

¹ See Exhibit 2: Courses Covering Genocide Education and Exhibit 3: Number of Required and Elective Courses about Genocide Education by Grade

² See Exhibit 4: Changes in Genocide Education Offerings from 2023-24 to 2024-25 School Year, and Exhibit 6: Strategies Intended by Districts who Anticipate Sustaining or Increasing their Genocide Education Offerings Next Year

Instructional Approaches are Rooted in History³

District leaders reported that teachers are encouraged to focus on historical context and analysis of primary sources for genocide education efforts—approaches that align well with traditional pedagogy. However, more interactive methods—such as survivor visits, guest speakers, museum visits, or opportunities for civic action—are less commonly encouraged, perhaps due to high resource requirements. This suggests the value of providing resources to districts to increase capacity for some of these more interactive learning experiences.

Holocaust Education Remains the Anchor, but Broader Representation is Limited⁴

According to district leaders, the Holocaust is the most commonly taught historical genocide event, frequently serving as the centerpiece of genocide education instruction. While some districts reported that their courses also include the Rwandan and Armenian genocides, far fewer address Native American dislocation and genocide or other global events. Teachers, students, and community partners noted this focus on the Holocaust in focus groups and spoke to the value of developing a more inclusive and comparative approach to genocide education.

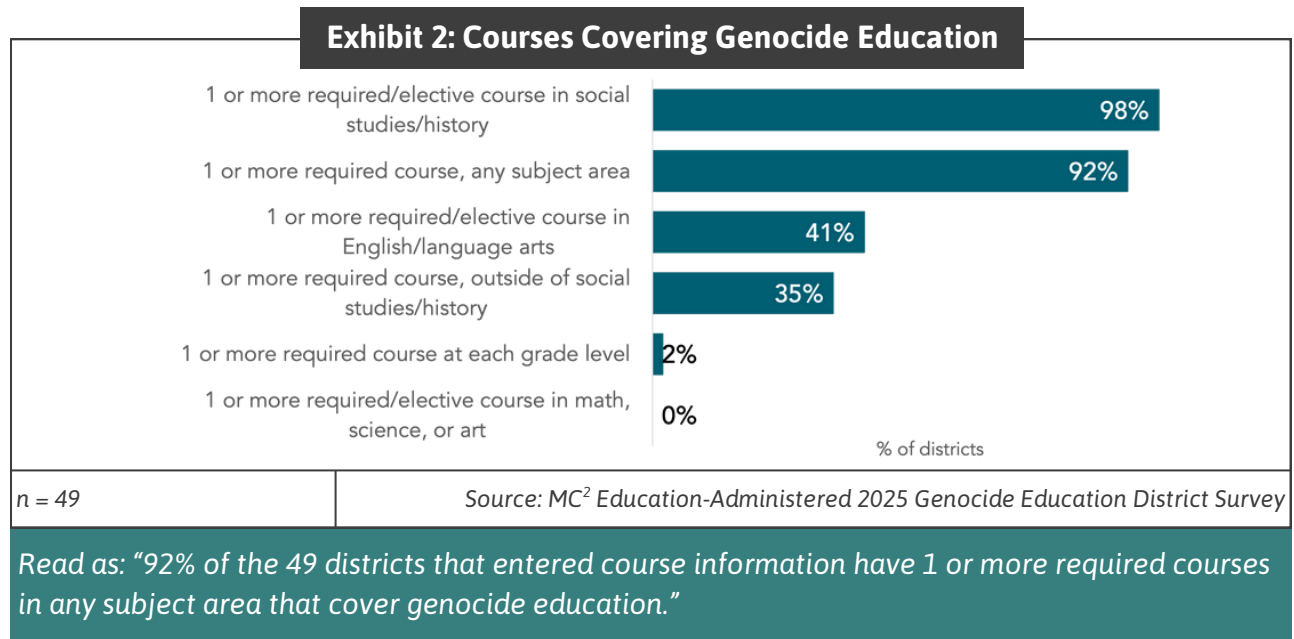


³ See Exhibit 5: Pedagogical Approaches Encouraged by Districts for Genocide Education

⁴ See Exhibit 7: Most Frequently Covered Genocide Topics, as Reported by District Leaders

Detailed Findings from Districts

According to this year's snapshot of data as well as last year's, students usually encounter genocide education topics in either required or elective social studies/history courses, and in some required English Language Arts courses.



Genocide education topics are not covered in other subjects such as math, science, or art. Of the district respondents who entered detailed information about course offerings, 92% reported offering at least one required course covering genocide education. Across required and elective social studies or history courses, 98% of district respondents reported at least one course covering genocide education. Finally, about a third of the districts offer a required English Language Arts course that covers genocide education ([Exhibit 2](#)).⁵

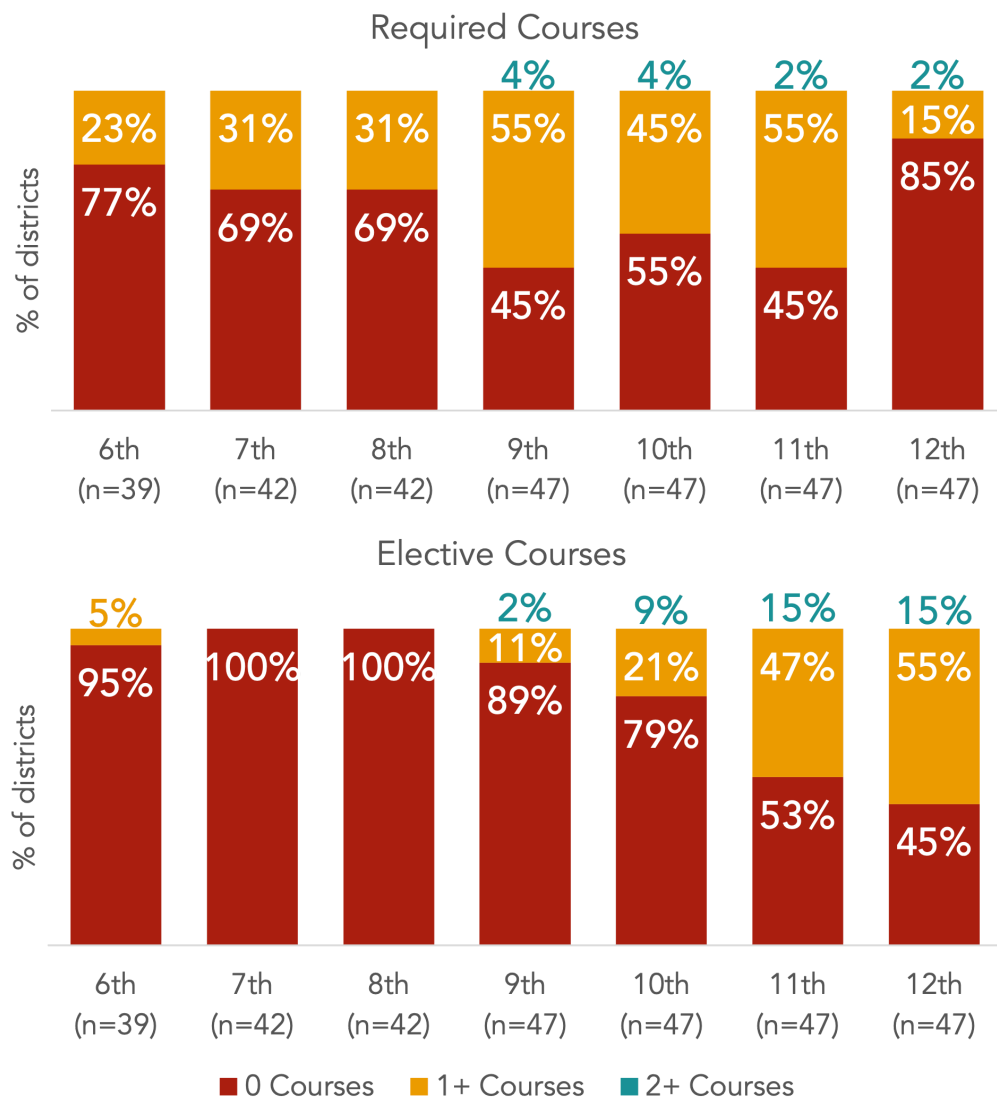
The proportion of districts with a required course covering genocide education in any subject area has risen in this year's respondent sample (from 76% of respondents last year). However, when survey data are limited to just those districts that responded in both 2023-24 and 2024-25, that difference goes away. For that subset of districts (n=43), 92% offered a required course in any subject area that covers genocide education in both school years. We don't know whether the districts responding in both years offer more courses covering genocide education than the state as a whole, or whether the 2023-24 respondent districts offer fewer

⁵ Respondent 'n' counts vary by question throughout district survey data due to the non-required nature of some questions, and some respondents who submitted the survey prior to completing all questions.

courses covering genocide education than the state as a whole, or if other (not observed) factors would explain the change. Although students can encounter genocide education topics throughout their 6th-12th grade years, districts generally offer required courses between 9th-11th grades ([Exhibit 3](#)). Very few districts require courses that address genocide education topics in 12th grade. Districts overwhelmingly offer elective courses at the high school level, and an increasing proportion of districts offer elective courses in the upper grades of high school.

Less than a third of districts have a required course covering genocide education in 6th, 7th, or 8th grades (23%, 31%, 31%, respectively). Required courses are more prevalent in grades 9-11, with between 45% and 55% of districts requiring a course covering genocide education. Elective courses, meanwhile, are rarely offered in middle school, and are offered increasingly throughout high school. About half of the districts surveyed offer an elective course covering genocide education for 11th and 12th graders (47% and 55% of districts, respectively), and 15% of the districts offer two or more such courses ([Exhibit 3](#)).



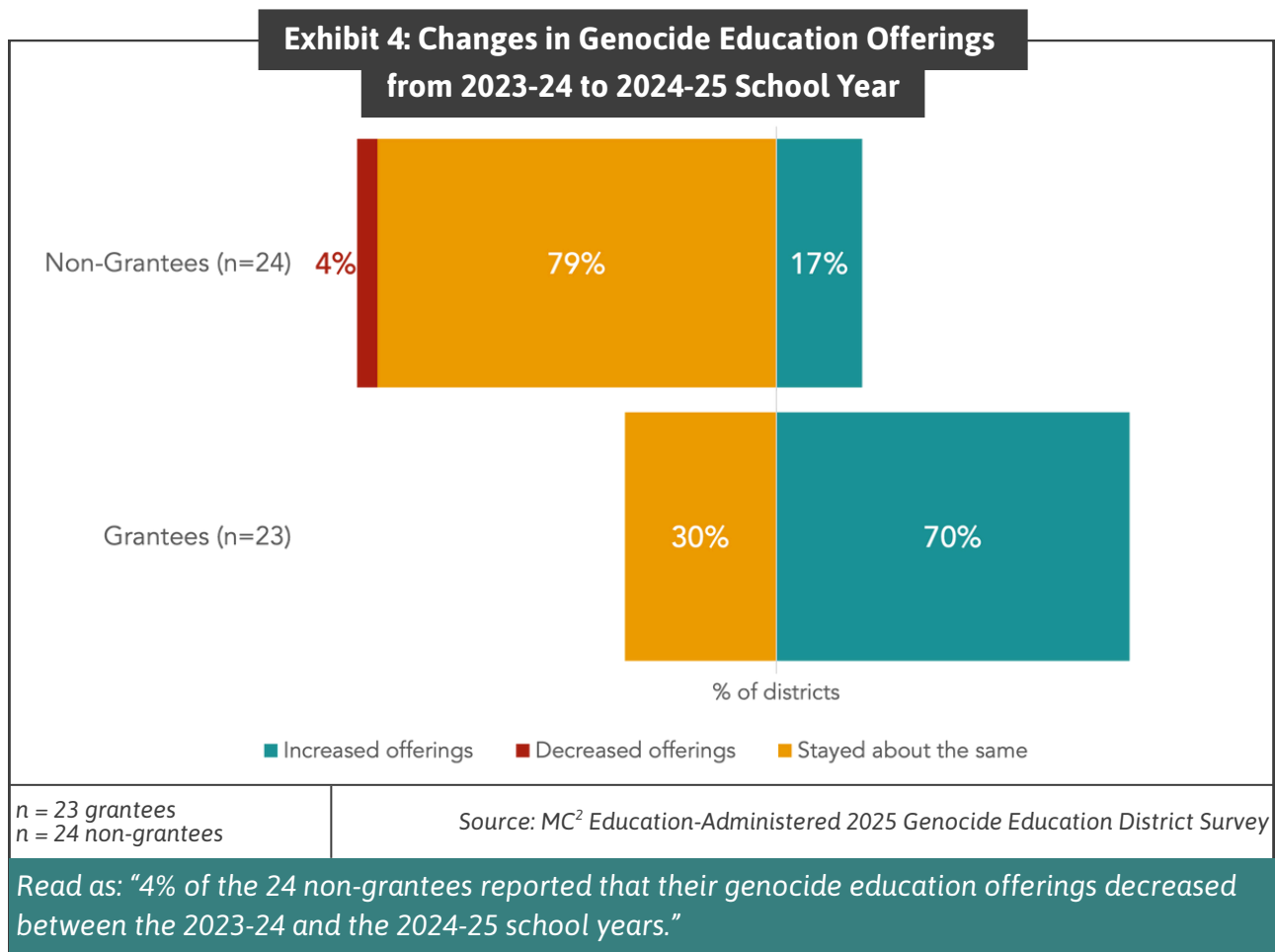
Exhibit 3: Number of Required & Elective Courses about Genocide Education by Grade

n varies by grade level

Source: MC² Education-Administered 2025 Genocide Education District Survey

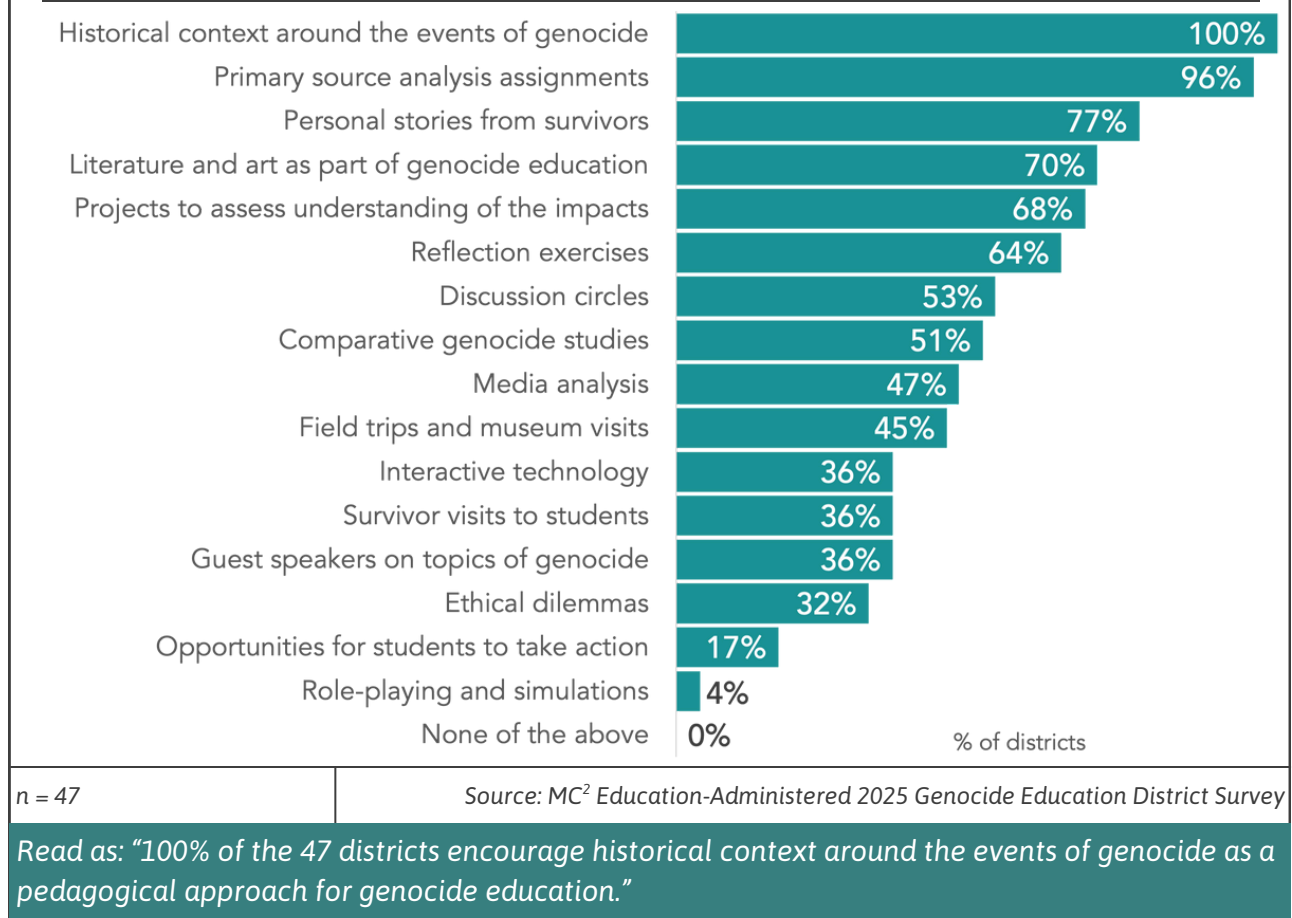
Read as: "23% of the 39 districts that offer 6th grade have 1 or more required courses in 6th grade covering genocide education." Or, "4% of the 47 districts that offer 9th grade have 2 or more required courses in 9th grade covering genocide education. Those 4% are included within the 55% who have 1 or more required courses in 9th grade covering genocide education."

Note: For ease of interpretation, numbers presented above the vertical bars in teal represent the percent of districts offering 2 or more courses in that grade. All districts in these percentages are also included in the 1 or more courses bar by definition.



When asked whether their genocide education offerings had decreased, stayed about the same, or increased from the previous school year (2023-24), there was a marked difference between grantee and non-grantee responses (**Exhibit 4**). Seventy percent of grantee districts reported increasing their offerings compared to the 2023-24 school year, whereas only 17% of non-grantee districts reported the same. Most non-grantee districts (79%), in fact, sustained their offerings, although a small portion (4%) decreased their offerings.

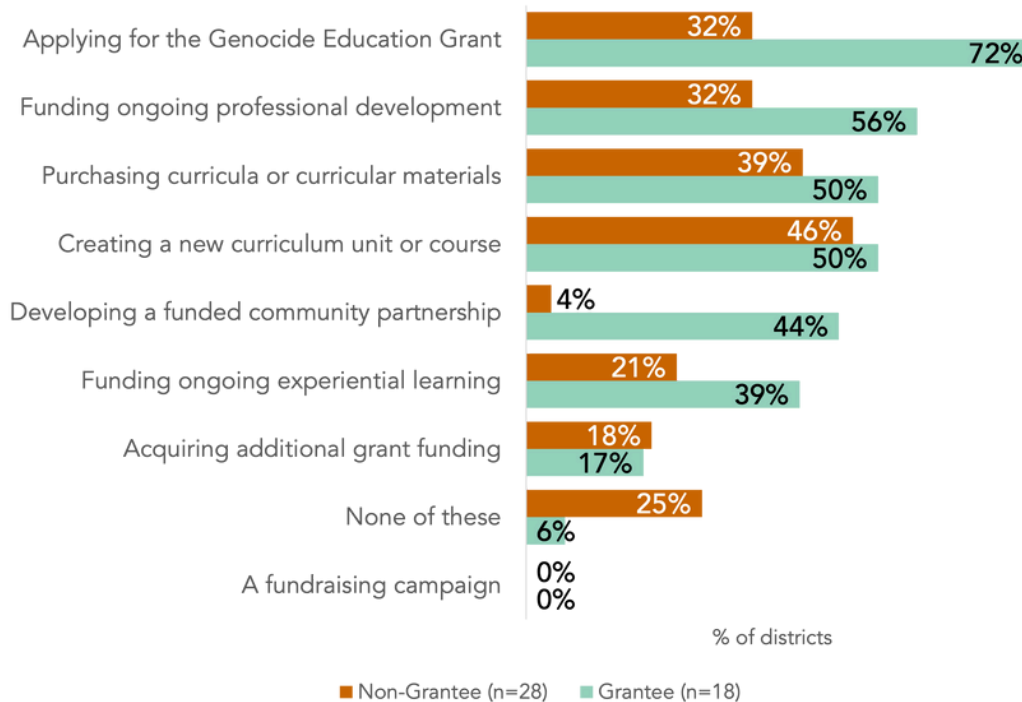
The findings from this year's snapshot of district respondents are remarkably similar to the findings from last year, suggesting that grant funding may play a role in district capacity to increase offerings in genocide education.

Exhibit 5: Pedagogical Approaches Encouraged by Districts for Genocide Education

District leaders reported that they encourage varied pedagogical approaches to teaching genocide education (**Exhibit 5**), including providing historical context around the events of genocide and the use of primary source analysis assignments (100 and 96%, respectively). Both teacher and student focus group participants highlighted the importance of primary sources for the student genocide education experience. Less than a third of responding districts reported encouraging the use of ethical dilemmas, opportunities for students to take action against genocide, or role-playing and simulations as pedagogical approaches to genocide education. Immersive or first-person experiences, such as field trips and museum visits, survivor visits to students, and guest speakers on topics of genocide, were encouraged by less than half of districts (45%, 36%, and 36%, respectively).

District respondents were asked whether their genocide education offerings in the next school year (2025-26) are likely to increase, stay about the same, or decrease. The 78% (n=46) of districts that anticipated sustaining or increasing their genocide

Exhibit 6: Strategies Intended by Districts who Anticipate Sustaining or Increasing their Genocide Education Offerings Next Year



n = 18 grantees
n = 28 non-grantees

Source: MC² Education-Administered 2025 Genocide Education District Survey

Read as: "Among those who anticipate sustaining or increasing their genocide education offerings next year, 32% of the 28 non-grantees plan to apply for the Genocide Education Grant, while 72% of the 18 grantees plan to apply for the Genocide Education Grant."

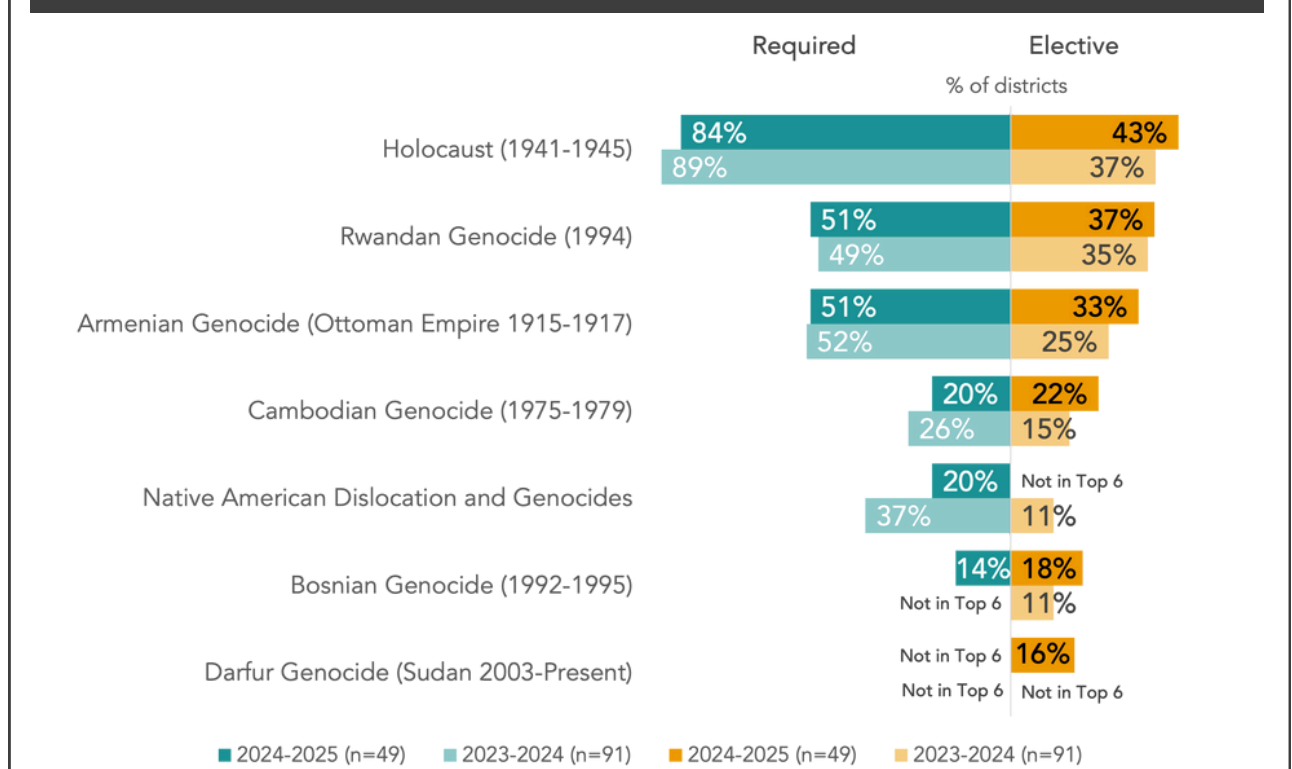
education offerings next year were then asked what strategies they would use to accomplish that goal. Here, we found distinct differences between grantee respondents (n=18) and non-grantee respondents (n=28).

Almost three-quarters (72%) of grantee and 32% of non-grantee respondents intended to apply for the Genocide Education Grant to sustain or increase their offerings (see [Exhibit 6](#)). In addition, more than half of the grantee districts (56%) planned to fund ongoing professional development, compared to 32% of non-grantees.

One apparent difference is that 44% of grantee districts and 4% of non-grantee districts anticipated developing a funded community partnership to sustain or increase their genocide education offerings. Findings from community partner focus groups (with representatives from partner organizations engaged to support

genocide education) also suggest that the state’s Genocide Education Grants served to motivate both school districts and organizations to form partnerships (see the community partner focus group section below for more detail).

Exhibit 7: Most Frequently Covered Genocide Topics, as Reported by District Leaders



n varies by year and condition

Source: MC² Education-Administered 2025 Genocide Education District Survey

Read as: “In the 2024-25 school year, 84% of the 49 districts reported that the Holocaust was covered in a required course and 43% reported that it was covered in an elective course. In the 2023-24 school year, 89% of the 91 districts reported that the Holocaust was covered in an elective course and 37% reported that it was covered in an elective course.”

Note: This chart shows the top six topics in required and elective courses as reported by district leaders. District leaders provided information on up to 15 separate courses, including narrative responses about which topics were addressed in a given course. Their responses were then grouped according to an established list of genocides, and we added more categories when appropriate.

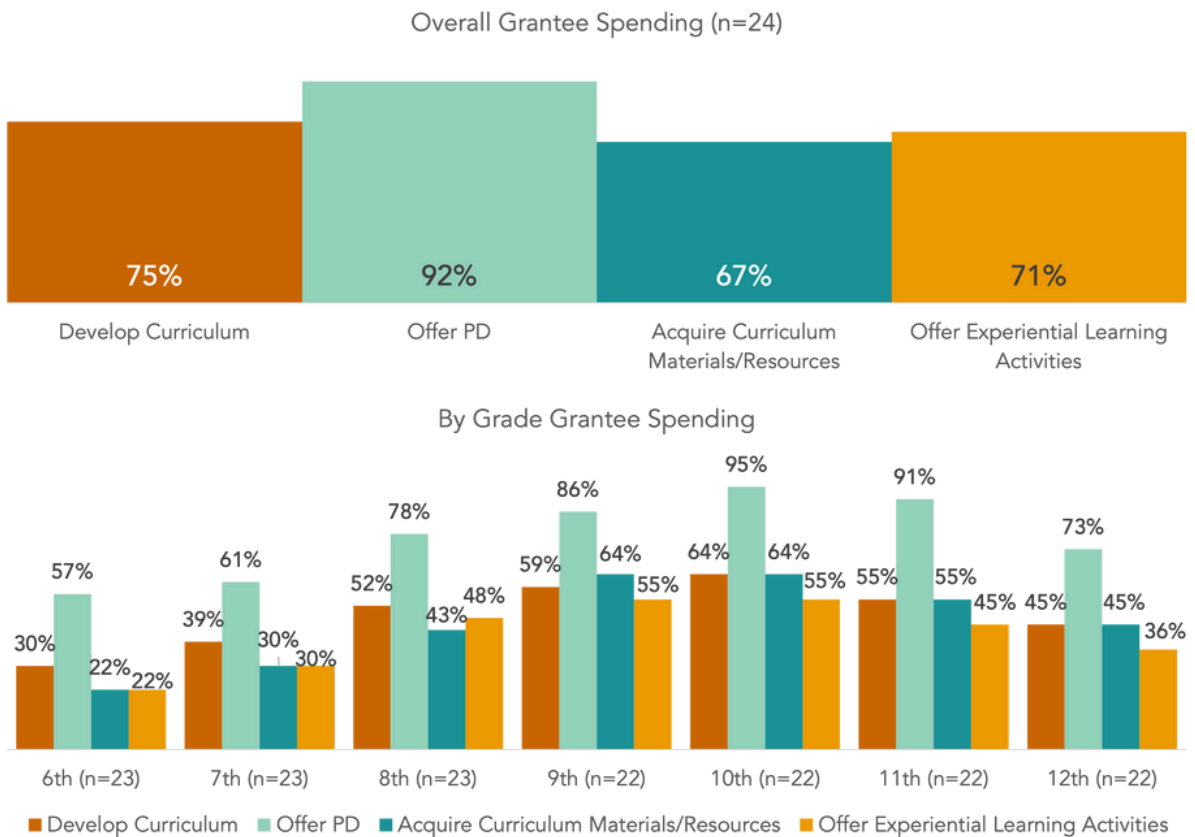
The snapshots of data from both years on genocide topics presented in [Exhibit 7](#) show generally steady patterns. In the 2024-25 school year, 84% and 43% of districts reported that the Holocaust was covered in a required or an elective course respectively, similar to the proportions reported in the 2023-24 school year ([Exhibit 7](#)). This finding was echoed by students in the 12th grade focus group, who recalled

learning about the Holocaust but expressed concern about not learning about other genocides beyond the Holocaust. Similarly, participants in teacher focus groups noted the need for more training and professional development on genocides outside of the Holocaust.

In both 2024-25 and 2023-24, the Rwandan and Armenian genocides were covered in required courses in about half of districts. The Cambodian genocide and topics of Native American dislocations and genocides were covered in required courses in fewer districts; both of these were among the top six most frequently covered genocide topics reported by district leaders. The same trends generally follow for genocide topics covered in elective courses, within which the Bosnian and Darfur genocides were also included among the top six genocide topics covered in elective courses.

Almost all (92%) of the districts which received grant funding in FY25 reported using grant funds to offer professional development (PD). At each grade level, more than half of all grantees reported using funds to offer PD, and the proportion of districts doing so peaks at 95% of districts offering PD for 10th grade teachers ([Exhibit 8](#)).



Exhibit 8: Percent of Grantees that Report Using Grant Funds, by Spending Category

n varies by grade level

Source: MC² Education-Administered 2025 Genocide Education District Survey

Read as: "75% of the 24 grantees reported spending their grant funds on developing curriculum. And, 30% of the 23 grantees who offer 6th grade report spending their grant funds on developing curriculum for the 6th grade."

The next most commonly reported use for grant funding was curriculum development, which followed the same general patterns we observed for PD. In fact, all four spending categories followed the same general pattern — increasing in proportion of districts from 6th to 10th grades, peaking in 10th grade, and decreasing across 11th and 12th grades.

Districts are consistently offering courses that address genocide topics across grade levels, with particular concentration in grades 9-11, which also seems to reflect how grantees allocate their funding. When we present future survey results, in spring 2026 and 2027, we will learn whether the patterns observed for the study's first two years remain stable. As illustrated below, the information from focus group conversations largely reinforces the findings described in this section. ■



Teacher Focus Groups

Sample and Methods

In early 2025, MC² held two focus groups with teachers who teach genocide education topics in their courses. All participants were invited to attend a virtual focus group; two focus groups were held, one each dedicated to grantees and non-grantees. Four non-grantee participants joined a live conversation, two teachers were unable to attend and submitted their responses to focus group questions via email, and one participant was pulled away halfway through the conversation and submitted responses to the focus group questions via email. Because only one participant in the grantee-specific ‘focus group’ attended, the session was converted to an interview format. The other two grantee teachers responded to the questions via email. The ten teacher participants came from seven different school districts, and all but two are experienced teachers with eight-plus years of teaching. The information and quotes provided below come from the focus group, emailed responses, and the single interview we conducted.⁶ In all cases, both in quotes and summaries of what we heard, we use the words and phrasing that participants used to refer to current and historical events.

⁶ Some participants' responses reflected particular political perspectives. As a non-partisan organization, MC² LLC neither endorses nor condemns what study participants share in interviews, surveys, or focus group discussions. Focus group facilitators are practiced in remaining neutral and non-judgmental in their facilitation of discussions, and in avoiding personal opinions and/or biases. Focus group facilitators followed the protocol available in [Appendix 3](#).

What We Learned

Teachers Need Centralized, Curated, and Age-Appropriate Resources

Teachers repeatedly asked for a central hub of vetted materials—including age-appropriate texts, primary sources, and multimedia—that can be easily adapted across grade levels. Many emphasized that supplemental materials (not full curricula) would be most useful, especially those that help balance emotional impact with age sensitivity, and particularly for middle school.

Finding time to get those resources [is a challenge]. There are a lot of great resources out there but it would be helpful if there was a singular repository for all of the great wealth of resources out there.

- Teacher from a non-grantee district

I want to teach about it [genocide], so finding ways to break down things down to core concepts, to make them readable for middle schoolers, to keep the impact but edit out the graphicness, especially with video. Video resources are fantastic for my curriculum, but a lot of the genocide ones I can't show in a seventh grade classroom, so just for professional development, like finding appropriate resources and editing them for student consumption is the biggest thing that I'm looking for.

- Teacher from a non-grantee district

High-Quality Professional Development (PD) Drives Confidence and Impact

For those teachers who do not have extensive experience teaching genocide education, receiving what they classified as high quality professional development (PD) helped them to feel better prepared and more empowered. They want PD that deepens their content knowledge and provides practical tools for navigating tough conversations and addressing current events with sensitivity and confidence.

I teach history, so I know some [genocides]. But even still, there's so many genocides that if you didn't ever study that specific area, you don't really know a ton... PD on specific genocides, or specific ones that are listed in the curriculum connection sheet from DESE would be helpful.

- Teacher from a grantee district

State-level Policy and Administrative Support Structures are Uneven and Urgently Needed

Teachers expressed real fear and uncertainty about teaching controversial content, especially without clear administrative backing or statewide policies to protect them. Despite genocide education being state-mandated, several teachers noted that a visible, enforceable stance from DESE would help ensure genocide education is not watered down or avoided.

It's the immediacy of what's going on right now has definitely given me pause and a sense of uncertainty and how to approach it just responsibly... I don't even know how my administration would respond if I were to try to present something in class and got parent pushback on it or something. It's the prospect of teaching. It is something I view with more uncertainty than any subject I've considered or been trying to prep for before.

- Teacher from a non-grantee district

Genocide Education is Most Powerful when Centered on Human Stories and Relevance

Teachers emphasized that genocide education is most impactful when students can connect emotionally through survivor stories, personal narratives, and real-life relevance (including current events). Many teachers already do this creatively, but they need support to do it safely, effectively, and consistently across schools.

Teaching genocide education is most impactful when it focuses on the human experience, making the events real and relatable to students. Allowing students to see the emotional and psychological resilience of survivors inspires them and fosters genuine connections with the material. Expanding access to resources that explore the full lifecycle of genocide—before, during, and after—would greatly enhance both teaching and learning outcomes.

- Teacher from a non-grantee district

Detailed Findings from Teachers

Now, we present detailed findings, from both grantees and non-grantees, about genocide education from the teacher perspective. The 2021 law, requires genocide education be taught in middle and high school courses, however it states “genocide education and instruction shall be utilized during appropriate times in middle and high school curricula, as determined by the local school district” (2021 Mass. Acts ch. 98). Therefore, teachers often have different perspectives and strategies for genocide education.

First, we will investigate the implementation and effectiveness of the Genocide Education Grant from the perspective of teachers. Throughout the section we draw from both grantee and non-grantee data, to help us learn whether the experiences reported are similar or different for grantee and non-grantee participants.⁷

Genocide Education Integration into Curricula

The three teachers from grantee districts described using varied approaches to teaching genocide education in their courses. One teacher who teaches Modern World History and Advanced Placement (AP) World History classes spends about 1-3 weeks on genocide topics in those classes. Another described weaving in the topic of genocide throughout a course on ancient civilization, and said “... anytime there’s something that we can connect within a unit, we try and bring it up.” The third grantee teacher described using project-based learning in a stand-alone Comparative Genocide Studies course.

We teach a full-year comparative genocide studies course covering Native Americans in North America, Armenia, the Holocaust, Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia, and Guatemala. We use a combination of books, narratives, and testimony by survivors, perpetrators, victims, and observers for sources (no “textbook”)... We also use lectures and projects including an end-of-year exhibition that the students work on for the entire school year to present to the school community and public before graduation.

- Teacher from a grantee district

One teacher from a non-grantee district reported teaching a stand-alone course using Facing History and Ourselves’ curriculum, while a different non-grantee participant described how multiple genocide topics are integrated throughout high school grades and courses they teach, including Modern World History, US History 1

⁷ Additional quotations from teachers are in [Appendix 1: Quote Bank](#).

& 2, and an AP course on geography. That teacher described covering both genocide and ethnic cleansing as part of a unit on culture in the AP course. Both non-grantee teachers reported teaching students about multiple genocides, although not the same ones. One teacher reported purposefully starting with the Armenian Genocide, “to help [students] understand the basic concepts of genocide.”

Teachers described different approaches to introducing genocide topics, including using clear and common definitions, beginning with a discussion on the Massachusetts law requiring genocide education be taught, to provide local context, and recognizing how student experiences may vary across grade levels and courses that build on students’ prior learning.

Freshmen study the Armenian Genocide, the Holocaust, and the Rwandan Genocide in Modern World History, sophomores cover the Trail of Tears in US History I, and juniors cover the continued genocide of Indigenous peoples in the US. I also incorporate a review of the Holocaust in US [History] II as part of our study of the Second World War. My AP [course in geography] class covers genocide and ethnic cleansing as part of the unit on culture. We discuss the Rwandan Genocide and the ethnic cleansing campaign in Myanmar. I also plan to incorporate a discussion about the current war in Gaza as part of this topic this year. What works well for me to engage my students involves establishing a clear definition of genocide before talking about specific cases. I find students can more easily learn how to apply the term in different contexts if they have a clear and specific definition that is agreed upon.

- Teacher from a non-grantee district

Another non-grantee English Language Arts teacher described providing historical context related to genocide education for 9th grade students before they begin to read the memoir *Night* by Eli Wiesel. This teacher also assigns the book *Maus* by Art Spiegelman to talk about the ripple effects of genocide.

*I have taught a Holocaust memoir to ninth or tenth graders every year of my career (*Night* and *Maus*), but I haven’t received any professional development related to genocide directly. I am interested in expanding my current *Maus* unit so that students research other genocides as part of their final project.*

- Teacher from a non-grantee district

Three teachers from non-grantee districts described incorporating media literacy into their curricula to teach students how ideas and prejudices can be amplified through social media. Two of these teachers focused specifically on social media and all three talked about modern propaganda and validating what we see online.

I can't not address it [current events], because this is something that I know they also have very easy access to, because social media has played such a unique role in our access to an awareness of what's happening around the world. So ... calling attention to media narratives and conflicting narratives that kids are encountering, either like on traditional news or social media.

- Teacher from a non-grantee district



Teachers from both grantee and non-grantee districts reported teaching the Ten Stages of Genocide.⁸ A teacher from a grantee district acknowledged facing some challenges when teaching genocide across the grades, especially beginning with 6th graders, because “they’re just too little.” This teacher described sequencing the topic of genocide through the 10 stages to “set the scene” and build upon students’ increased knowledge as they progress through grade levels, starting in 6th

grade with the first two stages (classification and symbolization), then continuing with the third and fourth stages in 7th grade (discrimination and dehumanization).

Because it's seventh grade and we want to connect it to them, we talk about bystander effect versus upstander and how it is on a smaller level ... that does relate to genocide as a whole, but especially the beginning stages and how they can have a role in stopping it and calling things out and educating other people. So we do a whole little thing about that, then we ... connect it to current events, is how we try to bring it in... So we were really proud of them for what they were understanding about different groups and ‘othering’ people and stuff like that.

- Teacher from a grantee district

⁸ Stanton, G. H. (2016). The ten stages of genocide. Genocide Watch. <https://www.genocidewatch.com/ten-stages-of-genocide>

Professional Development's Impact on Teacher Readiness

In this section, we investigate the impact of professional development on both grantee and non-grantee teachers' ability and readiness to teach genocide education topics. Specifically, we seek to answer the following questions:

To what extent and in what ways, if at all, did participation in Genocide Education Grant activities positively influence teachers' knowledge about and readiness to teach about topics related to the history and patterns of genocide?

To what extent and in what ways, if at all, did the different approaches to professional development and professional development partnerships support teacher comfort and readiness to implement instruction on genocide education?

One teacher from a grantee district reported not having participated in any professional development, although grant funds supported a field trip for their students to a museum. The other two grantee participants reported participating in or leading PD. Helpful partnerships and resources for professional development, as reported by one participant,⁹ included Facing History and Ourselves, the Genocide Education Project and the website Genocide Watch.

The same teacher appreciated grant funding that supported having a Holocaust speaker visit a 7th-grade class; the guest speaker brought Holocaust-specific materials as well, which the teacher found especially helpful. That speaker has since visited the school three times. Additionally, the teacher described participating in a district “train the trainer



⁹ The research team notes that we did not evaluate any PD quality nor do we endorse any provider over another. We are simply summarizing what we heard in focus groups.

model” training for all the English Language Arts and social studies middle school teachers. The principal joined the training and then discussed with other participants “what was realistic about what we could teach about that connected to our curriculum and how we could go about that.” For that teacher, the most meaningful aspect of the convening was the much needed time it provided to the teachers to plan, talk through, and learn about the different genocides.

Another grantee both led and participated in PD sessions, teaching other teachers how to integrate their practices as well as methods for discussing the Israel/Palestine issue¹⁰ in their high school classrooms.

Teachers from grantee districts reported feeling more comfortable teaching the topic of genocide after attending PD or other training; one teacher reinforced the value of experience, and becoming comfortable over time and through practice.

I'm more comfortable and more able to facilitate more discussion now that I've learned more and practiced it... I feel like it was just the time and the planning that we did. I'm trying to think if there was anything specific ... I think it was just I did it and it didn't, it wasn't a disaster, because it's scary, [my students] are so young. I didn't know what they would say, if they would get it. So it didn't blow up in my face. And that was great... We basically used the same materials, but just throughout [each school year] for three years ... as different current events have happened, we changed or added...

- Teacher from a grantee district

Teachers from non-grantee districts also reported receiving beneficial PD. One teacher reported attending online webinars sponsored by a variety of organizations that deepened their understanding of genocide education and provided resources. Another teacher reported that they found a recent PD experience with the Upstander Project especially useful specifically because it focused on the genocide of Indigenous Americans by the U.S. government with a focus on the more recent history.

It focused on the more recent history of this genocide--specifically the boarding school movement and the adoptions of Indigenous children into white families in Maine. They provided some direct instruction, including a discussion of vocabulary like the words

¹⁰ In all cases, both in quotes and summaries of what we heard, we use the words and phrasing that participants used to refer to current and historical events.

genocide" and "survivorship," along with a feature-length documentary they produced, links to shorter films on the same subject matter, and supplemental resources. I found it extremely helpful for contextualizing the Indigenous experience as an ongoing genocide. It was also really helpful to receive engaging materials that could be used with students, although it would have been nice to receive more concrete, background-knowledge materials specifically designed to prime students for the content from the documentary.

- Teacher from a non-grantee district

Two teachers from non-grantee districts described being well-prepared to teach about genocide because they had relevant background knowledge from their own college and/or graduate education. One teacher who had participated in numerous PD and graduate courses on the subject described PD offered by two organizations, Facing History and Ourselves and Salem State, as especially constructive.¹¹

This PD at Salem State was SUPER helpful in building my content knowledge. For example, I did not even know there was a genocide in Guatemala. Not only did I learn the history behind it, but how to integrate some survivor testimony and documentary footage into my class. I most appreciate PD which helps to expand my content knowledge but also gives me actual strategies or lessons to be able to teach in class. I find that the Salem State workshops actually do this the best that I've seen out of many PD opportunities.

- Teacher from a non-grantee district

One teacher from a non-grantee district reported feeling entirely prepared, having been teaching the subject for decades. This teacher described mild irritation with the new Massachusetts law on genocide education, perceiving it as “**compliance work**” rather than changing of curriculum. For this individual, who reported having taught genocide education since at least 2004, the law was not the impetus to teach genocide.

Sustainability of Genocide Education

We described grantee district survey responses earlier in this report (**Exhibit 6**). Now, we summarize teacher perspectives. We considered how teachers plan to create lasting, sustainable genocide education.

¹¹ The research team notes that we did not evaluate any PD quality nor do we endorse any provider over another. We are simply summarizing what we heard in focus groups.

One grantee educator named several specific strategies that they'll use, and noted they'll continue methods that the "kids really connect with" like guest speakers and listening to podcasts from people currently experiencing genocide.

Teachers from both grantee and non-grantee districts alike expressed their commitment to continuing to teach about genocide in their classrooms and seeking ways to improve their instruction, especially in light of current events.

I plan to continue doing what I'm doing. That is to say - taking PD that expands my content knowledge and teaching practices, as well as doing my own research and reading to further help my students. I also plan on offering the course at both the CP [college preparatory] and Honors level as well.

- Teacher from a non-grantee district

I'll definitely also continue teaching genocide education... especially with the incoming [Trump] administration, I think it's going to be really important to call out and identify rhetoric that ... allows things like genocide to happen. And I think it's more important now than ever to provide our students with a really strong foundation for identifying that rhetoric and actively fighting against it. So I absolutely will continue to incorporate text about genocide and genocide units into my own curriculum ... maybe my change will be to clue in more modern news articles and clue in more topics that are happening today. Rather than just keeping like material from history since genocide [is] something that actively is going on.

- Teacher from a non-grantee district

A grantee teacher also noted the connections they hope to draw between students taking part in civics projects and genocide education during 8th grade, saying that they're "trying to figure out a way to follow through within the community." In the end, the grantee teacher's goal was to "continue growing the options that we have to talk with the kids about [genocide]."

Next we will turn away from consideration of the Genocide Education Grant, and instead focus on the larger context and depth of genocide education across the state.



Resources, Supports, and Impediments for Genocide Education

In the section below, we seek to understand what participants use or need to support genocide education. Specifically, we ask:

What types of supports, resources, and/or opportunities are most in need to support students and teachers in providing and engaging in high-quality genocide education in middle and high school? What factors facilitate or impede teachers' ability to provide meaningful genocide education?

Lack of Resources

Teacher participants explained their need for more resources as they teach genocide education, including the lack of particular resources (such as on the Ten Stages of Genocide), or the time it takes to access resources. One teacher expressed appreciation for their district's efforts to share resources across schools. Another teacher from a non-grantee district mentioned not having enough time to search for resources and wished there was a ["single repository for all the great wealth of resources out there."](#)

Some teachers were more specific when describing which resources they needed, emphasizing that supplemental materials would be more helpful than new curriculum, such as additional online modules similar to the World War 1 modules from DESE or more professional development, on the different genocide events. One teacher from a non-grantee district asked specifically that DESE not create whole units on genocide because contemporary events are still developing and they can be hard to keep up with, whereas supplemental materials can be more easily used. The teacher jokingly suggested that DESE ["just buy us a subscription to National Geographic... some place where we can go and pull stuff..."](#) Finally, two teachers reported needing age-appropriate and student-friendly resources.

I want to teach about it, so finding ways to break down things down to core concepts, to make them readable for middle schoolers, to keep the impact but edit out the graphicness, especially with video. Video resources are fantastic for my curriculum, but a lot of the genocide ones I can't show in a seventh grade classroom, so just for professional development, finding appropriate resources and editing them for student consumption is the biggest thing that I'm looking for.

- Teacher from a non-grantee district

Expanding to Include More Genocide Topics

Teacher participants called for an expansion to include more materials and professional development focused on the different genocide events. One teacher appreciated having Holocaust-specific materials that a speaker had brought into the classroom, and hoped they could get similar materials on other genocides to use. Another teacher acknowledged having been trained to teach about the Holocaust, yet still felt unprepared to teach about other genocides in history without having had additional professional development.

Teachers also asked for more training and materials on the ripple effects and lifecycle of genocide as well as the contemporary reality of genocide.

Teaching genocide education is most impactful when it focuses on the human experience, making the events real and relatable to students. Allowing students to see the emotional and psychological resilience of survivors inspires them and fosters genuine connections with the material. Expanding access to resources that explore the full lifecycle of genocide—before, during, and after—would greatly enhance both teaching and learning outcomes.

- Teacher from a non-grantee district

Humanizing the Topic

Teachers overwhelmingly referred to the value of using primary sources to provide meaningful genocide education.

That is something that the kids really connect with because I had said before, we listen to that podcast, and it's by a teenager, and so it's very powerful for them to hear it from someone their age. Just continuing to find connections for them, specifically in their age... We also used a podcast that was an interview of a girl who moved away from China. She's Uyghur, and so that's been really cool. The primary source part of it, hearing from people, it's been really powerful for the kids.

- Teacher from a grantee district

And I know some kids also will always try to not be as in tune as other kids, or maybe not take it seriously as other kids. But I think when you are able to kind of paint a real picture for them of human impact of genocide, I've found that that has been really powerful and has allowed my students to connect. Usually, as an English teacher, I'm teaching about genocide through novel studies, so it helps them connect to the actual real stories in a way that's not so far away. It's not letters on a page, but it's somebody who's actually experienced something, looking into their eyes and talking to them about it. That to me, it's been the most powerful resource.

- Teacher from a grantee district



Some teachers described bringing in their own relevant stories and experiences to connect with their students; one teacher had shared family stories about their experience with the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, for example.

I integrate personal stories of forced migration, trauma, and rebuilding life after genocide. Using activities like having students attempt to take and pass the U.S. citizenship test makes the topic of displacement relatable and tangible. Sharing firsthand accounts from families who experienced genocide creates an emotional and bittersweet mood in the classroom that inspires and engages students.

- Teacher from a grantee district

Teachers from both grantee and non-grantee districts also reported using secondary sources in their lessons, such as news clips, movies, documentaries, literature and poetry.

Lesson Approach

Teachers described the approaches they use in planning lessons that facilitate meaningful genocide education, including providing definitions upfront, referring to the critical role played by Raphael Lemkin in coining the term “genocide,” and explaining Gregory Stanton’s work in developing the Ten Stages of Genocide.¹² One teacher described a lesson that powerfully illustrates the enormity of genocide.

I will have them qualify six million. I fill up one sheet with periods and I get hundreds. Then I shrink it down so I get four pages onto one. About 500 sheets later, I have printed out 6 millions dots or periods. I have students hang these sheets in my class but I don’t tell them the meaning. When they are done, I explain it’s 6 million dots/period ... one for each Jewish person who perished in the Holocaust.

- Teacher from a grantee district

Two teachers spoke highly of the materials and resources from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. One teacher described using the passports in their class by assigning students three people who experienced the Holocaust. They then have to learn about and present on each person. The other teacher said the museum’s website was phenomenal, especially because it was kept up to date.

¹² Stanton, G. H. (2016). The ten stages of genocide. Genocide Watch. <https://www.genocidewatch.com/ten-stages-of-genocide>

Student Wellbeing - Important Approach

Two teachers emphasized the value of attending to their students' wellbeing as they process such challenging content. According to one of these teachers from a non-grantee district, supporting the students in this way “fosters deeper engagement.”

We need to be cognizant that our students bring their own experiences and trauma into our classrooms. Facing History as an organization has helped me develop strategies to handle that.

- Teacher from a non-grantee district

Echoing the importance of centering student wellbeing, one participant asked for more professional development on facilitating difficult conversations.

Something I would need, as well, [is] pointers on how to facilitate those conversations with students of diverse political backgrounds, and also with students whose identities are at the core of what conversations we're having about genocide too, and how to protect those students in the classroom when those conversations are happening. I think [it] would be something I would really value in a professional development.

- Teacher from a non-grantee district

Political Tension & Current Events¹³

An undercurrent of political tension was apparent in both teacher focus group conversations. Four teachers, from both grantee and non-grantee districts, mentioned the challenges they face teaching genocide education given the political climate, and at the same time, acknowledged the heightened



¹³ Some participants' responses reflected particular political perspectives. As a non-partisan organization, MC² LLC neither endorses nor condemns what study participants share in interviews, surveys, or focus group discussions. Focus group facilitators are practiced in remaining neutral and non-judgmental in their facilitation of discussions, and in avoiding personal opinions and/or biases. Focus group facilitators followed the protocol available in [Appendix 3](#).

importance given the current political climate. There was a sense of uncertainty and fear amongst some of the teachers around the future.

Again, it's the immediacy of what's going on right now has definitely given me pause and a sense of uncertainty and how to approach it just responsibly. I don't even know how my administration would respond if I were to try to present something in class and got parent pushback on it or something. It's the prospect of teaching. It is something I view with more uncertainty than any subject I've considered or been trying to prep for before.

- Teacher from a non-grantee district

Some teachers described the tensions between discussing current events while they are still unfolding and making sure they have complete information, and needing to be sensitive about teaching certain topics relevant to groups of their students. Furthermore, teachers described considerable uncertainty about whether they do or don't have administrative support, especially in the face of parental pushback (see section below).

*I feel that our student population is pretty conservative for the area that we're in ... and I'm new to the school, but I've also been thinking a lot about that too, how I will approach those subjects. And I know we are about to teach the Holocaust with the book *Night* in my ninth grade at some point this year, and I've been thinking a lot about how I definitely am going to be leaning on other teachers who have taught it before, and some mentors to me at the school to understand how I'm going to translate my experience of teaching *Night* before in another environment, versus coming to an environment where the students and the parents both are more conservative, it might be less receptive to conversations about genocide.*

- Teacher from a grantee district

Administrative Support

Teachers praised the role played by administrators in making the challenging topic easier and possible, whether through providing PD opportunities, leadership involvement in vetting materials, or shared expertise. One teacher also pointed to district-level awareness of cultural sensitivities as helpful. One educator acknowledged that the support they get from their leadership is rare and doesn't happen in other places.

By contrast, three teachers (two from non-grantee districts, one from a grantee district) said that administrative support was absent, particularly when they faced parent protests about their genocide-focused instruction. One teacher from a non-grantee district described the stress experienced when getting pushback from parents despite the state's law requiring genocide education. The two teachers from non-grantee districts acknowledged anxiety about whether they have administrative backing, and how explicit policy guidance from their administrators could better protect teachers teaching such challenging topics.

And we have already seen in other states how that's really necessary, because if you don't have a statewide firm policy that protects people teaching more controversial topics, then you are going to lose the right to even speak its name in the room. So yeah, there's a real urgent need for people to establish norms that are on the right side of history. And this is a state that is well positioned to do that.

- Teacher from a grantee district



Time

Time constraints, often exacerbated by competing classroom priorities, represented the most significant impediment, mentioned by six teachers. Teachers commented on needing to choose “**breadth over depth**” when teaching about genocide, given a lack of time and large amounts of required content. Another concern shared by teachers was not having time to collaborate with their colleagues, which they said made it harder to provide meaningful genocide education.

I am one of the BIGGEST proponents of genocide education out there, but if you keep on asking social studies teachers to add and add more to their curriculum and not take anything else away, you are going to get a watered-down lesson that is not meaningful to students simply because we don't have the bandwidth.

- Teacher from a non-grantee district

I would love to engage in deeper learning activities that ask my students to evaluate their own potential relationship to the content, but I feel as though I need more time and/or less required content to be able to do so.

- Teacher from a non-grantee district

Student Characteristics

Participants described other factors that limit their capacity to teach about genocide more meaningfully, including the number of students with below grade-level literacy skills and student maturity and/or interest.

One thing that's really hard is ... and this is just in general teaching, but some kids really don't care about history; and a lot of them, when we talk about genocide, they understand the gravity of it. ... I see why [starting it in middle school is] important, and we all agree that it's important but especially with the sixth grade, they're babies, it's so hard to talk about it with them. So either they're so young, or they're so disengaged in general that it's hard, but we have had kids do a really, really good job; they understand that these are serious topics, and they really rise to the occasion, which is good.

- Teacher from a grantee district

Reaction to DESE's Description of "Meaningful Genocide Education"

We asked focus group participants to elaborate on the definition of "meaningful genocide education" that DESE uses:

DESE describes "meaningful genocide education" as instruction and coursework that, over the long term,

1 *engages students in learning about genocide, its causes, and impact on people;*

2 *demonstrates to students the ways in which their own action or inaction may play a role in the social contexts that can lead to genocide.*

Two teachers said they liked the descriptions, and two suggested that the descriptions include more on the stages of genocide. Other suggestions included increased emphasis on historical relationships between different groups, the aftermath of genocide, and shared humanity.

Finally, one teacher from a non-grantee district suggested that DESE provide more concrete learning objectives for teachers so they could actually begin to measure what students understand about genocide, asking "How do we measure the skills that they need to truly understand it and become citizens that don't only oppose it [genocide], but actively work against it?" ■



Community Partner Focus Groups

Sample and Methods

In late 2024, the MC² Education team held one focus group for community organizations and partners who work with Massachusetts schools and/or school districts to provide resources about genocide education. The study team reached out to a total of 13 community organizations and partners, eventually speaking with 10 individuals from 6 partner organizations. This sample included partners listed by grantees on their grant applications as well as organizations identified from a search of Massachusetts organizations that support districts with genocide education.¹⁴

¹⁴ Some participants' responses reflected particular political perspectives. As a non-partisan organization, MC² LLC neither endorses nor condemns what study participants share in interviews, surveys, or focus group discussions. Focus group facilitators are practiced in remaining neutral and non-judgmental in their facilitation of discussions, and in avoiding personal opinions and/or biases. Focus group facilitators followed the protocol available in [Appendix 4](#).

What We Learned

Partnerships are Most Effective when Built on Mutual Respect and Teacher-Centered Design

Community partners emphasized that they are most successful in engaging with districts when they are not just content providers but collaborative partners—valuing teacher voice, adapting materials to district needs, and fostering teacher-to-teacher learning. Professional learning communities and co-designed experiences strengthen trust and sustainability. Partners see themselves as filling crucial gaps in knowledge, pedagogy, and culturally relevant materials.

... fostering strong partnerships is the way in which we customize our work. So nothing that we do is sort of pre-designed. We do a lot of listening and we do assessments, but I think perhaps more than anything else, we try to create a relationship with a district prior to coming up with a scope of work or even thinking about an application, so that we really understand what their strengths are, and what their faculty are doing.

- Community Partner

Current Funding Structures Limit Strategic Planning and Long-Term Impact

Participants noted that one-year grant cycles and short application windows hinder meaningful collaboration, limit school capacity to plan PD, and often result in rushed or shallow engagement. Participants recommended multi-year grants to allow for deeper, strategic partnerships with districts and broader impact over time. They noted that long-term funding would reduce administrative burden and allow for stronger program design and delivery.

There's some of those things that we could improve in a longer grant funding, even if the absolute dollars are the same, but just knowing you can spend it over two years instead of one... I think, [that] would allow districts to be a little more thoughtful and to have a plan to make real change.

- Community Partner

DESE Guidance and Support Must More Explicitly Acknowledge Indigenous Genocide and Erasure

Several participants—especially those from Native communities and those working

closely with Native communities—critiqued the draft DESE definition of ‘meaningful genocide education’ as erasing Indigenous experience, both historically and in present-day education. They called for genocide education in Massachusetts to “**center the fact that this country is built on genocide**” and include concepts like erasure, survivance, and denial. There was a strong recommendation to formally include Native voices at DESE, such as through a dedicated liaison role or advisory position.

If we're not talking about [this] right in our own home, I think it's really hard for our students [to] make sense of it elsewhere as well. In my experience, students feel deceived when they come to find out about this happening to Native people right here in their own homelands later on in their educational journey. But again, I think it's really important that meaningful genocide education really does center the fact that this whole country is built on genocide, and so we really have to kind of center that critically, or else we kind of are ignoring the elephant in the room.

- Wampanoag Tribal Citizen

There is Demand for Comparative Genocide Content, Trauma-informed Pedagogy, and Deeper Convenings

Community partners echoed teacher and student calls for comparative genocide education in order to help students see patterns across time and cultures. They urged DESE to provide clearer pedagogical guidance—not just what to teach, but how to teach it safely and ethically, particularly in “**brave**” and identity-sensitive classrooms. Participants valued opportunities like this focus group and asked DESE to create more regular convenings for teachers and partners to learn, plan, and align together.

I hope that DESE prioritizes and I think a way to expand the meaningful genocide education definition is ensuring that we are learning about genocide in very reflective classrooms, in learning environments that do involve very careful building and maintenance of what's sometimes referred to as these sort of safe and brave classrooms... we can't just be introducing students to dehumanizing imagery and stories and... difficult content, without being trauma informed and tending to students, identities... I know that under the civics frameworks there was a good attention paid to not just the content standards, but also the guiding principles of instruction and pedagogy. So I think that there would be ways to apply that same sort of approach in thinking about genocide education specifically.

- Community Partner

Detailed Findings from Community Partners¹⁵

Nature of Partnerships

Participants reported that partnering with schools to provide genocide education resources was at the core of their missions. Most have offered genocide education programming and resources for 10-20 years, a few for much longer. The number of school districts each organization partners with ranged from 8-40 at the time of the focus group. Some organizations and partners said they had actively advocated for the genocide education legislation, and that the grant opportunities provided through the legislation led them to create more partnerships with school districts. One organization reported having built programming responsive to the legislation.

Some partners described how they made a proactive effort to reach out to certain schools that they “knew had challenges with funding” to partner with them. In other cases, partners immediately saw increased requests and inquiries from schools because of the grants. According to one partner, “when Massachusetts had this legislation, it just seemed like a perfect opportunity, especially the first round of grants, we were contacted quite a bit.”

What Makes for a Strong Partnership

When asked what makes for a strong partnership, several participants said that their teacher-centered programming made them especially successful. Partners described offering programming that created space for teachers to learn from each other through professional learning communities, for example, a rare and valuable opportunity.

We see ourselves as partners and not just content providers. In every session, we make a lot of time for teachers to talk to each other... We have resources, but oftentimes experts say, [they] really need to hear from our other colleagues who are trying to do the same work, and often [in] very similar circumstances. I think one of the reasons we've developed these strong partnerships is they can tell we respect them and want to learn from them too.

- Community Partner

Participants reported that strong partnerships are also created because they believe their organizations provide meaningful, unique, valuable, and authentic

¹⁵ See additional quotations from community partners see [Appendix 1: Quote Bank](#).

resources that districts need. Participants reported their perspective that schools do not feel equipped in the areas these partners specialize, making the experiences and materials these partners bring into the schools “very powerful.” Some participants said they tailor their work to each school district’s specific interests and needs, whether that approach represents the entirety of how they engage in the partnership, or they rely on a foundation of material upon which they build in district-specific activities/resources.



Partnership Challenges

Participants described a variety of challenges they face while working with school districts, including obstacles due to the grant timing and the one-year duration of funding.

I think the funding cycle the last couple years has been a short application window... when you know trimester grades are due, and just it's really tough to... have a series of meetings to think about what would the districts really want, and what providers can help with. And so there's some of those things that think we could probably improve in a longer grant funding [cycle], even if the absolute dollars are the same, but just knowing you can spend it over two years instead of one [or] over 36 months instead of 12, I think would allow districts to be a little more thoughtful and to have a plan to make real change...

- Community Partner

... those who administer the grants aren't going to want to do this, but these should be multi-year grants, because in one year, how many educators and students and community members can we impact? We're just trying to lay foundations. So if the grant forced us to think strategically with districts about where we want to get to in three or five years, we would spend less time writing scopes of work and submitting grant proposals, and we would spend more time designing and delivering what the educators and their students need.

- Community Partner

Other challenges reported by community partners included staff turnover in school districts, funding for and availability of substitute teachers to facilitate teacher attendance at professional development workshops, and teachers simply lacking the time and capacity to attend out-of-school-time events.

A Wampanoag tribal citizen participating in the focus group reported that partnerships can be more challenging when school districts seek out the Native perspective and voice as an afterthought, which is logistically challenging but can also be harmful to those providing the resources.

Sometimes we get asked to come into things kind of really late. And so what I mean by that is just sometimes we're like ..., "Oh, and what about the Indigenous part?" And it's one of those things where it's ... a little challenging for us to respond effectively... But also there's the social emotional aspect of that, and the labor of that too ... on our end ... feeling like an afterthought in some of these conversations. [Another participant] was talking about that earlier too, that concept of just forgetting and just kind of moving forward, and erasing [the genocide]. So that is a challenge of ... building these partnerships, because we're just, not thought of and a lot of times, you know, you don't know what you don't know. And some people, frankly, have never learned about Native people or had a chance to learn.

- Wampanoag Tribal Citizen

The same tribal member suggested that DESE should have an internal representative from the tribal communities who could act as a liaison, as happens in other states; this suggestion was supported by other focus group participants. Participants suggested that such a partnership between tribal nations and DESE would “*formalize structures and positions so that [Native] voices are represented in these spaces.*”

Another participant asked for DESE to do more in providing school districts with information on the various partners out there. They see the opportunity for DESE to collaborate more with the various organizations and partners which provide genocide education resources.

We wish more districts knew about our organization, and I think it would be a great opportunity to strengthen our communication and our partnership with DESE itself. Most of these workshops have come through direct outreach from our organization or direct

outreach to us from individual schools who have heard about us. I'm hoping and maybe it would, it would end up being a byproduct of this survey and deeper dive that DESE is doing now to establish a closer communication system and working collaboratively with DESE.

- Community Partner

Reaction to DESE's Description of "Meaningful Genocide Education"

We asked focus group participants to elaborate on the definition of "meaningful genocide education" that DESE uses:

DESE describes "meaningful genocide education" as instruction and coursework that, over the long term,

1 *engages students in learning about genocide, its causes, and impact on people;*

2 *demonstrates to students the ways in which their own action or inaction may play a role in the social contexts that can lead to genocide.*

Participants identified several issues and topics that they believe were missing from this description. One participant advocated for the inclusion of survivance in genocide studies:

There's a word in Native studies, and that word is survivance. We have such conviction about this, we won't talk about genocide until we talk about survivance, because otherwise you present teachers and students with a very warped view of societies and cultures and what has happened to them, as opposed to them having had centuries of resistance, and having overcome that, and in many ways thriving in spite of it.

- Community Partner

There was also a call to include the common stages of genocide as part of the definition. This aligns with teacher focus group findings, in which teachers reported how useful it was to use the stages to frame their lessons and asked for more resources on the stages.

I think some of us are sort of dancing around the edges of Gregory Stanton's model that he wishes he had called 10 processes of genocide rather than stages, you know, by highlighting denial. But I think it is absolutely essential. ... There's [also] a social, emotional learning piece to this. So you know, what this definition highlights is the ways in which students' actions or inactions may play a role in social context that can lead to genocide. I wish that the word 'othering' was in there. You know, students might be appalled to think that they could be part of genocide unless they understand the processes whereby it happens. But of course, it's our role to help them understand that. ... So I feel like part of what's missing here, for me, is trying to make this relevant to today's young learners.

- Community Partner

We heard similar perspectives from students in focus groups (elaborated below in the Student Focus Group section) to learn about the ripple effects of genocide to understand how these events are not only in history but have lasting impacts on society. Partners seemed to agree with these suggestions, nodding and voicing affirmations.

You know, something that we've been grappling with for the last 50 years is denial. And as you're seeing ... genocides moving further away from their events or you're seeing more and more people coming and denying certain aspects, or just not admitting at all what has happened. It's a big topic for us.

- Community Partner



Two focus group participants were more critical and noted that DESE's description does not reflect an Indigenous lens that considers the genocide of Indigenous peoples in Massachusetts and nationally. A Wampanoag tribal citizen, along with another participant in the group, went on to explain how a Massachusetts-based genocide education that does not include the Indigenous experience is a genocide education that is not "**grounded in reality**" and is "**engaged in an erasure...**"

And I think another sort of leg on this stool that is missing, and that's why it's wobbly and you know, in danger of falling over is erasure. So you know, in the 10 stages of genocide we have denial as the 10th, but that is not through an Indigenous lens. Through an Indigenous lens, erasure needs to be part of that. And so those engaged in genocide education, through an Indigenous lens, are engaged in un-erasure in a very intentional way. And I feel like, and this is a struggle that we are experiencing with some of the districts with whom we're partnering right now. They're very quick to teach about the Trail of Tears, and they are ignoring the abominations that the original peoples of this land right here [in Massachusetts] experienced, even though we may live in the space where there's the most documentation of the crimes that were committed. So that, I think, is an important piece of this puzzle.

- Community Partner

My only comment is that I can tell it's a very non-Native written statement. And what I mean by that is it doesn't feel like it's very grounded in reality, which is that DESE exists, many of the organizations on this call exist because Native people here have experienced genocide and are still experiencing the long term effects of it. And we're not calling that out. And so I think even as we talk about effective and meaningful genocide education, if that's not really at the core of it, then we're missing the fact that this [education] is occurring right on the grounds of genocide. [Other participant's] organization does this very effectively. This kind of stuff is really important that people understand that it's centered here, on the grounds in which we are talking on... you know, the places we see every day... You know genocide for me, is no man's land. I think of a very small 612 acres right off the coast of Gay Head. And when it's a small, little island that used to be home to a powwow medicine person in a cedar forest, and now it is a place you can't even go because it was bombed by the US military as an airfield range in World War Two. And so that, to me, is genocide, and that is part of it. And if we're not talking about that right in our own home, I think it's really hard for our students to make any sense of it elsewhere as well. Oftentimes, in my experience, students feel deceived when they come to find out about this happening to Native people right here in their own homelands later on in their educational journey. You know, whether it's in college, maybe it's later on in high school. ... But again, I think it's really important that meaningful genocide education does center the fact that this whole country is built on genocide, and so we really have to center that critically, or else we are ignoring the elephant in the room.

- Wampanoag Tribal Citizen

Recommendations for DESE Moving Forward

When asked what DESE's next priority for genocide education should be, some organizational representatives recommended an increased pedagogical focus. One participant suggested the approach to genocide education could mirror the way that the Civics Framework articulates guiding principles of instruction and pedagogy, so that genocide education is taught in:

... reflective classrooms, in learning environments that do involve very careful building and maintenance of what's sometimes referred to as these sort of safe and brave classrooms... but the bottom line is that we can't just be introducing students to dehumanizing imagery and stories and difficult content, without being trauma informed and tending to students' identities...

- Community Partner

Student focus groups [see that section below] echoed this sentiment and acknowledged how important it was for their teachers to approach the graphic and serious nature of genocide with care.

Additionally, participants urged DESE to provide increased opportunities for teacher and partner convenings, as well as more support for comparative genocide education, similar to those we had heard from teachers.

I love that we are coming together and having discussions and from all different aspects of work in genocide education. ... When I first looked into this type of education, talking about comparative genocides wasn't a thing or was frowned upon. But now we are talking about comparative genocides. ... We had a 45 minute workshop at [organization] on similarities between Native American and Armenian Genocide. It was 100 overflow capacity in the room, the educators really want to dive in... I think the first year [DESE] had webinars on the topics of genocide, and I think that was a good start. But what I'm finding from teachers is they really wanted a deep dive into the facts of the genocides to help them get it across to their students.

- Community Partner

One participant urged DESE to embrace the likelihood that this is “forever work.”

They're not going to like this, but this is forever work. ... Those of us who are doing it, we know that, right? We know that we're up against, whether it's, you know, centuries of denial or erasure about one genocide or another.

- Community Partner ■





Student Focus Groups

Sample and Methods

In early spring of 2025, we spoke to a group of 7th graders and a group of 12th graders, in two separate focus groups, about their genocide education experiences. These conversations offered us insight into student perspectives from near the beginning and end of their legislatively required participation in courses covering genocide education.¹⁶

The eight 7th graders were from four different Ancient Civilizations classes. They attend a public, Title 1-eligible school enrolling 6th and 7th graders located in a small city. The school's student body is largely made up of Hispanic and White students.¹⁷ Their district received funding from the Genocide Education Grant in the 2024-25 school year and used the funds to purchase classroom materials, mostly ELA books for grades 6, 8, 10, and 12. Additionally, the district purchased supplemental materials for the 7th and 9th grade history classes and paid for a trip for 9th grade students to visit an exhibit in Boston.

¹⁵ Some participants' responses reflected particular political perspectives. As a non-partisan organization, MC² Education neither endorses nor condemns what study participants share in interviews, surveys, or focus group discussions. Focus group facilitators are practiced in remaining neutral and non-judgmental in their facilitation of discussions, and in avoiding personal opinions and/or biases. Focus group facilitators followed the protocol available in [Appendix 5](#).

¹⁷ National Center for Education Statistics District Data



The sixteen 12th graders had participated in genocide education in 11th grade during US and World History required classes or a genocide-focused elective course. They were from a public, Title 1-eligible school in a suburban area which serves 9th-12th graders. The school's student body is predominately White.¹⁸ The district received funding from the Genocide Education Grant in the 2024-25 school year and collaborated with a widely-used community organization genocide education partner. We learned that teachers had attended several professional development seminars, workshops and conferences, and that they were able to bring an exhibit about the Holocaust from the community partner to their school. In addition, the district was able to create a new genocide-focused elective course.

The focus groups started with the researcher, who served as facilitator, explaining that we invited students to hear about their experiences with genocide education, and that their feedback would then be shared with DESE so that DESE could learn from students how to improve genocide education in the future for other Massachusetts students. We assured them that their feedback would be kept confidential, and that nothing they discussed would be linked to them in any reports.

Throughout the conversation, the facilitator provided students with opportunities to give their answers aloud; and for certain questions the students had access to a Padlet, a virtual collaboration tool through which each student could anonymously write answers to questions posed by the facilitator. For both focus groups, a school or district staff member remained in the room for the entire conversation.

¹⁸ National Center for Education Statistics District Data

What We Learned

We identified the following themes based on the responses from students during focus group conversations. Some themes were present across both groups, while others were more pronounced in one or the other. We note throughout when this is the case. First, we present these themes along with illustrative quotes¹⁹ and in the following section we provide more detailed summaries from each of the two focus groups.

Humanization is the Most Powerful Approach to Genocide Education

Students in both groups—that is, the 7th grade and 12th grade groups—said that individual stories of victims and survivors helped them understand the human cost of genocide. Personal narratives, photos, artifacts, and museum experiences brought abstract atrocities into sharp emotional focus.

I think learning more about individual stories from the Holocaust rather than just hearing about the facts and numbers was a lot more impactful.

- Student, 12th grade

Emotional Discomfort is Real—but Valuable

For many younger students, this curriculum represents their first exposure to as heavy a topic as genocide.

I didn't like learning about all of the deaths.

- Student, 7th grade

Students in both age groups described emotional challenges—especially with topics like death, child victims, and cruelty—but the older students also emphasized that this discomfort deepened their understanding.

I think honestly just talking about it more made it easier, learning more about it. Cause when you first hear it it's kind of a shock and it kind of gets worse before it gets better. ... Talking about it more makes it easier to talk about...

- Student, 12th grade

¹⁹ See additional quotations from students see [Appendix 1: Quote Bank](#).

Developmentally Appropriate Scaffolding is Essential

Younger students often needed reassurance (e.g., “Hitler is dead”) to feel safe discussing difficult topics in class. Sometimes, the reassurance they reported receiving from teachers was not factual (e.g., “this won’t happen again”). Older students usually expressed a more nuanced understanding, reflecting on how societal instability and ideology—not just individual evil—can lead to genocide.

Understanding that genocide doesn't happen randomly but is the result of a country in distress and fear who are looking for a way to find stability. It also changed my perspective to understand that many of the people involved in genocide aren't evil people at their core but don't have choice in their participation.

- Student, 12th grade

Effective Pedagogy Involves Multiple, Reflective Modes

Students in both groups valued a variety of approaches to learning about genocide, such as videos, books, group projects, survivor stories, poetry, and discussion. Students in both groups identified group work, games, breaks during heavy lessons, and reassurance from teachers as effective support strategies.

Younger students often remembered short-form articles as effective learning tools, while older students shared more about books they had read on the topic. For older students, being part of open and unpressured discussions was especially important.



Allowing the class to have an open and honest discussion about what genocide is and its effect on marginalized communities, while also monitoring the discussion to ensure that everyone was being sensitive to people's experiences.

- Student, 12th grade

Teacher Sensitivity and Authenticity Matter

Older students appreciated when teachers were patient, emotionally aware, and sometimes vulnerable themselves. This corresponds to anecdotes shared by teachers who brought their personal family stories into the classroom.

They were very cautious when explaining deeper and more graphic topics and always warned us before something uncomfortable was going to be brought up, and they were always open to answering our questions [and] concerns if we had any.

- Student, 12th grade

Trust in teachers made students more willing to engage with difficult content. Students appreciated when teachers acknowledged the emotional toll and created safe, supportive environments to process it.

Making themselves available to answer any questions that people may have, not making anyone feel ashamed or nervous when discussing such a heavy topic.

- Student, 12th grade

Encouraging open communication and including themselves in the conversation made me feel like my questions and difficult feelings were ok.

- Student, 12th grade

Desire for Broader, Inclusive Genocide Curricula

For younger students, this often represents the first exposure to emotionally charged topics. Twelfth grade students noted an emphasis on the Holocaust and wanted to learn more about additional genocides. Older students noted that understanding the vast scale of genocide across the world requires instruction that

explicitly acknowledges the many different genocides in our history. Limiting instruction to the Holocaust, especially for younger students, means that they don't learn about genocide as a recurring global phenomenon.

I didn't know that genocide was like a thing. Like I just didn't know anything about it until someone brought it up...Like I knew about the Holocaust but I didn't know that it was like a thing besides the Holocaust.

- Student, 7th grade

...it's also hard to learn about or know the patterns of genocide when we only learn about one. ... we only learned about the Holocaust. And it's a major event, I get it and I think it's still something that we should talk about, but I think by including other genocides it'll give a better understanding of why or how it happens instead of just analyzing one situation and one person.

- Student, 12th grade

Genocide Education Influences Worldview and Values

Students described lasting impacts of genocide education: greater empathy, moral clarity, civic awareness, and a stronger sense of responsibility not to be bystanders. Some expressed confusion or fear, but also a desire to be kind, informed, and engaged in justice and anti-hate efforts.

I just want to be nice and treat others well because there's never a reason to be mean.

- Student, 7th grade

The world has a lot of problems when it comes to demographic groups, and there is almost always a conflict going between groups across the world. I know now that my role is to do whatever I can to make sure that does not happen, and I try to not use hatred in any situation to avoid escalating any conflicts.

- Student, 12th grade

Some Students May Leave Genocide Education Experience with a Misunderstanding of Genocides as Only Happening in the Past

The research team notes that this was a takeaway for the two groups of students we spoke with, but we cannot say if this is broadly the case. Some students in both age groups came away with a perspective that roots genocide solely in history or geography without identifying it in their lives or in the modern day.

Most of the younger students had come away from their genocide education experience under the impression that genocides like the Holocaust were in the past and won't happen again. The older students rooted genocide events firmly in history and in other areas of the world. They were set on "not repeating history" and seemed to understand the geopolitical role of the United States in the global community, but it is worth noting that these students did not mention the ways that genocide affects our nation and local communities.

It's not gonna happen again anytime soon because Hitler isn't alive.

- Student, 7th grade

[It] makes me think about how important learning history is, and how grateful I am to live in a country where these things don't happen.

- Student, 12th grade



Focus Group #1: Seventh Graders²⁰

General Genocide Knowledge

The first question asked during the focus group, “What did you learn about genocide that you did not know before?” elicited individual concepts or short sentences: “the Holocaust,” “ghettos,” “concentration camps,” “some people escaped, some people got killed.” As the facilitator repeated the question, one student explained:

They wanna kill people with different... like just different. It can be race or it can be just something about you that you look like.

- Student, 7th grade

Another student talked about learning that Jewish people were not the only ones targeted in the Holocaust, people with special needs were also targets.

Throughout the conversation, it appeared for these students that learning about the Holocaust was their first introduction to the overall topic of genocide. One student talked about how they didn’t realize genocide was something beyond the Holocaust. Another student talked about how entirely new this topic was for them:

I didn’t know that genocide was like a thing. Like I just didn’t know anything about it until someone brought it up...

- Student, 7th grade

Learning Approaches and Pedagogy

When asked about the ways they learned about genocide, the students listed off a number of methods and approaches, including: role play, class discussion, games (e.g. Jeopardy, Quizlet, and Gimkit), lectures, and worksheets. One student explained how they learned about “some of the people who did it,” and when asked who they learned about, they listed Anne Frank and Hitler. The students repeatedly discussed note taking as a method of learning about genocide. It seems that their teacher had introduced this new skill to their students during the genocide education unit, and the experience stood out in the students memories as quite challenging.

²⁰ See additional quotations from students see [Appendix 1: Quote Bank](#).

In terms of materials the students used in their lessons, some students explained that they didn't read books as much as they read articles in pairs and as a class about how "it happened, how it started, how they started killing people." Some others said that they read some books, including *The Book Thief*, a story about a girl who lived through the Holocaust. Others talked about doing research on survivors with writing assignments focused on the survivors' stories.

Students also talked about watching videos and looking at photos in their classes. As they watched videos, their teachers had them complete worksheets to show that they were paying attention. The students went on to describe photos they looked at in class, including pictures of railroads with people on both sides, gas chambers, and images of children's shoes.

The students explained that they appreciated learning about genocide through group projects. In three out of the four classes taking part in the conversation, students worked in groups of 3-4 to put together slide deck presentations with research they had done on individuals from the Holocaust. The remaining student talked about how in their class, they worked in a group to read through a paper.

Challenges and Facilitators During Genocide Education

At this point in the conversation, the students were asked about the challenges they faced while learning about genocide, which specific topics they found to be challenging, and what, if anything, helped them overcome those challenges.

It was, like, sad. Especially because it's not your fault if it's like something that you can't control.

- Student, 7th grade

One student asked "Hitler isn't alive is he?" while considering their response. Many students found the topic of death and even the word "death" itself to be challenging:

I didn't like learning about all of the deaths.

- Student, 7th grade

One student found it challenging to learn about "how people get ripped out of their homes and put into camps, then just killed because of their beliefs." Another shared

via the Padlet how it was hard to learn “that it could’ve been avoided.”

The facilitator then asked what helped the students overcome these challenges. Three out of five students who answered the prompt via Padlet wrote that knowing this was in the past and was over helped them.

Knowing that it's never gonna happen again (hopefully).

- Student, 7th grade

Another student wrote that playing games made the experience easier because the environment was happier.

In terms of topics that were especially hard to talk about, the students wrote again about the concept of death, especially “kid death.” The senselessness of the killing and the dehumanization of people were challenging topics as well. Students wrote how it was hard to talk about how Hitler targeted people “for no real reason” and that if he hadn't died, he would have gone on to kill more. Another student wrote that it was hard to talk about how “people actually started to believe that Jews and others were waste.”

The next prompt asked how their teachers helped them discuss such challenging topics, and how their teachers made them feel safe and comfortable while learning about genocide. While one student wrote via Padlet that making the lesson into an activity helped them, the students primarily wrote that their teachers helped them by telling them it was in the past, and it was not going to happen again. A couple of students wrote that their teachers made sure they knew Hitler was dead, which meant “he can never hurt anyone anymore.” One student shared out loud that they felt more comfortable talking about the subject, knowing that it wasn't their fault, that it was over and done with:

Just knowing that it wasn't your fault and that it's like done and over with. There's nothing you can really do about it, so like being sad is like, I guess like empathy and stuff is important but um. Just knowing that it wasn't you and it's done it helps me be more comfortable talking about it.

- Student, 7th grade

World Views

These young students' world views seem to have been impacted by their experiences in their various classes learning about genocide. They wrote in the Padlet about how much more aware they were now of the human capacity to harm others, and how they now have a desire to be a force for good in the world. For example, one student wrote how this experience “made me think about how just one person can cause so many deaths,” while another wrote that “I just want to be nice and treat others well because there’s never a reason to be mean.” These lessons also brought up deep questions for these students, as one student wrote about their confusion around how such terrible things can happen while others stand by and do nothing.



How people can cause so many bad things including deaths and not be guilty.

- Student, 7th grade

This experience also led some students to become more empathetic towards others, as they wrote about how this topic may be sensitive for some and how they should be aware that “everyone could be going through silent battles.” With an increase in empathy, these students also expressed a sense of empowerment to not just be a bystander. Coupled with this, however, were some feelings of confusion and uncertainty about the world around them. They wrote about their confusion and fear, questioning how a trusted leader who appeared to be good could turn out to be so dangerous.

Makes me feel bad/scared because I know that he used to be a good leader and how we might not know if someone is planning on doing that again.

- Student, 7th grade

After learning about genocide, these students plan to think about people who are different from them and how those people should be treated. They plan to behave differently by being “good kids,” not be mean to others, and be nicer in general. They will treat others with more empathy, not bully people and “be nicer to other[s] no matter race or ethnicity.” One student wrote that they will “remember that if they can’t change it in a minute or less then keep it to yourself.”

Recommendations for DESE and Teachers

At the end of the focus group, students were asked to share anything they would want DESE and others teaching genocide education to know. Students asked for teachers to make sure everyone is involved, and perhaps given the uncomfortable topic, they should use more tools like group work, or the Chromebooks to provide alternative ways to contribute so all students can feel more comfortable. Students explained that DESE and others teaching about genocide should know that this topic can be uncomfortable to learn about, and that it is easier if the teachers can make it fun through activities. One student talked about how some words like “death” and “dead” can even be hard to hear, and that they wished their teachers could find other ways to talk about death.



Focus Group #2: Twelfth Graders

General Genocide Knowledge

The conversation started with students describing what genocide topics they had learned about in their classes. Students listed the names of the various genocides they had learned about, saying “Holodomor, I guess...”, and “we briefly touched on Native American Genocide.” One student mentioned learning about the Cambodian genocide, but initially misremembered it as the “Colombian” genocide. Another student described having learned about the Rwandan genocide in middle school.

Humanization and Teacher Sensitivity during Genocide Education

Students reported how it was especially powerful to put the challenging topic of genocide into perspective when their teachers had provided ways to “make it real” and “humanize” the topic by really learning about individual people who had experienced genocide. One student said, “I think learning more about individual stories from the Holocaust rather than just hearing about the facts and numbers was a lot more impactful.” Students described how their teachers accomplished this through multiple modes: going to museums to view real artifacts, reading diaries out loud, watching documentaries, and reading detailed firsthand account memoirs.

We went to the Auschwitz museum last year which was something that really put it into perspective for us. Especially because it was a silent tour, and so you got to kind of go in and read about it and see the objects that came directly from the camp. And it made it more... it had more of a depth to it. It felt more like, not something that just happened so long ago, but something that the remnants are still here, and people are still experiencing the horrible ramifications of it, so that was something that definitely added some depth and information about it into my education.

- Student, 12th grade

Students also emphasized the importance of learning about the stages of genocide. One student described learning about them in a class focused on World War II:

Kind of also the phases of it... I guess specifically with the Holocaust it was like, they weren't death camps at first, they were just work camps that they overwork you to the point of death. But then it became more just exterminating... it was more intentional.

- Student, 12th grade

The facilitator asked if there were any modes or ways of learning that were especially helpful in dealing with the challenging topic of genocide. Students described several modes, coupled with consistent examples of teachers taking a tender and caring approach while teaching about genocide.

Using movies, videos, first-hand accounts, and presentations from experts helped students overcome some of the challenges they faced when learning about genocide. One student appreciated how the teacher took into consideration the varied ways students learn.

One student described writing poetry about the sensitive topic and reading their poems aloud, which provided the class an opportunity to reflect and be vulnerable together. Another tried to describe how simply talking about genocide made it easier to learn about it:

I think honestly just talking about it more made it easier. Learning more about it, cause when you first hear it it's kind of a shock and it kind of gets worse before it gets better. But once you kind of see how many people... I don't really know how to explain it. Talking about it more makes it easier to talk about because it's more accepted to openly engage in I guess... it's not like, I don't really know how to explain it, it's easier to talk about it the more you do.

- Student, 12th grade

Several students talked about the various books and stories they had read during their classes, and how powerful these stories were because they humanized the topic. Some students also described how their teachers took the time for reflection, by pausing a documentary film, or taking a break while reading aloud to provide time for students to digest and discuss.

Challenges and Strategies that Helped Students Grapple with Difficult Topics

At this point in the conversation, the students were asked about the challenges they faced while learning about genocide, which topics they found to be challenging, and what, if anything, helped them overcome those challenges. They were able to enter their responses anonymously via the Padlet, but there were moments when students volunteered to elaborate more out loud on their experiences.

A majority of students shared that the brutality of genocide was the most challenging part. Specifically, students talked about how difficult it was to learn about the scale of the death, the horrific details of genocides, the cruelty, and the



tragic emotional reality of these events. They talked about the experience of visualizing the brutality and immersing themselves into the events “in order to fully understand the level of horror that took place.” The visualization experience was especially hard for the students during a poetry writing assignment. While this topic was hard, the students also highlighted that it was “necessary to learn about.”

[It was challenging] Trying to picture and imagine how bad some events of genocide really are and the impact that it has on the families and people that are participating in the genocide and the ones that are being hurt or killed by the genocide attempts.

- Student, 12th grade

Making a personal connection to these events is another example of how humanizing the topic makes the lessons more real and powerful. One student wrote that learning about genocide was hard because they felt a lack of personal connection, since “we have not personally experienced anything like these genocides.” Others wrote that learning in-depth about personal stories helped them make connections even without any personal ties to genocides.

But, given the brutal nature of genocide, making these connections is still a challenging experience when learning about young children and families being separated or worse.

The ugly details of genocide were definitely hard to learn about because when you put it into perspective, the people who these horrible genocides happened to are really no different than you and I. The detailed learning that we experienced last year put that into perspective.

- Student, 12th grade

For some students, the stories of genocide struck close to home.

Talking specifically about the Holocaust, having such close family ties to the event, knowing that my ancestors had to live through those camps or didn't make it through them made it particularly difficult to then talk about the people who do not believe that it happened.

- Student, 12th grade

As students learned about these events, they came to realize the impact on not only those who were targets of genocide, but also the ripple effects on their families and “the people that are participating in genocide.” One student wrote about how scary it was to learn how quickly events can unfold in society and escalate toward genocide. That student wrote about erasure and denial as challenges faced in learning about genocide, and acknowledged that it was a taboo topic for some, specifically because the topic is not widely talked about, and in some cases, the truth about history is denied.

When asked what helped them while learning about genocide, most talked about the important role their teachers played in creating the right environment for them to learn about this challenging topic. In particular, they appreciated when their teachers were patient with them, provided them with an opportunity to be honest and have open discussions, and made themselves available for questions. Students valued when their teachers didn't rush them through the topics and took their time during the lesson. They noticed and were grateful when their teachers were sensitive to students' emotional health, by providing space to reflect and learn individually, never pressuring them to participate publicly in class discussion.

They were very cautious when explaining deeper and more graphic topics and always warned us before something uncomfortable was going to be brought up, and they were always open to answering our questions [and] concerns if we had any.

- Student, 12th grade

Additionally, when teachers were authentic about the impact of this topic on themselves, and joined their students in the learning experience, students found the education particularly meaningful.

Encouraging open communication and including themselves in the conversation made me feel like my questions and difficult feelings were ok.

- Student, 12th grade

Making themselves part of the learning experience through their reflections and writing along with us [made it easier].

- Student, 12th grade

While the details were difficult to learn about, a couple of students shared that knowing the details helped them face the topic head-on. They appreciated it most when their teacher didn't "sugar coat" it.

I think the ugly details were a part of what helped me overcome this challenge because when it becomes more real and detailed, it becomes more of a passion to try and recognize patterns and recognize when things are getting worse... I felt more comfortable talking about it knowing that the only way to get the full and honest truth was to get all of the details and to understand all of the suffering in order to properly educate and defend future generations from such violence.

- Student, 12th grade

A few students wrote that knowing the importance of this topic was helpful while going through their lessons. They consider learning about genocide to be valuable, in part because they want to personally prevent the erasure of the events.

Understanding that it is important to continue sharing their stories so that they won't be just a number in history, but a valuable lesson that we can all learn from. Furthermore, ensuring that their culture and community aren't completely washed away in media and outside countries.

- Student, 12th grade

What Was Missing

When asked what they felt was missing from their genocide education, a major theme of the conversation was around the students' call to expand the topic of

genocide to include more genocides beyond the Holocaust. The students talked eloquently about the importance of learning about the Holocaust, but they highlighted how not learning about other groups and other events made it seem as if the Holocaust was the only genocide in history.

I think obviously the Holocaust is a super important event to learn about, especially, I have family ties to it and what my family members experienced through it. But I also think that there's a lack of highlighting other groups that experienced genocide. And I think that in order to actually understand genocide as a concept, not just the Holocaust as a stand alone event, and realize that genocide happens all over the world, there needs to be a bigger focus on other groups.

- Student, 12th grade

They went on to explain that this made it hard for them to learn the patterns of genocide, since they were most often only aware of one example. While some students indicated having learned about other genocides, others had only studied the Holocaust.

I kind of wanted to reiterate - I think it's also hard to learn about or know the patterns of genocide when we only learn about one. Which is why I find it hard to answer about 'what did we learn about



patterns', because we only learned about the Holocaust. And it's a major event, I get it and I think it's still something that we should talk about, but I think by including other genocides it'll give a better understanding of why or how it happens instead of just analyzing one situation and one person and how it spiraled from there, being able to see it in different areas with different people would give me a different view to look at it from. Because it's really easy to just get sucked into like the Holocaust is like the major one, or the only genocide that happened, and that's not true. And if we want to learn about genocide in general, then getting other examples is important to have that knowledge.

- Student, 12th grade

Other students explained that they wanted to learn more about the stages of genocide, which was also noted in both teacher and community partner focus groups. The students have an urge to learn about the ripple effects of genocide, and to understand how these events are not only siloed in history, but have lasting impacts on society.

I think just talking about genocide in the modern day. Because it is important to talk about other groups, but if we are going to go back to the Holocaust, talking about things like neonazism, recognizing that wasn't just something that happened in history but there's still effects that take place today that are tied into it. And you see other genocides that kind of follow in suit of what happened. And I think highlighting how it affects people every day is important.

- Student, 12th grade

World View

These sixteen 12th-grade students described how their world views have changed after their genocide education experiences, and that they had previously lived in a “bubble” that has now popped. They know now about the human capacity for brutality, and they also have built up empathy for both those unfairly treated and for some of those who were complicit in genocide. They shared how they now know that genocides are not necessarily committed because people are evil, but rather their societies may be unstable.

Several students said they are now more aware of the significance of power dynamics and how abuses of power can lead to such devastation. A couple of students noted that they appreciate the privilege of living in a place “where these things don't happen.”

Most of all, students shared some version of a call to action. One Palestinian student, with close family ties to Gaza, described what it was like to learn about genocide in a class amidst the Israeli/Palestinian conflict.²¹ That student felt they have a responsibility to ensure people are well informed about the conflict, to tell the personal stories not told in the news, and to help others understand the humans impacted so their stories were not lost.

Because obviously from my perspective I obviously could never understand what a person is going through in that current moment, and obviously I have my own personal feelings about it and I talk to the people going through it and it's really disheartening. Even though it may be hard to hear about it, I think it's really important to understand and acknowledge and continue its message so that it doesn't get lost throughout history or misinterpreted and people just become lost to numbers if we don't... they get their stories told and humanized.

- Student, 12th grade

These students don't want to be bystanders, and shared about internalizing the adage that history repeats itself. They want to make sure they share what they've learned and to prevent the erasure of the events of genocide in history and prevent genocides from occurring in the future.

Although we cannot rewrite history, we can ensure people are informed on what happened to those affected and tell their stories. By telling those stories, we can better recognize the patterns and effects of genocide to better our world and community.

- Student, 12th grade

It has changed the way I view myself in the world, it puts in perspective how much damage one person can do when given the proper tools and opportunities, it shows the significance of how power works in the world and how important checks and balances are.

- Student, 12th grade

²¹ In all cases, both in quotes and summaries of what we heard, we use the words and phrasing that participants used to refer to current and historical events.

The genocide education that I have gotten over the last year has opened my eyes about how easily an imbalance of power can lead to such violence and devastation. It made me think about how people do not commit genocide because they WANT to be evil, but because they believe they are right, and that is where it really strikes me to know that in order to manage genocide, significant opposition against such views needs to be voiced. As someone who has always been interested in government and politics, given that America has such a significant role in the operations of many countries, taking a stand against genocide in any way possible is extremely significant.

- Student, 12th grade ■



Themes That Emerged This Year

Data collection for year two of this evaluation included the annual district leader survey and focus groups with teachers, community partners, and students. This year's data collection represents the most significant amount of qualitative data across the four-year evaluation period. We learned what teaching and learning about genocide in Massachusetts looks and feels like from those directly involved. We also heard participant perceptions of the impact and value of this education. Below are the high-level themes we identified across all data collection activities this year. We look forward to continuing our data collection in years three and four through district leader surveys, which will give us an opportunity to see the impact and potential changes to genocide education in Massachusetts schools over time.

- As hoped and expected, all focus group participants understand the gravity and value of learning from history and embarking on genocide education.
- Similar to last year's data snapshot, we see that grantees are much more likely than non-grantees to have increased their offerings in genocide education compared to the previous school year. This suggests that grant funding may play a role in district capacity to increase offerings in genocide education.
- Teachers, students and community partners highlighted the importance of using primary sources and resources that humanize the topic of genocide. Community partners acknowledged and understood their role in providing these important resources.
- Some participants from all focus groups (teachers, students, and community partners) called for an expansion of genocide topics covered beyond the Holocaust. Two community partners in particular requested that the Indigenous experience be centered. Additionally, across all types of participants there was an emphasis on a need for more focus on the stages of genocide, the ripple effects of genocide, and erasure/denial of certain genocides or genocidal events.
- Many teachers expressed a need for more age-appropriate resources that can help them teach the challenging themes of genocide education to younger students.

- Some participants from all focus groups (teacher, community partner, and student) identified the value of tending to students' emotional health while learning about genocide. For many students, this is their first exposure to topics like death and targeted violence, which creates challenges regarding students' capacity for these topics and social-emotional development.
- Some community partner focus group participants specifically requested that DESE take a similar approach to creating genocide education pedagogical guidelines as they have for civics education.
- A constant undercurrent of political tension was apparent when speaking to teachers. This is not surprising given the current contentious political climate, and as some teachers reported, the uncertainty around administrative support for teachers facing pushback while teaching genocide topics.
- Teachers expressed a need for more time to convene with each other, and for more training and materials on the facts of varied genocides. Community partners see the value in providing these resources to teachers. ■



Appendices

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Appendix 1: Quote Bank

Below are quotes removed from the body of the report for brevity. We believe there is great value in including participant voice so we are including these quotes below. Quotes are listed under the section headers where they originated.

Teacher Focus Groups

Expanding to Include More Genocide Topics

I really want them [the students] to have more of a sense of ... the immediacy of some of these conflicts and atrocities.

-Teacher from non-grantee district

Administrative Support

I would say another barrier is kind of like I had mentioned before the piece about, the backlash from parents, which is kind of stressful, because we do have a lot of parents who very strongly feel in our district like some things are not supposed to be talked about with kids this young. And luckily, our principal obviously, is like, well, we told you that you had to do this, so it's not your fault. Like, we'll handle it, but it's difficult.

-Teacher from grantee district

Political Tension

I feel okay teaching it. But even, last year, in the environment that we teach in, it can be kind of scary. Like we're backed, obviously by this state mandate and a bill, and the principals and the superintendent know that. But it's still kind of scary to talk about such heavy things with such young kids. And we don't, and I know it's like a whole six through 12, it doesn't have to happen in middle school, but we do want to be following through with giving them a basis of information.

-Teacher from grantee district

Reactions to DESE's Description of "Meaningful Genocide Education"

The enduring historical relationships between people. I think that's one thing I would add.

-Teacher from non-grantee district

Additional Suggestions:

I would include more emphasis on the aftermath of genocide—how individuals and communities rebuild and heal—as a critical part of understanding its long-term consequences.

-Teacher from non-grantee district

How do you become an active agent of change in your own society... combat the sense of despair... I want to give them [students] a sense of having tools, some sense of their own power, ... what they can do as an individual and as a group, as a generation...

-Teacher from non-grantee district

Maybe focusing more on this concept of complicity and not so much like playing a role that's a very active thing to play a role, whereas complicity is just something you can be born into and be totally unaware of.

-Teacher from non-grantee district

It's hard when you tell 12 year olds that what you're doing is going to lead to or not lead to genocide in another part of the world. ... I wish DESE... would phrase it more about human activity than you and your activity.

-Teacher from non-grantee district

Community Partner Focus Groups

Nature of Partnerships

...we've reached out, particularly to diverse, socioeconomic and racially diverse districts that have less money put aside for professional development...

What Makes for a Strong Partnership

how we build a strong partnership is we work with the district to select additional elective topics that they want to learn more about...

Student Focus Groups

Genocide Education Influences Worldview and Values

"Seeing how all this happened and there were countries who were not helping this cause."

-Student, 7th grade

General Genocide Knowledge

Like I knew about the Holocaust but I didn't know that it was like a thing besides the Holocaust.

-Student, 7th grade

World Views

There could be a bunch of bad things happening right now and we wouldn't know.

-Student, 7th grade

The man was a trusted leader before that and many were forced or tricked into believing him

-Student, 7th grade

Recommendations for DESE and Teachers

Like some people might not feel comfortable so don't like force them to talk about something they don't want to.

-Student, 7th grade

Yeah maybe like more chromebook work for people who don't like to talk. Or like writing for the people that don't want to talk.

-Student, 7th grade

What Was Missing

I think learning about the individual stuff happening to certain people but then also learning about how it affected the whole world afterwards and not just the people that actually had to experience it, but like the people that are from those families and what they have to experience now because of what people decided they were gonna do.

-Student, 12th grade


World View

The phrase that history will repeat itself unless taught otherwise has always been said in school, but learning about the specific brutality and the scope of its horror makes it a lot more truthful. Since learning the in-depth details of different genocides, I have found myself more willing to speak on it in group settings because I want others to know what I do, so that they also fully understand that we cannot move on without first grasping their effects on the world.

-Student, 12th grade

It made me realize how important learning human history is. To know what millions before you have gone through has shown years of dark periods in humanity that still resonate today. These years of tragedy have further solidified that polarization and prejudice do far more harm than good. It has highlighted my perspective that we can not allow history to repeat with these genocidal acts and how important it is to care for others who are different.

-Student, 12th grade



The world has a lot of problems when it comes to demographic groups, and there is almost always a conflict going between groups across the world. I know now that my role is to do whatever I can to make sure that does not happen, and I try to not use hatred in any situation to avoid escalating any conflicts.

-Student, 12th grade

Makes me see the abuse of power imbalances and how easily fear can control others. Makes me want to fight harder against those that want to control or spread hate towards others/other groups.

-Student, 12th grade

It made life seem more real and popped the bubble I was previously living in. It is easy to forget about the struggles others around the world face and by learning about these hateful acts, my eyes were opened to how easily someone in power can destroy the lives of someone else.

-Student, 12th grade

Appendix 2: District Survey 2024-25

Introduction

Welcome to the Genocide Education Evaluation Survey for District Leaders. This survey is part of a study commissioned by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), which has contracted with MC2 Education, a third-party, independent research organization. The study is designed to learn about Genocide Education from the perspectives of Massachusetts school and district staff who are knowledgeable about history and social studies education in their districts. As you may know, Massachusetts passed genocide education legislation in 2021. This survey asks about your district's social studies/history education offerings that address genocide to understand more about genocide education offered by districts across the Commonwealth and what additional supports districts like yours might need.

No individual responses will be identified. Data shared publicly will always be presented in the aggregate.

Your participation is voluntary, and we hope you will complete this survey to help us learn more about your district's experience with genocide education. There are no right or wrong answers, and your candid responses will help DESE to provide support districts like yours might need. Thank you!

For additional information about the development of this survey, please contact us at [email address].

If you believe that you can answer questions regarding the implementation and state of genocide education in your school district, please complete this survey. If you believe that you are not a good fit to answer this survey, please forward this survey to the individual(s) in your district responsible for social studies/history education.

Background Information

1. Please select the name of your district.

2. Please indicate your responsibilities in your district. **Please check all that apply.**

- a. Curriculum Director (e.g., Social Studies, Middle School/Secondary)
- b. Professional Development Director
- c. Secondary Education Director
- d. Assistant Superintendent
- e. School Leader
- f. Department Head (e.g., Social Studies or History)
- g. Instructional Coach
- h. Teacher with district responsibilities
- i. Other [Please Specify]

3. Did your district receive or apply for a Genocide Education Grant, Fund Code 215, offered by DESE to fund activities in either of the following school years? Select all that apply.

- a. Yes, received a grant in 2022-2023 > [Skip to 'Grant Funding Use'](#)
- b. Yes, received a grant in 2023-2024 > [Skip to 'Grant Funding Use'](#)
- c. Yes, received a grant in 2024-2025 > [Skip to 'Grant Funding Use'](#)
- d. Applied for a grant, response pending > [Continue to Next Question](#)
- e. No > [Continue to Next Question](#)

Background Information - Non-Grantees

4. You indicated your district didn't receive the Genocide Education Grant above. Please select any other resources you've used to offer genocide education. Please check all that apply. > [After this question, skip to 'Genocide Education Courses'](#)

- a. Other grant funding [Please specify]
- b. Other district operating funds
- c. Federal funds
- d. None of the above (No additional funding needed)
- e. Other [Please Specify]

Grant Funding Use

5. Please indicate how you used grant funding to support the following grade levels through your Genocide Education Grant. Please check all that apply.

Enter course name	Select Grade(s)	Select Subject(s)	Required/ Elective	Approximate # of Hours of Course Addressing Genocide	Genocide Events Covered
[Short answer text]	[Select all that apply, checkboxes] 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12	[Select all that apply, checkboxes] English Language Arts Arts Math Science Social studies/History Art Other	[Select one, multiple choice] Required Elective	[Numeric]	[Short answer text]

> Section repeats 15 times to allow for 15 course entries

Genocide Education Instruction

7. Which of the following pedagogical approaches does your district encourage educators to use or provide when carrying out genocide education this academic school year (2024-25)? Please check all that apply.

- a. Historical context around the events of genocide
- b. Projects to assess student's understanding of the impacts of genocide
- c. Personal stories from survivors
- d. Field trips and museum visits (including virtual field trips)
- e. Primary source analysis assignments
- f. Reflection exercises
- g. Comparative genocide studies
- h. Literature and art as part of genocide education
- i. Guest speakers on topics of genocide
- j. Survivor visits to students
- k. Ethical dilemmas
- l. Role-playing and simulations
- m. Interactive technology
- n. Discussion circles
- o. Media analysis
- p. Opportunities for students to take action against genocide
- q. Other [Please specify]
- r. None of the above.

Genocide Education Changes

8. How, if at all, have your district's offerings in genocide education changed this academic school year (2024-25)?

- a. Increased offerings > [Continue to next question.](#)
- b. About the same offerings > [Skip to 'Professional Development and Partnerships'](#)
- c. Decreased offerings > [Skip to question 10.](#)

9. In which ways have your district's offerings in genocide education increased (i.e., including additional genocide education development and content) this academic school year (2024-25)? Select all that apply.

- a. More genocide education courses are offered
- b. More genocide education courses are required
- c. More teachers are addressing genocide education
- d. More grade levels are participating in genocide education
- e. More students are participating in genocide education
- f. More field trips are being planned/have been offered
- g. More guest speakers have been invited to speak in our classes/schools
- h. Added curricular/instructional resources
- i. Added more time to current PD offerings
- j. Offered new professional development
- k. Formed new community or organizational partnerships
- l. Offered more individualized instructional coaching
- m. Other [Please specify]
- n. I don't know (I wasn't present/etc.)

10. In which ways have your district's offerings in genocide education decreased (i.e., having less genocide education development and content) this academic school year (2024-25) Select all that apply.

- a. Fewer genocide education courses are offered
- b. Fewer genocide education courses are required
- c. Fewer teachers are addressing genocide education
- d. Fewer grade levels are participating in genocide education
- e. Fewer students are participating in genocide education
- f. Fewer field trips are being planned/have been offered
- g. Fewer guest speakers have been invited to speak in our classes/schools
- h. Less professional development has been offered
- i. Fewer community or organizational partnerships have been formed, or previous partnerships have ended
- j. Less individualized instructional coaching has been offered
- k. Other [Please specify]
- l. I don't know (I wasn't present/etc.)

Professional Development and Partnerships

11. Did district staff participate in professional development on Genocide Education in spring, summer, or fall 2024?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. I don't know

12. Did your district provide professional development on Genocide Education to educators in spring, summer, or fall 2024?

- a. Yes > [Continue to next question](#)
- b. No > [Skip to 'Genocide Education Sustainability'](#)
- c. I don't know > [Skip to 'Genocide Education Sustainability'](#)

13. Please select the modalities your district used to provide professional development (PD) or other resources to educators/other staff focused on genocide education. Please check all that apply.

	Stand-alone	Ongoing
Full Day Training		
Half-day training		
Less than half-day training (i.e., 1-2 hours)		
Co-Planning (e.g., educators in the same school/district engage in lesson planning together)		
Cohort model (e.g., a group of educators participate together in PD activities)		
Other (please specify)		

13. Please estimate the total number of professional development hours your district provided for genocide education.

- a. Middle School (6th-8th grades)
- b. High School (9th-12th grades)

14. To the best of your knowledge, how many teachers at each level received professional development? Please enter '0' if there was no professional development for a level.

- a. Middle School (6th-8th grades)
- b. High School (9th-12th grades)

16. With which, if any, of the following organizations has your district partnered to provide professional development on genocide education topics? Please check all that apply.

- a. Facing History and Ourselves
- b. Salem State University Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies
- c. The US Holocaust Memorial Museum
- d. The Genocide Education Project
- e. Primary Source
- f. Lappin Foundation
- g. Echoes and Reflections
- h. University of Massachusetts Institute for Holocaust, Genocide, and Memory Studies
- i. Brown University Choices Program
- j. Zinn Education Program
- k. Bristol Community College Holocaust and Genocide Center
- l. Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe
- m. The Barnstable Human Rights Academy
- n. Provincetown Juneteenth
- o. Provincetown UU Racial Justice Group
- p. The National Native American Boarding School Healing Commission
- q. A Healthy Lynnfield
- r. Other [Please specify]
- s. None

Genocide Education Sustainability

17. To the best of your knowledge, which of the following best describes your district's plans for genocide education in the next academic year (2025-26)?

- a. Likely about the same as this year > [Continue to next question](#)
- b. Likely to expand in some ways compared to this year > [Continue to next question](#)
- c. Likely to decrease at least a bit > [Skip to 'Genocide Education Support'](#)
- d. I do not know > [Skip to 'Genocide Education Support'](#)

18. How does your district plan to support the development of sustainable long-term genocide education programming? Please check all that apply.


- a. Applying for the Genocide Education Grant
- b. Developing a funded community partnership
- c. Acquiring additional grant funding
- d. A fundraising campaign
- e. Purchasing curricula or curricular materials
- f. Creating a new curriculum unit or course
- g. Funding ongoing professional development
- h. Funding ongoing experiential learning
- i. Other [Please specify]
- j. None

Genocide Education Support

DESE History/Social Science team members describe “meaningful genocide education” as instruction and coursework that, over the long term, 1) engages students in learning about genocide, its causes, and impact on people; 2) demonstrates to students the ways in which their own action or inaction may play a role in the social context that can lead to genocide.

19. Please identify the top three things your district does especially well to support meaningful genocide education in middle and high school. Please assign a ranking of 1, 2, 3 (with 1 being the thing you do best) to the three you choose. Leave the rest blank.

- a. Grade-appropriate assessments
- b. Professional development about content
- c. Professional development about pedagogy
- d. Instructional resources/curricula
- e. Access to experiential learning
- f. Assistance with integrating into curriculum
- g. Dedicated time for instruction
- h. Time for planning
- i. Availability of multiple teachers to brainstorm/co-plan
- j. Balancing the time demands associated with district/DESE priorities



20. Please identify the top three areas in which your district needs support to provide meaningful genocide education. Please assign a ranking of 1,2,3 (with 1 being the most important area) to the three you choose. Leave the rest blank.

- a. Grade-appropriate assessments
- b. Professional development about content
- c. Professional development about pedagogy
- d. Instructional resources/curricula
- e. Access to experiential learning
- f. Assistance with integrating into curriculum
- g. Dedicated time for instruction
- h. Time for planning
- i. Availability of multiple teachers to brainstorm/co-plan
- j. Balancing the time demands associated with district/DESE priorities

Other Comments

21. Is there anything else that you feel is important about genocide education in your district that we have not yet asked you about? Please tell us more here.

We appreciate you for taking the time to complete the survey!

Appendix 3: Teacher Focus Group Protocol

Introductions

My name is [NAME] and this is my colleague [NAME]. We work for a research company called MC² Education. We were hired by the state of Massachusetts to gather information about genocide education to help the state better understand genocide education in MA and better support teachers. The purpose of this focus group is to learn more about your experiences teaching genocide education. We want to understand what professional development opportunities you've participated in, your experience implementing genocide education, what other resources might be helpful, and how confident you feel teaching genocide topics.

Welcome/Approach

The purpose of today's discussion is to *learn more about your experiences with teaching genocide education*. We would greatly appreciate your candid feedback and responses.

We want you to feel comfortable sharing your experiences. If there is a question that comes up and you would prefer to share with a private chat with me or my colleague [NAME], please write in the Zoom chat. In our discussion today, if you know other teachers who have had experiences similar to what you share, you can let us know. For example, you can say something like "a challenge for some staff at our school was" This helps to keep the pressure off sharing something about you specifically and keeps the experience about teachers in general.

While we're not planning to talk about anything especially sensitive in today's focus group, all the information provided during the focus group will only be reported outside of our research team in aggregate with no identifying information, in other words, we won't say who specifically provided the feedback. No documents for the research project will contain information that could identify any individual by name. Your participation is completely voluntary. You can decide not to answer a question or to stop participating in the focus group at any time. If you choose not to participate there will be no effect on your relationship with your school.

If you have questions about the study, please feel free to contact the study director, Jackie Mendez, at [email address].

During the focus group we will take notes and, with your permission, we would also like to record the conversation to supplement our notes, recordings will be transcribed using otter.ai. Is it ok if we audio-record our conversation? **Confirm**

We have a few housekeeping notes before we begin:

- This session is informal; there is no need to raise your hand to speak. However, we just ask that you please speak one at a time so that we can make sure that we hear everything everyone has to say.
- We also want to make sure everyone has an opportunity to share. Please be mindful of giving everyone an opportunity to contribute.
- Also, we want to make sure that everything that is shared during this group stays in the group. Therefore, no one should share what is discussed during a focus group outside of the focus group session.

Does anyone have any questions before we begin? You can also send a private message through the zoom chat if you have any questions.

Ice Breaker: Please say your first name only and one word that describes how you're feeling today. We only have 2 minutes for introductions, so if you could please do this quickly go around clockwise to next person in the focus group.

Focus group questions:

1. Please go around and tell us about your teaching experience: how long you've been


- teaching overall
- how long you've been teaching genocide education
- what grades you teach
- which courses.

2. Please describe (if applicable) your recent participation in any Professional Development on Genocide Education, over the past year or so. What about this PD was helpful/useful in supporting your teaching of Genocide Education? What else would have been helpful?

- If you did not participate in any PD, please share if you were aware of any PD and why you did not attend.

3. How prepared or ready do you feel to teach Genocide Education?

- What kinds of things help make you feel prepared?
- If you do not feel prepared, why is that?
- What resources/support would you need to be prepared?



4. We're interested in understanding what Genocide Education looks like in your classrooms and schools. For example, Genocide Education could be taught as a stand alone class, as separate units or sections in a class that covers other topics, using specific resources, or other ways. Please describe over the past year or so, how you integrate Genocide Education into your curriculum. What works well to engage your students.

- What works well to engage your students in genocide education?

5. DESE History/Social Science team members describe “meaningful Genocide Education” as instruction and coursework that, over the long term, 1) engages students in learning about genocide, its causes, and impact on people; 2) demonstrates to students the ways in which their own action or inaction may play a role in the social context that can lead to genocide. Is there anything you would add to this description of “meaningful genocide education”?

6. What resources help you to provide meaningful genocide education?

7. What gets in the ways of your ability to provide meaningful genocide education?

8. How has your approach to Genocide Education instruction changed in the past year?

- What influenced this change?
- Did you receive any additional supports

9. How if at all, do you plan to continue teaching Genocide Education in your classroom this coming academic year and next?

- If not, why?
- If yes, are there any ways in which you will change what or how you offer it?

10. Is there anything else you'd like to share that we have not discussed yet?

Appendix 4: Community Partner Focus Group Protocol

Introductions

My name is [NAME] and this is my colleague [NAME]. We work for a research company called MC² Education. We were hired by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, or DESE, to help learn about successes, challenges, and how DESE can better support districts and schools as they teach genocide education. *The purpose of this focus group is to learn more about your experiences partnering with school districts, including your experience working with both schools and school districts, your observations about how the schools/districts with whom you are partnering are approaching Genocide Education, what you believe is working well and what can be improved.*

Welcome/Approach

We would greatly appreciate your honest feedback and responses. The information you provide today will help us give DESE valuable information about how organizations like yours are partnering with districts and schools as they implement genocide education.

We want you to feel comfortable sharing your experiences. If there is a question that comes up and you would prefer to share privately with me or my colleague [NAME], you can write just to [NAME] or me in the Zoom chat. If you know other organizations similar to your own that have had the same experiences you can let us know. For example, you can say something like “a challenge for some organizations was” This helps to keep the pressure off sharing something about you or your organization specifically, and keeps the experience about these partnerships in general.

The information provided during the focus group will only be shared outside of our research team in aggregate (in other words, we do not share information about who specifically provided the feedback). Any documents resulting from the information we collect today will contain NO information that could directly identify you by name. Your participation is completely voluntary. You can decide not to answer a question or to stop participating in the focus group at any time. If you choose not to participate there will be no effect on your partnership or partnerships with schools.

If you have questions about the study, please feel free to contact the study director, Jackie Mendez, at [email address].

During the focus group we will take notes and, with your permission, we would also like to record the conversation to supplement our notes, recordings will be transcribed using otter.ai. Is it ok if we audio-record our conversation? **Confirm.**

We have a few housekeeping notes before we begin:


- This session is informal; there is no need to raise your hand to speak. However, we just ask that you please speak one at a time so that we can make sure that we hear everything everyone has to say.
- We also want to make sure everyone has an opportunity to share. Please be mindful of giving everyone an opportunity to contribute.
- Also, we want to make sure that everything that is shared during this group stays in the group. Therefore, no one should share what is discussed during a focus group outside of the focus group session.

Does anyone have any questions before we begin? You can also send a private message through the zoom chat if you have any questions.

Ice Breaker: Please say or type in the chat your first name only and describe a little about your organization & role. We only have 2 minutes for introductions, if no one wants to volunteer I'll start with.... Pick someone.

Focus group questions:

1. How long has your organization been partnering with schools in Massachusetts to work on Genocide Education? With roughly how many schools/districts has your organization partnered on genocide education?
2. What led your organization to decide to partner with a school/school district in MA?
 - Who initiated the partnership—was it your organization or did a school reach out to you?
3. Based on your experience, how does your organization foster a strong partnership with MA schools/districts?
 - How familiar are you with the state's legislative requirements for genocide education? How do the requirements affect your partnership(s) with schools or districts, if at all?



4. DESE History/Social Science team members describe “meaningful Genocide Education” as instruction and coursework that, over the long term, 1) engages students in learning about genocide, its causes, and impact on people; and 2) demonstrates to students the ways in which their own action or inaction may play a role in the social contexts that can lead to genocide. What else would you add to this description of “meaningful genocide education”?

- What do you think DESE should prioritize next in genocide education?

5. In your experience, what gets in the way of a strong partnership, and what challenges or barriers have you experienced when partnering with schools/school districts in MA?

6. What could DESE do to support your organization in partnering with schools & districts?

7. Is there anything else you’d like to share that we have not discussed yet?

Appendix 5: Student Focus Group Protocol

Introductions

My name is [NAME] and this is my colleague [NAME]. We work for a research company called MC² Education. We were hired by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education to learn from students and teachers what genocide education looks like in their schools and what you think about it.

You might not have heard of genocide education before, and that's ok. It's basically when schools teach students about the history and patterns of genocide. Students might learn about how specific groups have been targeted in the past, about how prejudice and hatred can impact societies, and about how people today can help prevent genocide and other similar violence. In 2021, the state legislature in Massachusetts passed a law that required every student to learn about these topics in middle and high school.

The purpose of this focus group conversation is to hear about your experiences in History, Social studies, or English Language Arts classes that addressed genocide. We want to understand what you liked, what made it easier to learn about genocide, and what, if anything, made it hard or challenging to learn about genocide. We also want to understand how learning about genocide affected you.

Your feedback is really important because it will help us improve genocide education for other students in Massachusetts.

Welcome/Approach

Discussing the impacts of genocide and learning about genocide can be difficult to talk about. We want you to feel comfortable sharing your experiences. If there is a question that comes up and you would prefer not to answer in front of others, you do not have to, please feel free to pull one of us aside after the focus group to share privately.

We have a few norms for the group that we want to make sure everyone understands. The focus group is informal, so you do not have to raise your hand to speak. However, we just ask that you please speak one at a time so that we can make sure that we hear what everyone has to say. Another very important norm for this group is everything that is shared in the group stays in the group. Please do not share anything that is talked about in this group after our conversation is over.

However, if you know other students similar to you that have had the same experiences you can let us know. For example, you can say something like “a

challenge for some students in our class was” This helps to keep the pressure off sharing something about you specifically and keeps the focus on experiences of students in general.

All of the information you share during the focus group will be kept confidential by the study team. This means that anything you say during the focus group will not be shared with anyone outside of the study team. Any report we write summarizing what we learn today will not include your name or anything that could directly identify you. Your participation is voluntary. You can decide not to answer a question or stop participating in the focus group at any time. You can take a moment for a break by stepping outside the classroom for a moment, or get a sip of water.

In Massachusetts, genocide education is required by the state legislature. Your feedback as a student is incredibly important because we want to know what works, or doesn’t work for you, and how we can improve genocide education from the perspective of students.

Does anyone have any questions before we begin?

Ice Breaker: Please say your first name only and your favorite food. We only have 2 minutes for introductions, so if you could please do this quickly. We’ll start here and then go around the classroom.

Focus group questions:

1. What have you learned about genocide at school during this academic year?
 - Which genocides have you learned about?
 - What have you learned about patterns or signs of genocide?
 - What do you know about genocide now that you didn’t know before this year?
2. There are lots of different ways to learn about all subjects, like class discussions, projects, guest speakers, role-playing, field trips, among others. What are some of the ways you learned about genocide in your X class this year? [probe on reading something written by a survivor or family member, class discussions, projects, guest speakers, role-playing, field trip (e.g. cultural event or museum), reading a book, discussions with classmates and/or teacher, completing a project, etc.]
 - Of all the ways you learned about genocide through your courses, which was the most engaging for you?
 - Which of those helped you understand something you had not known before?

-
3. What has been challenging for you while learning about genocide? (Padlet)
 - What, if anything, helped you overcome the challenge?
 4. Were there aspects of genocide that you found hard to talk about in class? If so, what were those? (Padlet)
 - What, if anything, did your teacher do to make it easier for you to discuss?
 - What did your teacher do to help you understand a painful/hard experience?
 - What did your teacher do to make it feel safe/comfortable to discuss a sensitive topic?
 5. Having learned what you did this year about genocide, what, if anything, has changed about how you think about the world and your role in it? (Padlet)
 - Changes in whether/how you engage with your community
 - Changes in your feelings about people who are different from you
 - Changes in how you are treated/how you treat others
 - Changes in how you can behave differently
 - Changes in your feelings about what happens outside of your local community
 6. Is there anything you wish you could have learned about genocide that you didn't get to in class?
 7. What would you want the people who are trying to improve genocide education to know?
 - What advice would you give to other teachers who are trying to teach about these topics? What would you want them to know?
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Teacher Questions (emailed to teacher) before the student focus groups to gather information to help with framing of focus group questions and probes:

- Name of class(es) where you teach Genocide education topics in core classes this academic year
- A few sentences describing the content and approach used in the courses described above.

