



Genocide Education

2024-25 Year 2 Brief

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Prepared for the Massachusetts Department of
Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE)



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How This Brief Was Created

This brief summarizes select findings from the second year of an ongoing study (2023-2027) of genocide education for the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) conducted by MC² Education (MC²). The brief focuses on how districts are expanding genocide education offerings and integrating it into courses, as well as how teachers are being supported and prepared to teach about genocide in their classes. To read the full report, please visit the [DESE website](#).

Exhibit 1: Data Used to Study Genocide Education

| Method | Participants (Grantee & Non-Grantee) | Icons |
|---|---|-------|
| Surveys | <ul style="list-style-type: none">District Leaders | |
| Focus Groups | <ul style="list-style-type: none">Teachers7th and 12th grade studentsCommunity partners | |
| Note: We indicate which data sources contribute to each section by presenting the icons listed above. | | |

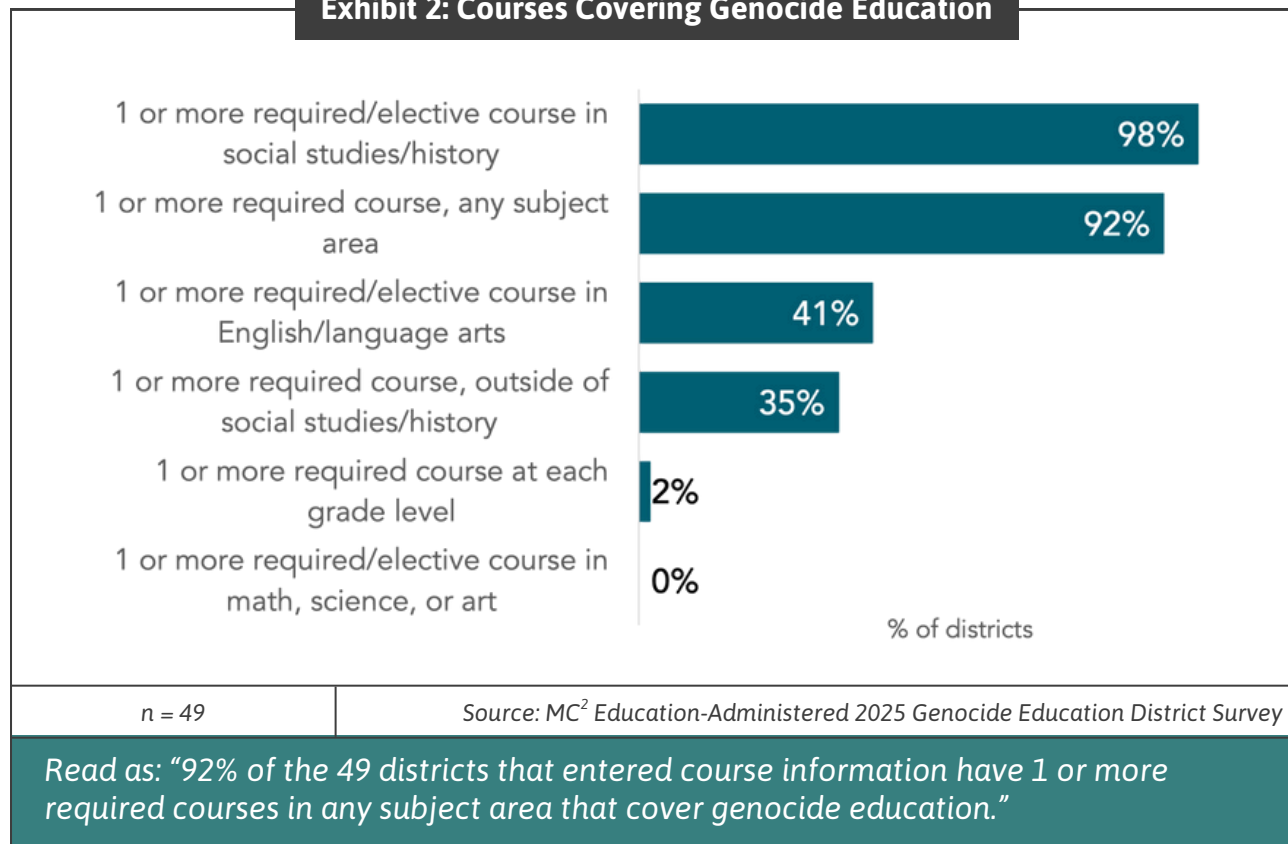
What We Learned about Genocide Education in 2024-25

Genocide Education Implementation

Across all respondents (both grantees and non-grantees), 92% have at least one required course that covers genocide education topics (Exhibit 2). Almost all courses covering genocide education are in social studies/history classes. Genocide topics are also covered in English/Language arts courses (whether required or elective) in 41% of responding districts.



Exhibit 2: Courses Covering Genocide Education



Grantee Genocide Education Offerings

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 the district's capacity to expand its genocide education offerings. District leaders reported that teachers are encouraged to focus on historical context and analysis of primary sources.





Instructional Approaches

Human Stories & Relevance

Teachers repeatedly noted that genocide education is most impactful when events are brought to life through survivor stories, personal narratives, and current events with real-life relevance. 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

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

Teacher Sensitivity and Authenticity

Participants across all focus groups (teacher, student, and community partner) identified the value of tending to students' emotional health while learning about genocide. Genocide instruction can be the first time younger students are exposed to topics like death and targeted violence, which can be challenging for these students. As one 7th-grade student shared, "I didn't like learning about all the deaths."



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

- Student, Focus Group

However, students responded positively to teachers who supported them in processing sensitive topics by previewing upcoming learning.



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

Students shared that trust in teachers made it easier for them to learn about genocide, and made them more willing to engage with difficult content. Students appreciated when teachers acknowledged the emotional toll of learning this material and created safe, supportive environments to process it, illustrated in the quote below:

[It was helpful that teachers] Ma[de] 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

Multiple, Reflective Modes of Pedagogy



Both 7th and 12th graders named a variety of approaches to learning about genocide, which they valued, including videos, books, group projects, survivor stories, poetry, and discussion. They identified group work, games, breaks during heavy lessons, and reassurance from teachers as effective support strategies.

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

[What helped was] 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



Instructional Supports

Centralized, Curated, and Age-Appropriate Resources

Many teachers asked, in focus groups and open-ended survey questions, 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.



I want to teach about it [genocide], so finding ways to break 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)

Teachers expressed an interest in PD that provides practical tools for navigating tough conversations and addressing current events with sensitivity and confidence, and deepens their content knowledge.



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



Expanded Topic Coverage

Participants across all focus groups (teachers, students, and community partners) recommended an expansion of genocide topics covered beyond the Holocaust (Exhibit 3). Two community partners in particular suggested that the Indigenous experience be more intentionally centered in genocide education. Additionally, participants across all focus groups emphasized the need for more focus on the stages of genocide, the ripple effects of genocide, and erasure or denial of certain genocides or genocidal events.



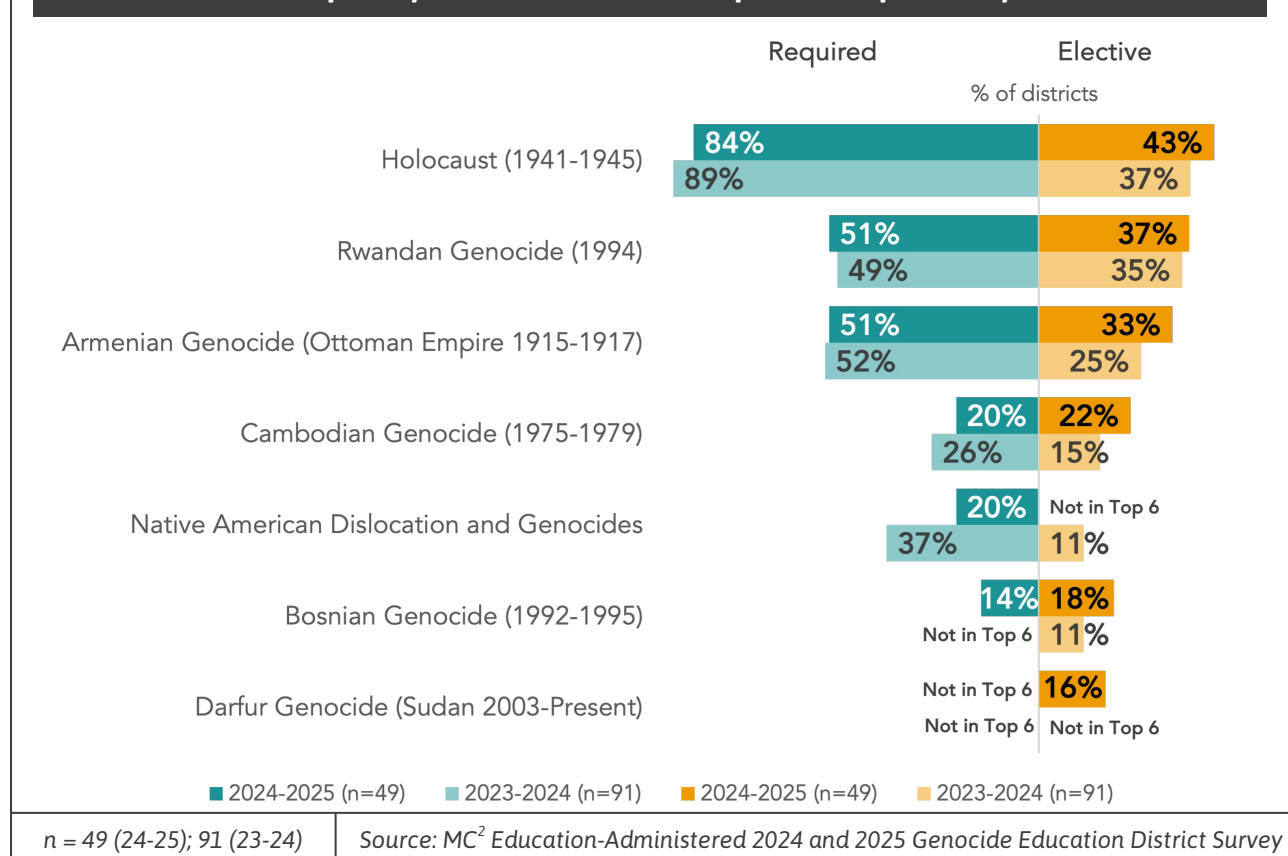
...it's also hard to learn about or know the patterns of genocide when we only learn about one. ... we only learned about the Holocaust. And it's a major event, I get it and I think it's still something that we should talk about, but I think by including other genocides it'll give a better understanding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

- Student, 12th grade

Exhibit 3 illustrates that while a number of genocides in addition to the Holocaust are covered across the Commonwealth, the Holocaust remains the most frequently covered genocide.

District leaders provided information on up to 15 separate courses, including narrative responses detailing which topics were addressed in each course. Their responses were then grouped according to an established list of genocides, and the evaluation team added additional categories when appropriate.

Exhibit 3: Most Frequently Covered Genocide Topics, as Reported by District Leaders



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."

State-Level Policy and School-Level Administrative Support

Teachers expressed fear and uncertainty about teaching controversial content, especially when they lacked clear administrative backing or statewide policies to protect them. Despite genocide education being legislatively mandated, several teachers noted that a visible, enforceable stance from DESE would help ensure genocide education is not watered down or avoided out of fear of pushback.



It's the prospect of teaching [about genocide]. It [genocide] 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

Additionally, focus group participants asked DESE to provide clearer pedagogical guidance, more comparative genocide content, and more regular convenings for teachers and partners to learn, plan, and align together. To learn more about these DESE-specific requests, see the full 2024-2025 evaluation [report](#). ■

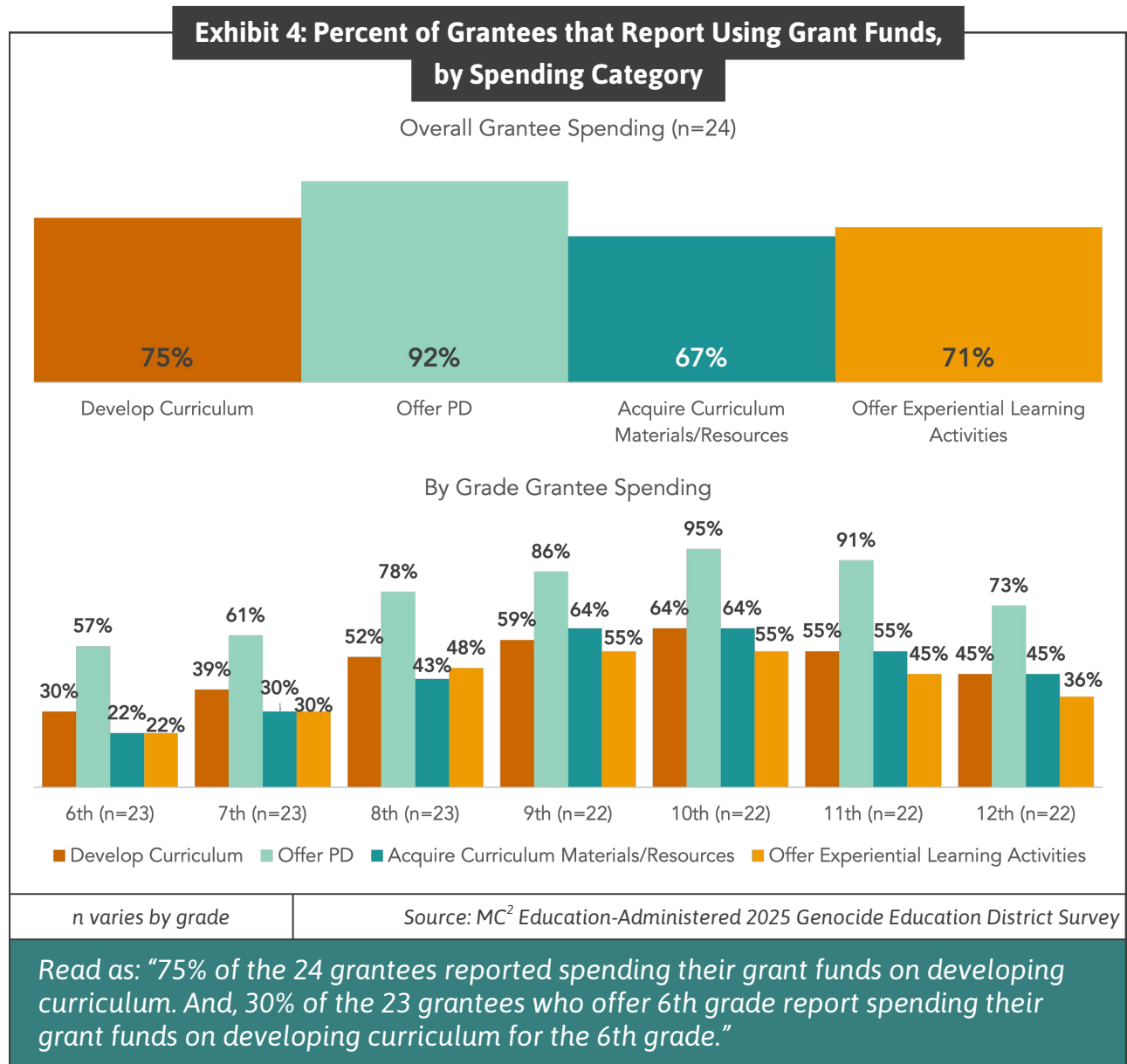
District Strategies for Sustaining and Increasing Genocide Education



Grantees reported a variety of strategies to sustain or increase genocide education offerings next year compared to non-grantees. Over half of grantees, compared to a third of non-grantees, reported plans to fund ongoing PD in the coming year. In particular, very few non-grantees (4%) report developing a funded community partnership in the coming year when compared to grantees (44%). The relatively larger number of grantee districts planning to form these partnerships in the future is consistent with community partner reports and focus group findings, which indicate that they believe the state's genocide education grants motivated both school districts and organizations to form partnerships.



When we investigated how grantees used their funding in 2024-25, we found that almost all had used it to offer PD, often for 8th-11th grade teachers (Exhibit 4). Between two-thirds and three-quarters of grantees used their funds to develop curriculum, acquire curricular materials/resources, or offer experiential learning activities. While spending occurred across all grades, it was most common in grades 8 through 11. ■



Impact of Genocide Education: Students' Perspective



Both 7th and 12th-grade students who participated in our focus groups reported shifts in their worldview following their genocide education experiences.

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

- Student, 7th grade

Even though it may be hard to hear about it [genocide], 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



Students reported that their experience with genocide education motivated them to change their behavior, with many speaking about plans to treat people different from themselves with greater kindness and empathy. Students talked about being "good kids," avoiding bullying, and treating others well, "no matter their race or ethnicity." Twelfth-grade students, in particular, described gaining an understanding that genocides stem not from inherent evil but from societal instability and imbalances of power.

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

- Student, 7th 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

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

When asked what they felt was missing from their genocide education, students recommended that educators acknowledge the discomfort associated with the subject matter. They asked teachers to ensure everyone is involved, and perhaps, given the uncomfortable topic, they should use more tools like group work or provide alternative ways to contribute, such as "writing for the people that don't want to talk," so that all students can feel more comfortable.

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

- Student, 7th grade

Some students emerged with a strong call to action, rejecting the role of passive bystanders. They spoke about learning that history repeats itself and expressed a determination to share their knowledge, prevent historical erasure, and work actively to prevent future genocides. ■

Although we cannot rewrite history, we can ensure people are informed on what happened to those affected and tell their stories.

- Student, 12th grade

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





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