



# Evidence-based Lessons for Building for a Better Democracy through Civic Education

INSIGHTS FROM OUR STUDY OF MASSACHUSETTS AND FROM 20 YEARS FOCUSED ON CIVIC EDUCATION



# Presenters



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# A 20-Year Legacy in Equitable K-12 Civic Learning



# Pioneering Research: Proven Practices to Reduce Inequity in Civic Education

Content &  
Concept  
Knowledge

Current &  
Controversial  
Issue Discussions

Simulations of  
Democratic  
Processes

Student Voice in  
Schools

Service learning  
and Action Civics

Inquiry to  
Informed Action

News Media  
Literacy

Social Emotional  
Learning

Culturally  
Responsive  
Pedagogy

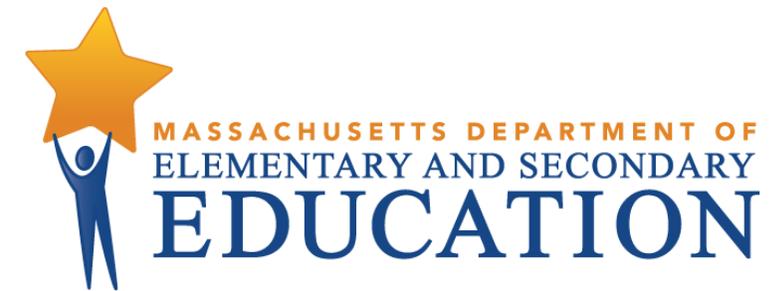
School Climate  
Reform

# The Go-To Partner for Evaluation of State Civic Education Policy and implementation

CIRCLE's unique expertise in following and evaluating implementation of state-level civic education policy and revision of standards/frameworks:

- Florida
  - Illinois
  - Massachusetts
- 
- Nonpartisan, evidence-based advice to various civic ed policy stakeholders in Washington and California

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# Many Lessons Learned

- **Collaboration**
  - Cross-sector, diverse partnerships
  - Bringing administrators on board
  - Distributed leadership; regional experts & network
- **Investment in Teachers**
  - High expectations and support for all
  - Explain why changes are important
  - Create space for mutual support
  - Excellent training - "Show, don't Tell"
- **Data for continuous improvements**
- "Civics is the Plate" - Civics is not an "add-on"

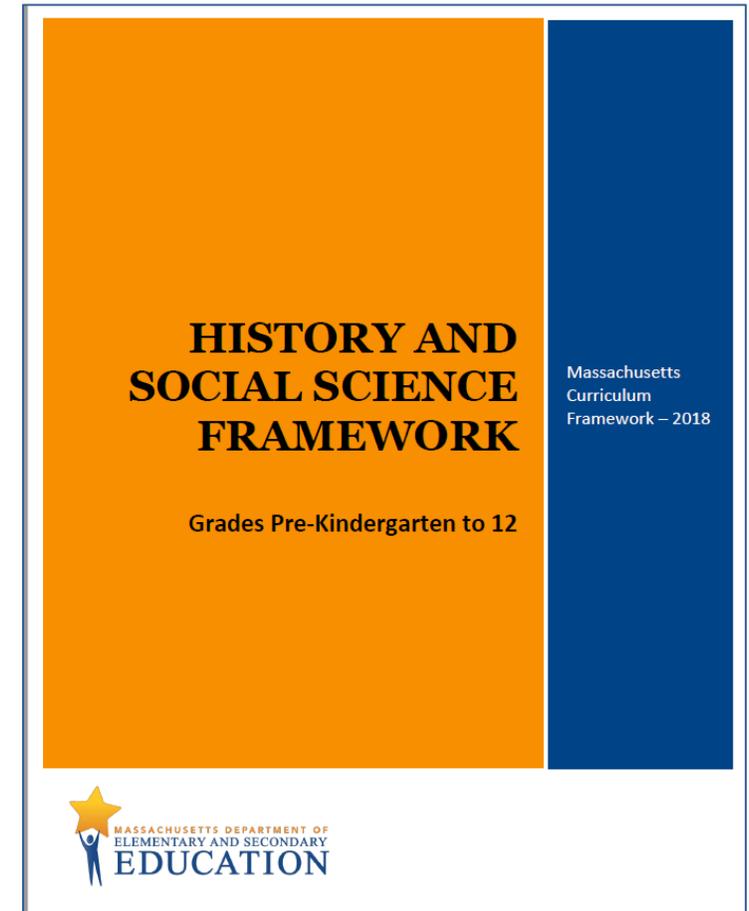


# Civic Education in Massachusetts: Context

- **Acts of 2018 Chapter 296: An Act to Promote and Enhance Civic Engagement**
  - Massachusetts Civic Learning Coalition
  - Civics Trust Fund
  - Student-Led Civics Project Requirement
- **2018 MA DESE HSS Framework & Civics Project Guidebook**

# New Framework Calls on Teachers to Ensure Students Have the Civic Knowledge, Skills, and Dispositions to Thrive in Democracy

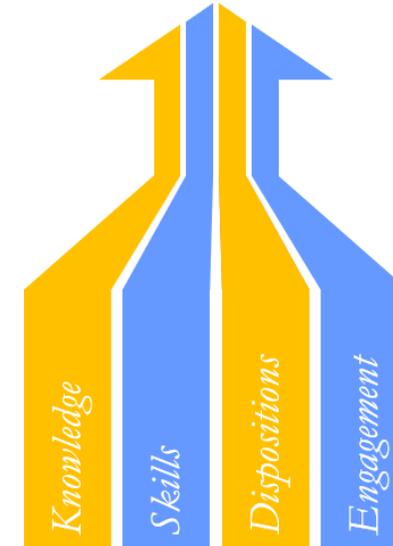
- ❖ **Practice Standards** follow inquiry arc from civic knowledge/skills/dispositions through informed action
- ❖ **Guiding Principles** include:
  - Inclusive, critical, culturally responsive instruction (GP 2)
  - HSS instruction from PreK-12 (GP 3)
  - Interdisciplinary learning (GP 5)
  - Critical thinking (GP 6)
  - Social-emotional skills (GP 10)



# Legislated Student-Led Projects that Emphasize: Inquiry, Systemic Impact, and Action

## Student-led Civics Projects Pedagogical Principles

- Student-led
- Project-based
- Real-world
- Rooted in understanding systems impact
- Goal-driven
- Inquiry-based
- Non-partisan
- Process-focused
- Action-based



## Civics Project Guidebook

Guidance to support implementation of Chapter 296 of the Acts of 2018,  
*An Act to promote and enhance civic engagement.*

October 2020

# Civic Education in MA: Preliminary Findings Show Promising Signs of Equitable Implementation

**Civics Trust Fund: Priorities Placed on Underserved Districts**

+

**HSS Framework Revision: Reflection of diversity, Stronger emphasis on Elementary grades**

Teacher familiarity with policies and competency in applying practice standards did not vary by demographic makeup of district's student population

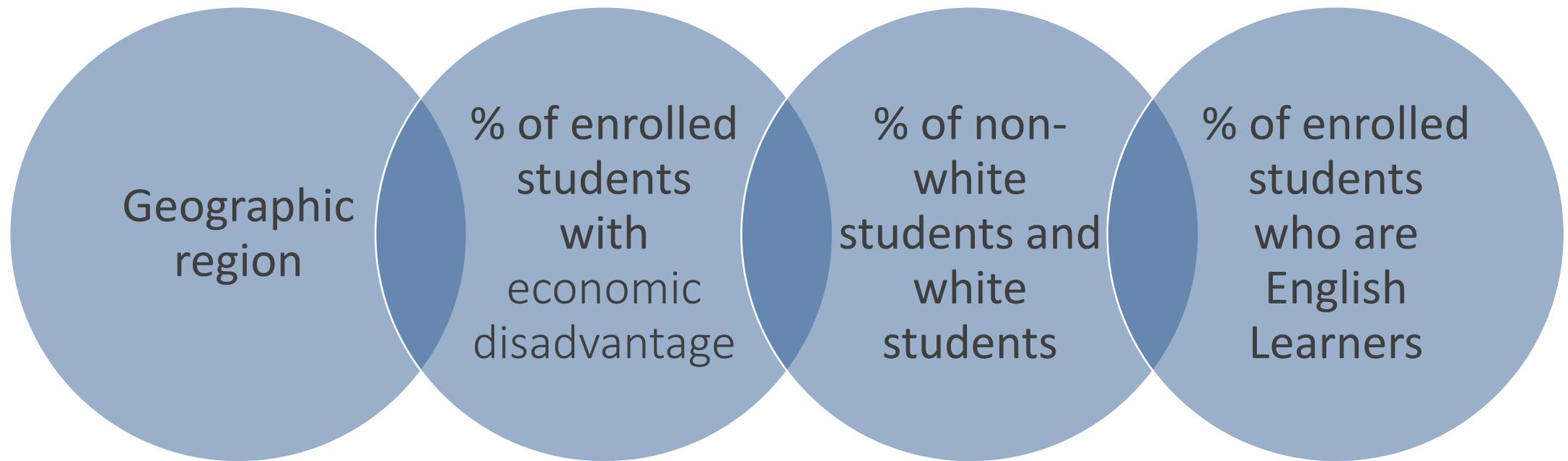
Implementation of practice standards and confidence much lower among elementary teachers

# Teachers are Aware of the Framework; Few Know How it Directly Applies to their Instruction

- ❖ **Educators value the type of Civics described in the HSS Framework**
  - Generally, educators at all grade levels, district and school administrators express strong belief in inquiry-based civics education
- ❖ **Only 2 in 5 teachers know *how* the HSS Framework affects their instruction**
  - Overall, 96% have at least heard of it.
  - And another 1 in 5 of teachers have "heard of it but don't know its details."
  - 28% of Elementary know how the HSS Framework could influence instruction vs 65% of MS and HS teachers
- ❖ **Only 1 in 5 *Middle School & High School* teachers know about the Civics Project legislation and how it affects their instruction**

# Equity-focused Funding Priority Pays Off: No Difference in Awareness by (District-Level) Demographics

CIRCLE's previous research shows there are disparities in civic learning opportunities but in this study there were **no significant differences in levels of awareness** of the HSS Framework and Civic Projects legislation when comparing groups of districts by:



# Secondary Teachers Reported More Awareness and Implementation than Elementary Teachers

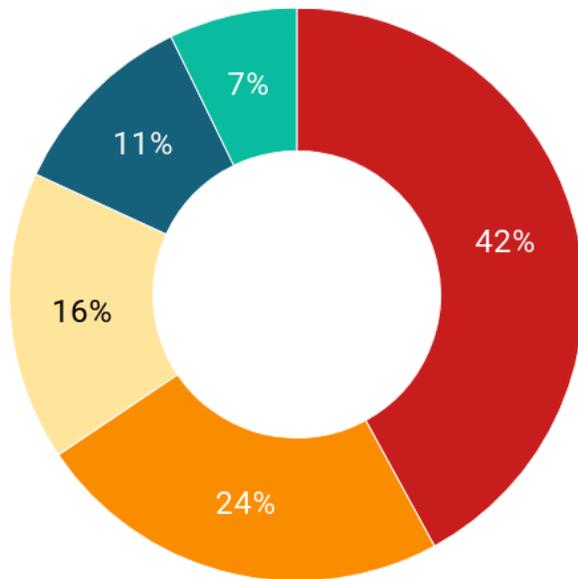
- ❖ **More clear understanding of the HSS Framework and its application in classroom among secondary teachers than elementary teachers**
- ❖ **Two-thirds of middle and high school teachers are teaching civics in a required course (stand-alone or integrated in another course)**
  - 28% of MS & HS teachers said they have implemented student-led civics projects
- ❖ **In elementary school, modeling and teaching about being "good citizens" may be happening, but there's less teaching about concepts and content related to civics such as the principles of the U.S. Constitution**
  - Only 8% Elementary teachers say they teach social studies 4+ hours a week;  
38% teach it 2-3 hours per week

## Educators Need Support and Preparation to Teach Civics in Today's Polarized Society...

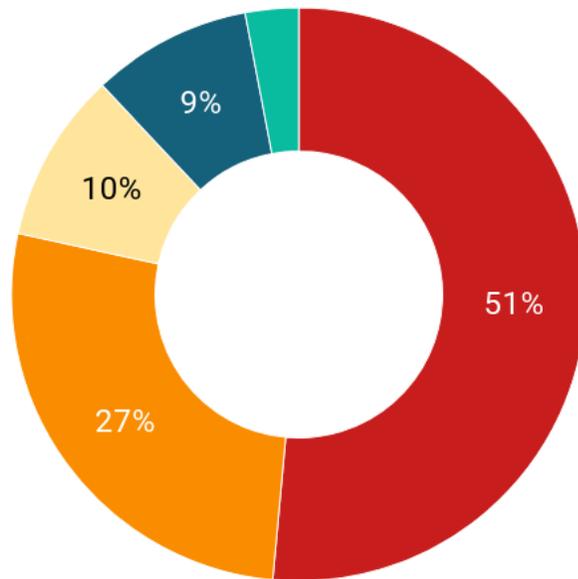
*“ [I’m] very, very cautious with [teaching] civil rights because of all the unrest in the country [at this time]. I was going to videotape all my lessons like I’d done earlier, but I was afraid that if I did that and I said even something remotely off the cuff it’s now out in the video world. So I scaled it back and did a bunch of worksheets and stuff that I had which was kind of lame. But I also didn’t want to offend anybody, or have my name in the paper for, 'Mr. X said this.' ”*

# However, 42% of Teachers have NEVER Received Civics-Focused PD

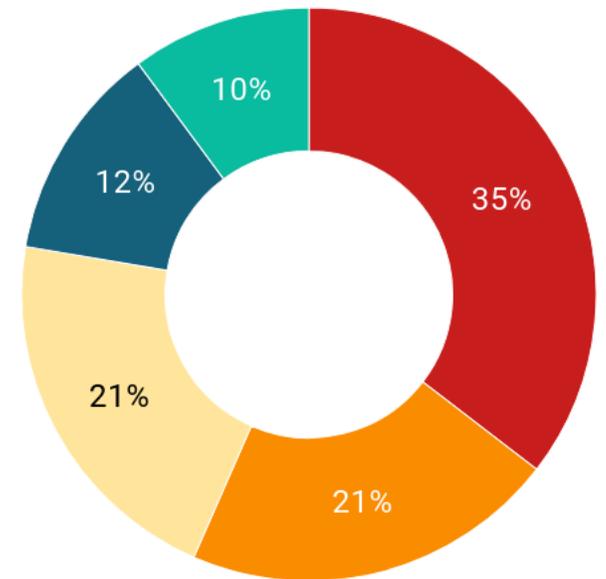
Never    Once every few years    Once a year    Frequently embedded throughout the school year    Once a semester



Overall

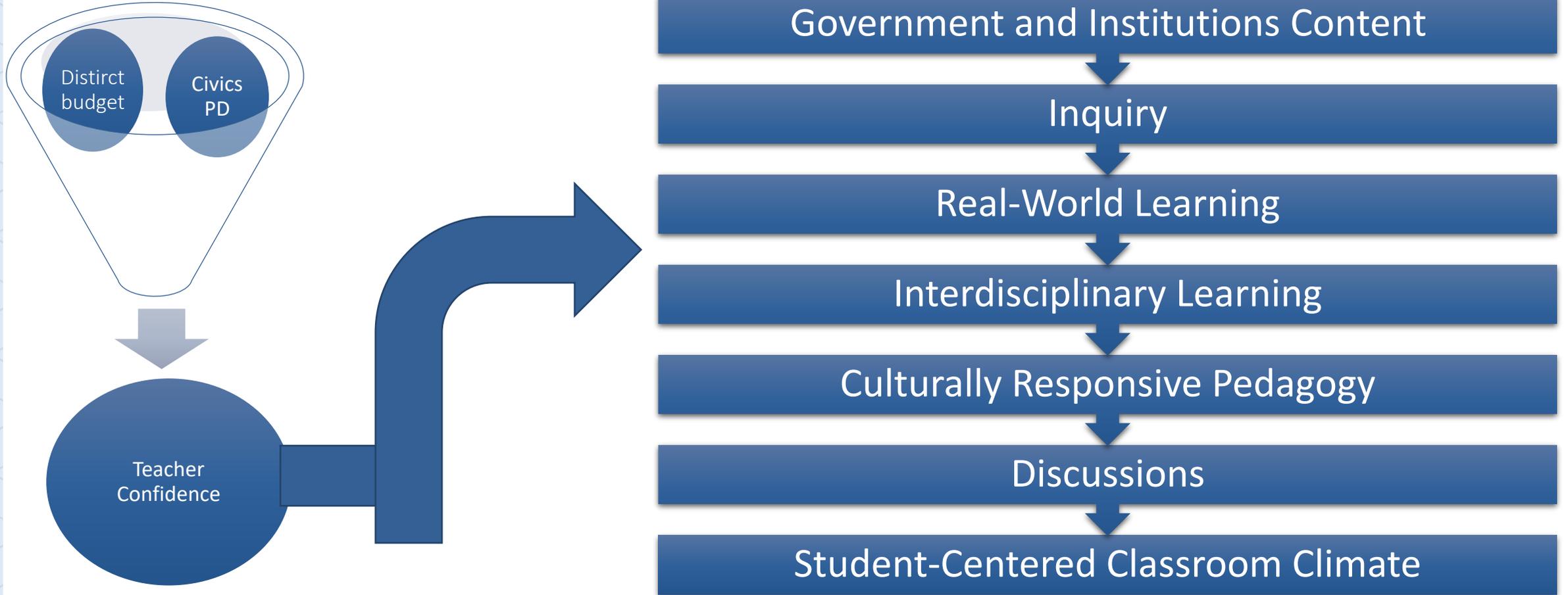


Elementary Teachers



Secondary Teachers

# Professional Development & Teacher Confidence Predict Civic Teaching Competency



# PD is Correlated with Different Domains of Civic Teaching Competency in Elementary vs. Secondary Teachers

## Elementary Teachers

- **PD is correlated with:**
  - Civil discourse/Discussion
  - Culturally Responsive teaching
- **PD was NOT correlated with:**
  - Core civics content
  - Inquiry + informed Action
  - Information literacy

## Middle and High School Teachers

- **PD was correlated with:**
  - Content
  - Inquiry
  - Student-centered
  - Interdisciplinary teaching
- **PD was NOT correlated with:**
  - Democratic Classroom climate + Controversial Issue Discussion
  - Culturally Responsive teaching

# Elementary Teachers Feel Less Supported and Prepared to integrate Civics than Secondary Teachers

Elementary-Grade Teachers Secondary-Grade Teachers

Too much pressure to incorporate other content\*\*



Don't have enough time\*\*



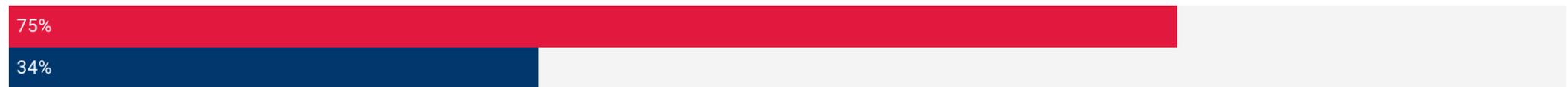
Don't have access to training to develop skills in this area\*\*



Don't have enough resources\*\*



Don't have enough information\*\*



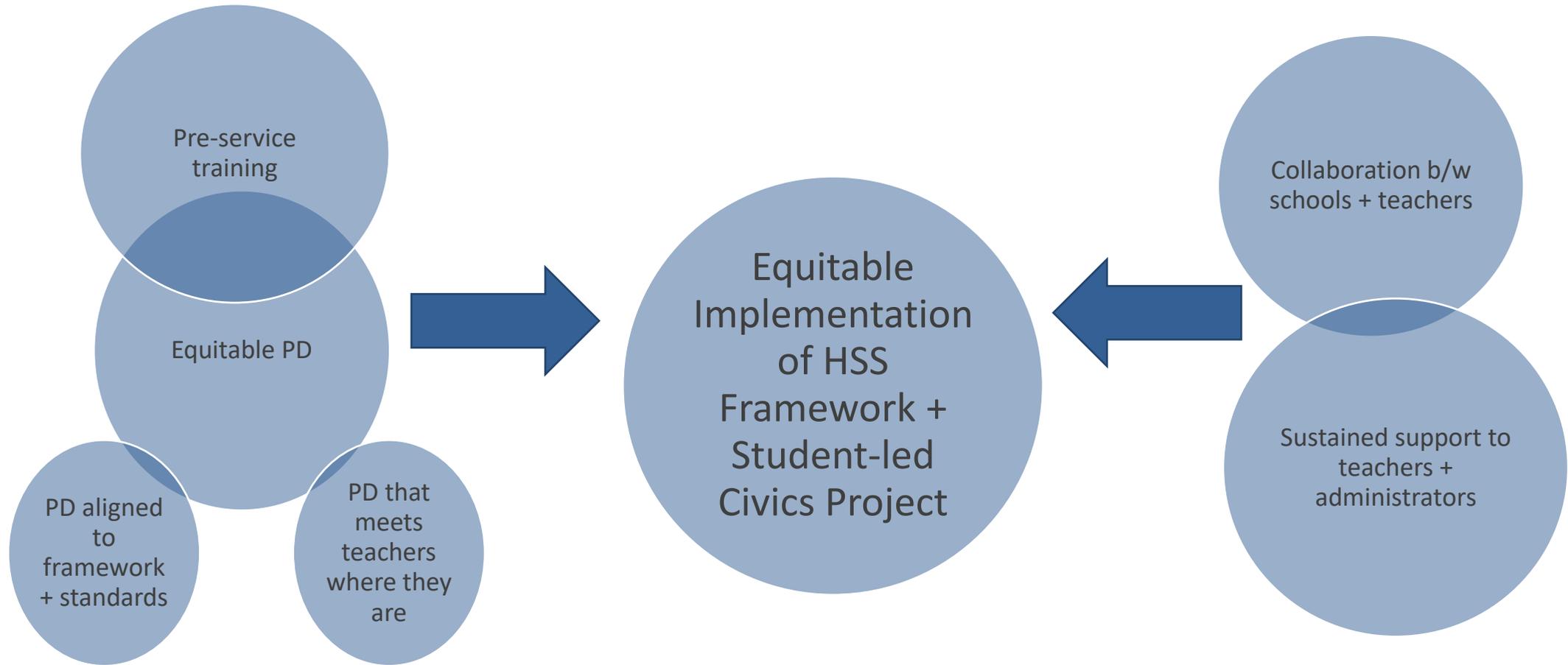
## Teachers have the Skills and Confidence to Support Student-Led Inquiry and Discussion, but Most Have to Self-initiate PD & Resources

“ There was a big discussion about the [Black Lives Matter] protests that are happening right now. A few students did a project on a timeline that’s the history of racism in the United States, when it started, all the events that had happened from 1600s to now.

There’s a big protest that happened in the community that I work in, so many of the students were involved in that and they were very interested in how [racism has] been going on for so long and still happening now.

They came away with [the idea] that history is continuing to repeat itself. It was fascinating. We talked a lot about what they could do going forward. How could they make sure that this doesn’t continue and what steps could they take? ”

# Recommendation: Continue to Prioritize Equitable Implementation & PD across Massachusetts



# Recommendation: Invest in Professional Development & Curricular Resources

## Professional Development

- 42% of all teachers have NEVER had Civics-focused PD
- “More equitable classroom, more equitable curriculum”
- **Interdisciplinary Teaching; Social-Emotional Learning; Culturally Relevant Pedagogy**

## Curricular & Instructional Resources

- The **critical role of PD providers**
- Developmentally appropriate, **especially for elementary and middle school**
- **Explicit connect to the HSS Framework & Civics Project Guidebook**

# Recommendation: Teachers Need More Support for Civic Projects through PD & Peers

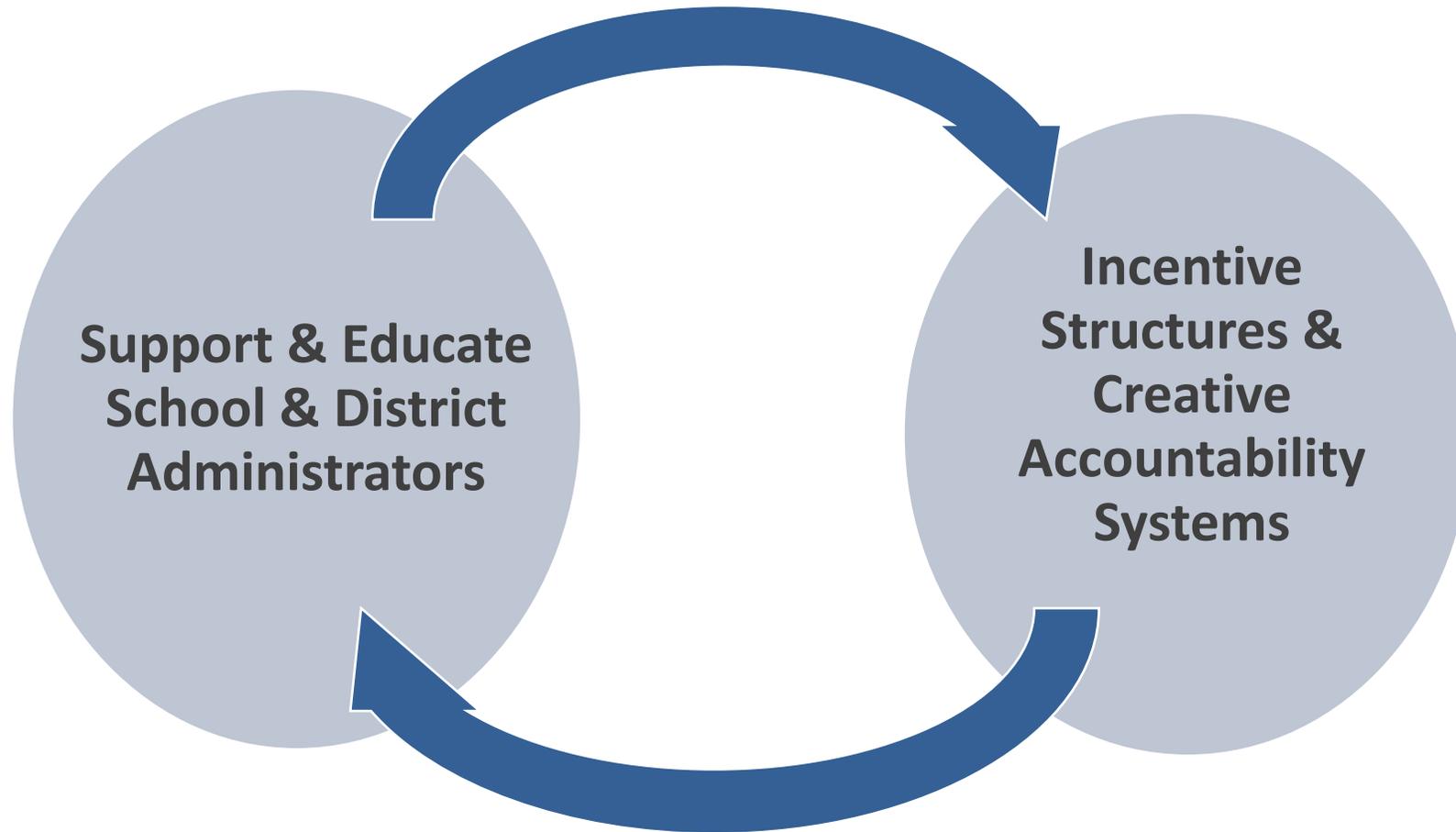
## Student-led Civic Project Support

- More training on how to implement projects
- Civic Project exemplars

## Support from Peers

- Learning and collaborating with fellow teachers is really important to teachers

# Recommendation: Educate MA Administrators & Provide Incentives



# Questions?



Thank You!

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