

Implementation Study of the California Teachers Collaborative for Holocaust and Genocide Education



**JUNE 2023 -
JULY 2024**

AT A GLANCE

This report describes experiences of teachers who were part of the California Teachers Collaborative for Holocaust and Genocide Education during the school year 2023-24, focusing on participation in professional development activities, experiences teaching using Collaborative partner-developed lessons and resources, and the opportunities and challenges that emerged.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The California Teachers Collaborative for Holocaust and Genocide Education has led a statewide initiative over the past two and a half years, uniting 14 partner organizations to provide high-quality Holocaust and genocide education for California middle and high schools. Between January 2023 and June 2024, the Collaborative trained 1,317 educators from public and private schools and universities while reaching over 2,000 educators in total through curriculum sharing and outreach. During the 2023-24 school year, a select group participated in an implementation study, which included intensive Summer and Winter Institutes and ongoing bi-monthly virtual meetings.

Drawing on focus group, interview, survey, and observational data, the study finds:

The Collaborative is a strong support for teachers.

Over 95% of participants at both Summer Institutes strongly agreed that the curricula, resources, and instructional strategies were relevant and applicable to their classrooms and schools. As one teacher put it:

“*It's never easy to teach about [the Holocaust and genocide], but being given opportunities to learn from various professors and educators made me feel more confident to incorporate different aspects of the Holocaust into my teaching.*”

The professional development for teachers is invaluable – and they use what they learn.

94% of teachers reported using materials from Collaborative members, often noting that they were drawing on what they learned in sessions. Teachers shared statements like:

“*I use the Native American Gold Rush genocide materials [from Redbud Resource Group] in US History. And then I also use the [Avenues for Change] Bosnia and Herzegovina [web]site in human geography. I basically took a lot of the [Avenues for Change] slide deck and put it into mine and it was super impactful.*”

Teachers are sharing what they learn in the Collaborative with non-Collaborative teachers.

73% of teachers indicated that they spoke with colleagues who did not participate in the Collaborative this school year when planning their lessons on Holocaust and genocide for the school year. One teacher stated:

“*I attended the Summer Institute with a colleague of mine, and she teaches eighth grade history, and I teach sixth grade. ... After she attended the Institute, we could collaborate and then we were able to connect with seventh grade teachers [who had not attended]. And so, all the grade levels were collaborating on this curriculum together.*”

Teachers would teach more about the Holocaust and genocide if they had more time to devote to the topics.

Repeatedly, across interviews and focus groups, teachers stated they wished they could do more. As one teacher noted:

“*Never enough time. ... I wish I had a full year to just focus on Holocaust studies in all aspects of curriculum from language arts, through history, through art and philosophy.*”

As the Collaborative begins its third year, the current study will continue offering feedback to guide the program's implementation and provide insights into its impact.

INTRODUCTION

The California Teachers Collaborative for Holocaust and Genocide Education (the Collaborative) is a statewide network of 14 leading organizations focused on Holocaust and genocide education (see Table 1 in the Appendix for the list of member organizations).

Established by the Jewish Family and Children's Services (JFCS) Holocaust Center and funded by the California Department of Education, the Marin County Office of Education, and the State of California, the Collaborative seeks to ensure that all secondary students in California engage in high-quality learning on topics of the Holocaust and genocide with well-trained teachers.

Through standards-aligned lesson plans, expert-led professional development sessions, and a wealth of educational resources, the Collaborative empowers educators in teaching the lessons of history and what happens when bias goes unchecked.

By 2029, the Collaborative aims to:

- **Train 8,500 California teachers through professional development workshops and institutes.**
- **Serve all California school districts with students in grades 6-12.**
- **Educate 1,062,500 California students.**

This report describes Collaborative teachers' experiences during the 2023-24 school year. While the Collaborative reached over 2,000 teachers, this study centers on a smaller group of teachers who were part of the study throughout the 2023-24 school year. Totalling about 80 teachers (those who attended the 2023 Summer Institute, the 2024 Winter Institute, and the semi-monthly virtual cohort meetings), they shared their experiences through surveys, focus groups, and interviews.

Across these data, teachers continually stated that the Collaborative was incredibly helpful to them in teaching students about the Holocaust and genocide. Teachers indicated that they valued the resources and training provided by Collaborative partners and shared them with colleagues who were not part of the Collaborative. They additionally indicated that students—who often came to their classes with little background knowledge of the Holocaust or genocide—found studying this content meaningful and important. Lastly, teachers described additional needs and challenges they encountered in teaching about the Holocaust and genocide.

KEY PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

June 2023 - July 2024

ACTIVITY	DESCRIPTION	PARTICIPATION
Summer Institute 2023	Teachers attended a three-and-a-half-day institute with 19 workshops offered by 13 partner organizations. Teachers received digital resources on Holocaust, antisemitism, and genocide education. Learning was extended through tours and survivor testimony at the USC Shoah Foundation, Holocaust Museum LA, and the Museum of Tolerance.	88
Teacher Implementation Plan	Teachers submitted an Implementation Plan highlighting their commitment and action steps to implement the new curriculum. (Note: the reported data reflects participation in the 2023 and 2024 Summer Institutes.)	172
Online Teacher Cohort Groups	During the 2023-2024 school year, Summer Institute teachers participated in five, 120-minute virtual meetings for continued professional learning, collaboration, and implementation support.	80
Winter Institute 2024	Teachers experienced the traveling exhibition of <i>Auschwitz. Not Long Ago. Not Far Away.</i> in conjunction with hands-on workshop sessions featuring standards-based classroom lessons and primary sources on Auschwitz and “The Final Solution.” Co-hosted by the JFCS Holocaust Center and the Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation and Institute.	71
Professional Development Sessions with Collaborative Partner Organizations	Teachers attended virtual and in-person professional development sessions offered by Collaborative partners, which featured curriculum resources. (Note: These data are for January 2023 through July 2024.)	1,075
Summer Institute 2024	Teachers attended a three-and-a-half-day institute featuring 21 workshops from 13 partner organizations. They received digital resources on Holocaust, antisemitism, and genocide education; attended an evening resource fair and expert teacher panel; participated in guided tours at the Museum of Tolerance; and heard testimonies from survivors of the Holocaust and the Rwandan and Cambodian genocides.	113

SOURCES OF EVIDENCE¹

DATA COLLECTION ACTIVITY	DESCRIPTION	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS/PARTICIPANTS
Getting Back in Touch Survey	This survey, fielded in August of 2023, asked teachers about their plans for teaching Holocaust and genocide education in the upcoming school year.	73 (83% response rate)
Implementation Survey	This comprehensive survey, fielded in the late winter and early spring of 2024, asked teachers for detailed information about planning for and teaching of Holocaust and genocide.	30 (34% response rate)
Focus Groups and Interviews	Four focus groups were conducted in spring of 2024 centered on learning about teachers' experiences planning and implementing Holocaust and genocide education. Interviews were also conducted with teachers who were unable to attend a focus group using the same protocol.	24 (27% participation rate)
Observations	Research staff observed the Winter Institute and a classroom at a middle school in the LA area in the early spring of 2024.	121

¹ Note that there were also hundreds of teachers involved in other Collaborative partner-led activities in 2023 and 2024. Additional data will be collected in the academic year 2024-25 to continue to understand the impact of the Collaborative on teacher practice in California.

WHAT TEACHERS DID DURING SCHOOL YEAR 2023-24

Nearly all the teachers who participated in the Collaborative during the 2023-24 school year taught about the Holocaust and genocide (see Graph 1). The teachers in the Collaborative represented public and private schools across the state, with about one-third at middle schools and about half at high schools; they primarily taught in either English/language arts or history/social sciences (see Graphs 2 through 4). Half of the teachers indicated they spent more time teaching about the Holocaust or genocide this year compared² to prior years, and a similar proportion of teachers stretched the content over five or more lessons (see Graphs 5 and 6).

Across both the survey and qualitative data, teachers shared that they drew upon resources from the Central Valley Holocaust Educators' Network, Echoes & Reflections, Facing History & Ourselves, JFCS Holocaust Center, Redbud Resource Group, USC Shoah Foundation, and Uyghur Genocide Online Resource Center.

A key theme that recurred was the need to adapt new curriculum, resources, and lessons to the students in their classrooms. Teachers indicated that they needed to skillfully select resources, curriculum, and lessons, as they found they had access to more than they could use.

A South Coast high school teacher noted during a focus group:

“

So, through my whole planning [process] I pick and choose. The first thing I do is [...] a survey to find out how much my students already know about the Holocaust and some of the concepts like genocide [...] and tolerance. And then, after that I pick out my resources—and the Summer Institute gave me some really nice resources that I use now—and after that I go do it.

² Note that at the 2024 Summer Institute, about 10% of teachers stated they teach ethnic studies, either as their only subject of instruction or as one of several courses they teach.

TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES WITH THE COLLABORATIVE AND TEACHING HOLOCAUST AND GENOCIDE EDUCATION

Teachers routinely discussed how participation in the Collaborative helped them teach. Three key ideas emerged across the data: 1) teachers found taking part in the Collaborative innately helpful, 2) teachers noted the particular benefit of the professional development opportunities provided by the Collaborative, and 3) teachers indicated that they collaborated with colleagues both inside and outside of the Collaborative.

THE COLLABORATIVE IS INNATELY BENEFICIAL

Teachers found great benefit in the existence of the Collaborative and its partner organizations. For example, teachers who participated in the survey wrote that the Collaborative made it easier to prepare to teach complex topics, such as in this example:

“

It's never easy to teach about [the Holocaust and genocide], but being given opportunities to learn from various professors and educators made me feel more confident to incorporate different aspects of the Holocaust into my teaching.

When asked (in the Implementation Survey) about the teaching resources they use, a teacher wrote:

“

I use the resources from the Collaborative all the time. There are so many! The primary sources, the Survivor testimonies from the Shoah Foundation, it's all so helpful.

Several teachers also expressed that participating in the Collaborative gave them greater confidence in teaching Holocaust and genocide education. During a focus group, an LA area middle school teacher related this in saying:

“

I can definitely say [the Summer Institute] was impactful [as I developed] a lot more confidence.

TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES CONT'D

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT EXPERIENCES WERE ESSENTIAL

Half of the teachers reported attending at least one professional development session with a Collaborative partner organization during the 2023-24 school year. Teachers most commonly mentioned the partner organizations Facing History & Ourselves, Museum of Tolerance, Holocaust Museum LA, Echoes & Reflections, and USC Shoah Foundation (see Graph 7).

A middle school teacher in the South Coast region shared during a focus group:

“

I've taken bits and pieces as we've gone along just to kind of fit them into the curriculum for U.S. history. ... We walk through how the UN defines genocide and the framework for that and when we got into slavery, and as we moved through slavery, and antebellum America, we really overlaid the UN definitions and applied them through a lens of slavery.

THE COLLABORATIVE FOSTERED COLLABORATION

Teachers also reflected on how they lived the “collaborative” aspect of taking part in the Collaborative. This was apparent to them in two ways. First, participating teachers met with other teachers—many of whom were not part of the Collaborative (see Graph 8). Second, teachers noted they valued having a space with colleagues who were focused on teaching similar content, where they could talk in greater depth and detail about successes and challenges related to teaching about the Holocaust and genocide.

A Bay Area middle school teacher commented during a focus group:

“

I attended the Summer Institute with a colleague of mine, and she teaches eighth grade history, and I teach sixth grade. ... After she attended the Institute, we could collaborate and then we were able to connect with seventh grade teachers [who had not attended]. And so, all the grade levels were collaborating on this curriculum together.

TEACHERS' REPORTING OF STUDENT EXPERIENCES

Although this study did not capture perspectives directly from students themselves, teachers relayed their interpretation of students' experiences in focus groups and interviews. Several themes emerged. First, teachers reported with great regularity that most students come to their classes with little knowledge of the Holocaust or genocide, regardless of grade level. A Bay Area high school teacher noted:

“

[My students] don't have any background for the Holocaust. ... So, I've used lots of the curriculum that we've gotten through the Collaborative just so they have these journeys over to the history [of the Holocaust] as they're reading the memoir [I've Lived a Thousand Years by Livia Bitton-Jackson].

But perhaps because students come to them with little prior knowledge (and sometimes with misconceptions, as one teacher asked students “How many Jewish people died during the Holocaust?” and the students thought maybe several hundred), teachers also talked about the transformation of students' knowledge. A Bay Area high school teacher reported during an interview:

“

I use the Native American Gold Rush genocide materials [from Redbud Resource Group] in US History. And then I also use the [Avenues for Change] Bosnia and Herzegovina [web]site in human geography. I basically took a lot of the [Avenues for Change] slide deck and put it into mine and it was super impactful. ... [The students] really enjoyed it, and they were amazed at how recent that history was.

At the same time, teachers also reported that students could get overwhelmed by the content, particularly those who had family ties to the Holocaust or other genocides. A Bay Area high school teacher shared their approach and underscored the emotional impact of the content on students:

“

I think just paring it down and trying to pick out what was the most important [in Holocaust and genocide education] because I felt like I could have [covered the] Cambodia[n genocide] and so many others. But like I said, when we were done with our unit, the kids were done. They literally said, 'We can't do any more genocide. We can't. We can't do this anymore.'

TEACHER CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS

Overall, across both the surveys and the qualitative data, teachers wished they had more time to teach about the Holocaust and genocide and would teach more on these topics if they could. As one teacher noted in an open-ended comment on the survey:

“

Never enough time. ... I wish I had a full year to just focus on Holocaust studies in all aspects of curriculum from language arts, through history, through art and philosophy.

At the same time, teachers expressed concerns about overwhelming students given, the gravity of the topics. A South Coast high school teacher related:

“

Even with twelfth graders, from talking to some of the other educators, they're still kind of concerned about giving them too much info because of the effect of the pandemic, ... [the pandemic] was something that they'd never seen happen in our world. ... We try to not [spend] too much time [on the Holocaust and genocide].

Other teachers cited resistance from school/district leadership or their communities as a challenge. During a focus group, one teacher in the South Coast region talked about how she has gotten pushback from school leadership and the community in general for teaching about the Holocaust and genocide. Another South Coast area high school teacher chimed in with an idea of how to support her in facing these challenges:

“

[It] should not be you [having to be] an island unto yourself trying to [fight to teach Holocaust and genocide education], you know? We have to be able to help you. ... I'm sure we can come up with talking points, [similar to us] hav[ing] media guides, right? We could have a curriculum guide that we could create. That would help. We all could use it ... [I could use it] even at my school.

CONTINUED SUPPORT NEEDS

Teachers talked about the types of supports they would benefit from in teaching Holocaust and genocide education, which varied from specific artifacts or resources, to professional development activities, to emotional and intellectual support and community. The survey and qualitative data largely describe similar themes, even if both sources of data have different examples of what a specific teacher would find most helpful.

When asked, teachers responded with a variety of requests for additional support and resources. Teachers offered suggestions of new resources, including:

- A bibliography of Holocaust and genocide resources
- Materials translated into Spanish
- Posters of the ten stages of genocide
- Resources in Google Classroom format
- Additional documentaries or videos
- Handouts and lesson guides/plans, particularly by grade level
- Additional information on specific genocides (e.g., Rwanda, Cambodia)
- Materials related to the Japanese internment in California during World War II

Other teachers noted the need for greater support around teaching about the Holocaust and genocide altogether. During a focus group, a South Coast high school teacher elaborated on the need for materials and resources to bring back to colleagues at her school:

“

I see that my school is a place where they have such a need for this type of professional development. ... I have tried to bring our teachers to ... professional development [sessions] at the Museum of Tolerance, even [...] webinars. And they are like, 'Oh, no, I don't get paid for that,' or things like that, you know. So something that I could bring [to them] myself [would be helpful].

Multiple teachers cited the need for help in digging through resources. The experience of feeling overwhelmed by well-meaning colleagues' suggestions came up repeatedly. A Central Coast high school teacher mentioned during a focus group:

“

I hear people say, 'Oh, you should have your students read' this book or that book, or the references that get thrown out, which are awesome, and I'm always scribbling them down to have some kind of a bibliography or recommended book list. [It w]ould be helpful when we're looking [to have] something [like a list] of things we can assign students.

TAKEAWAYS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Collaborative has improved teachers' experiences in planning and implementing Holocaust and genocide education across the state. This study suggests the following key takeaways:

- The Collaborative is a strong support for teachers.
- The professional development provided to teachers is invaluable.
- Teachers are sharing what they learn in the Collaborative with non-Collaborative teachers.
- Teachers make use of the lessons and resources they get from the Collaborative.
- Teachers would teach more about the Holocaust and genocide if they had more time to devote to the topics.

In addition, the data illuminate areas that could use further development or in which teachers could benefit from additional resources or supports:

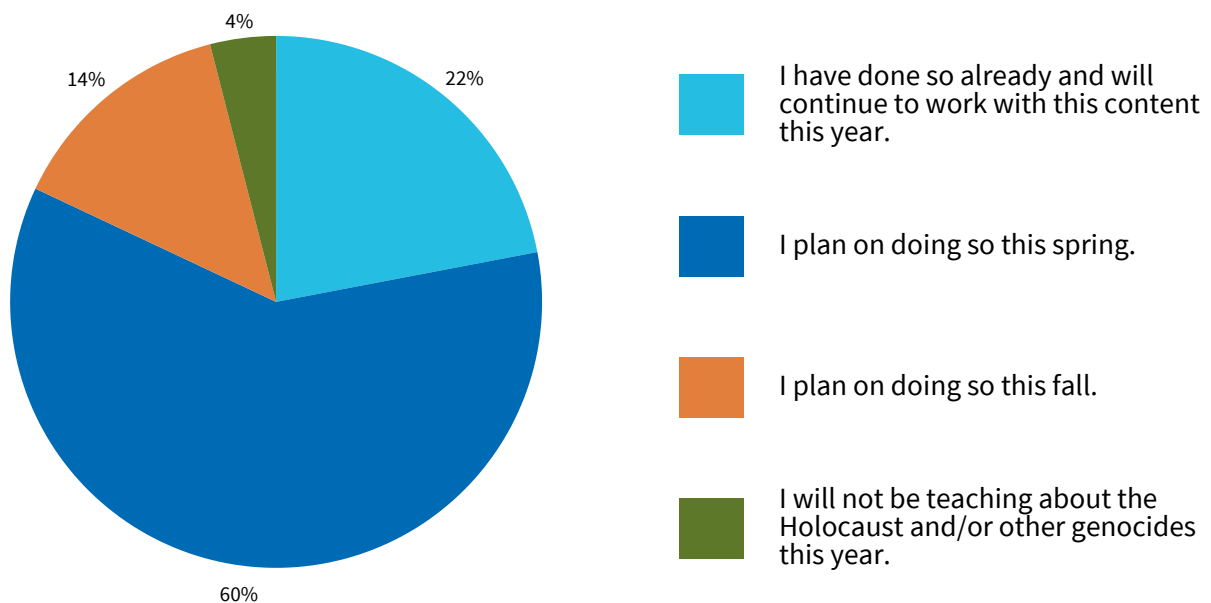
- Teachers expressed interest in receiving additional guidance on how to integrate/curate content, lessons, curricula, and resources.
- Teachers would benefit from additional support in how to respond to pushback from school/district leadership and/or the community regarding the teaching of the Holocaust and genocide.
- There is an opportunity to strategically integrate more social-emotional learning strategies and trauma-informed practices into curriculum resources on topics of the Holocaust and genocide to equip teachers with tools to support students emotionally during the units of instruction.

APPENDIX: GRAPHS AND TABLES

TABLE 1: ORGANIZATIONS PARTICIPATING IN THE COLLABORATIVE

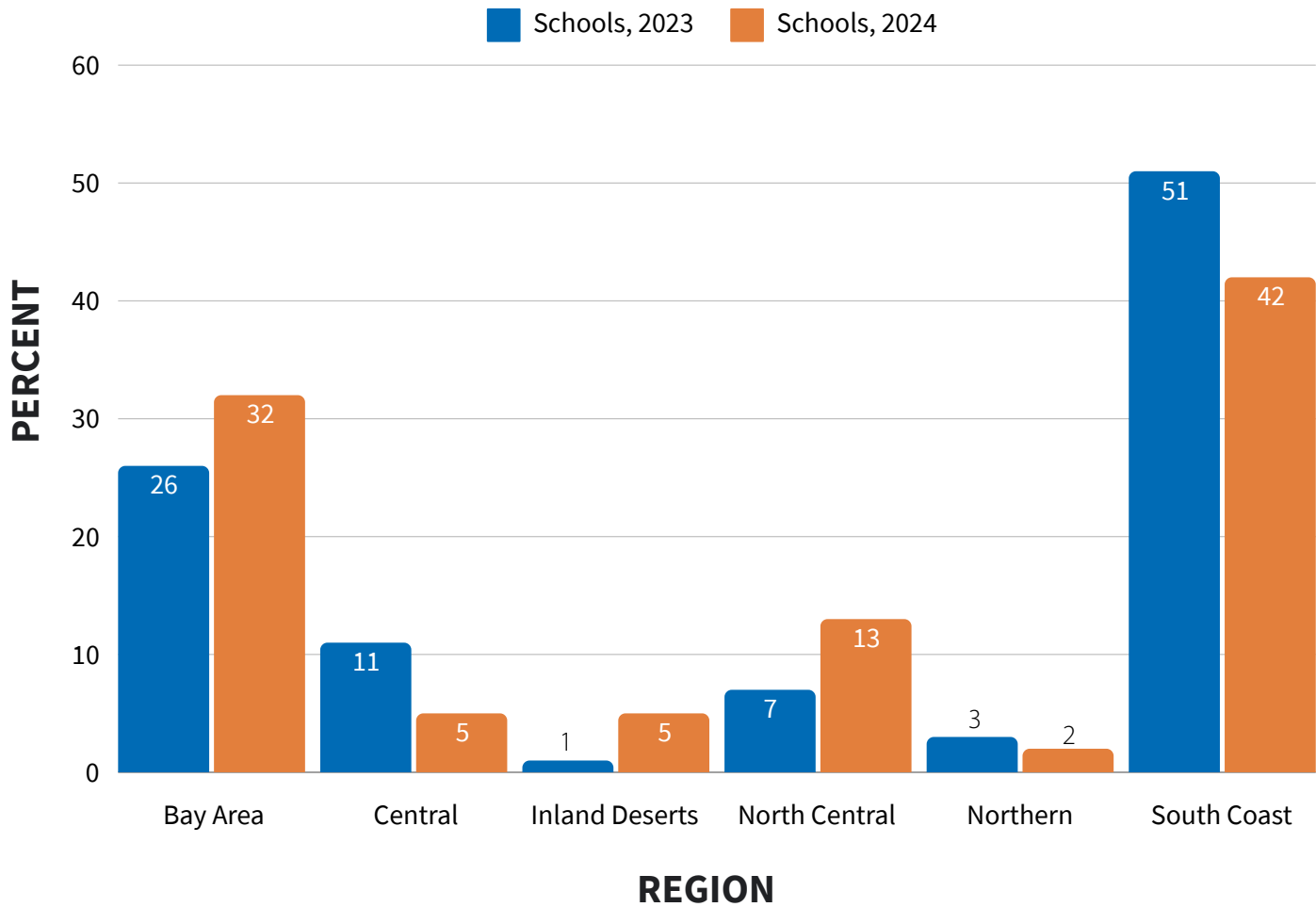
Avenues for Change: Holocaust and Genocide Education
Cambodian Genocide Resource Center
Central Valley Holocaust Educators' Network (CVHEN)
Echoes & Reflections
Facing History & Ourselves
Holocaust Museum LA
Jewish Family and Children's Services Holocaust Center
Jewish Partisan Educational Foundation
Museum of Tolerance
Redbud Resource Group: Indigenous History and Education
The Genocide Education Project: Armenian History and Education
TWIGE Project: Teaching about the Genocides in Rwanda and Guatemala
USC Shoah Foundation for Visual History and Education
Uyghur Genocide Online Resource Center

GRAPH 1: TEACHING HOLOCAUST AND GENOCIDE IN SCHOOL YEAR 2023-24



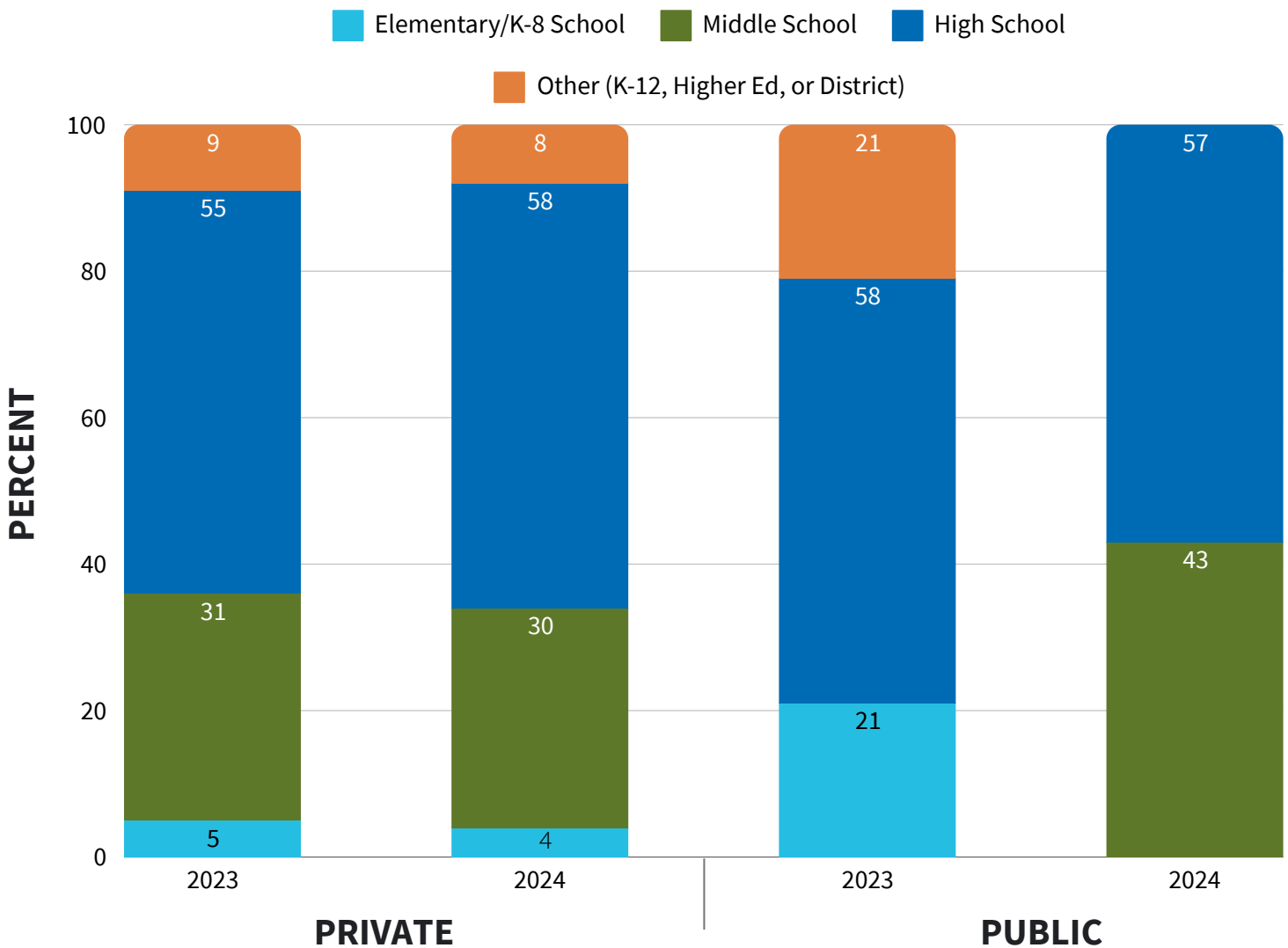
Getting Back in Touch Survey Data (N=73)

**GRAPH 2: PROPORTION OF SCHOOLS BY REGION
AT THE SUMMER INSTITUTES IN 2023 AND 2024**



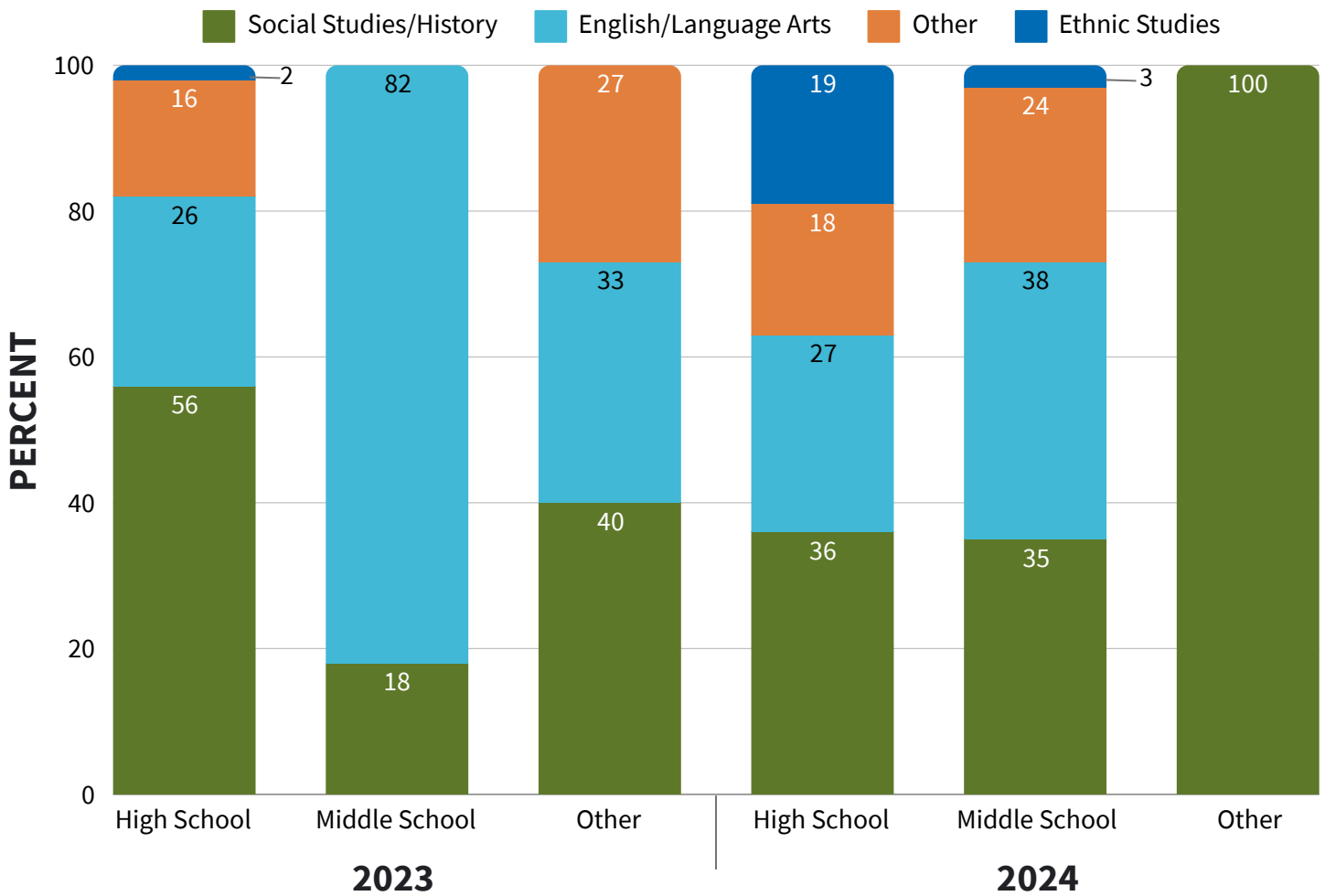
Summer Institute Participant Data, 2023 (N=88) and 2024 (N=113)

**GRAPH 3: SCHOOL LEVELS REPRESENTED BY TYPE OF
SCHOOLS AT THE SUMMER INSTITUTES IN 2023 AND 2024**



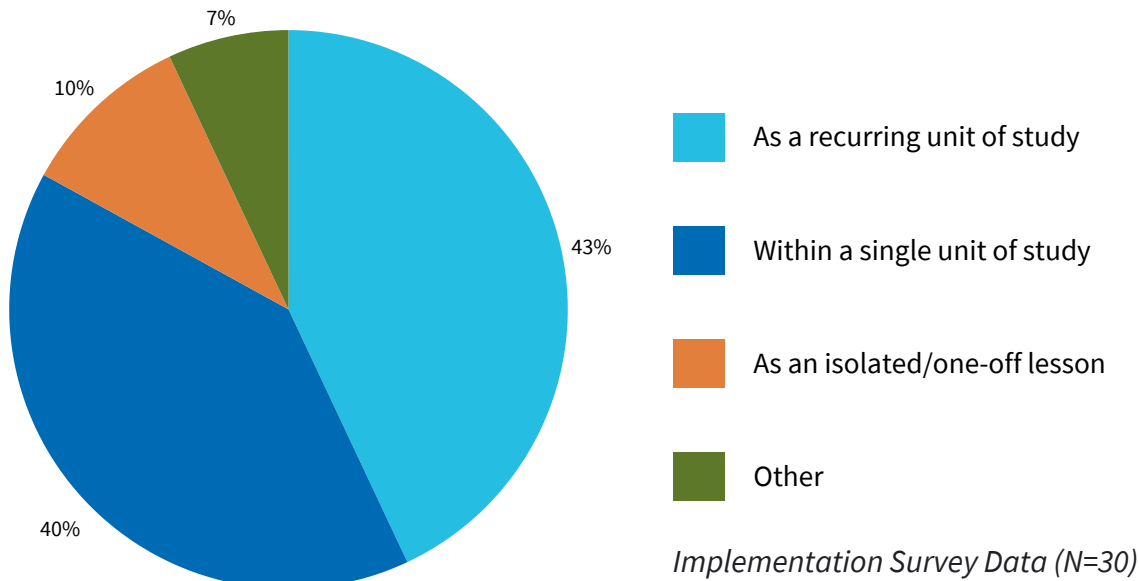
Summer Institute Participant Data, 2023 (N=88) and 2024 (N=113)

**GRAPH 4: SUBJECTS REPRESENTED BY GRADE LEVEL AT THE
SUMMER INSTITUTES IN 2023 AND 2024**

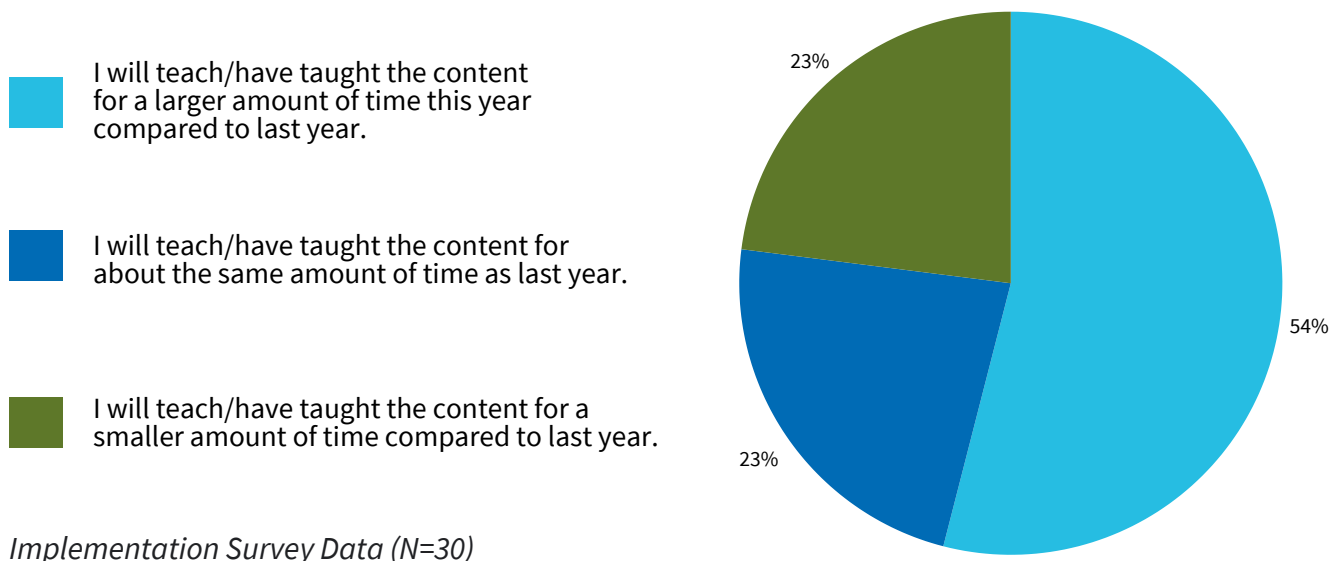


Summer Institute Participant Data, 2023 (N=88) and 2024 (N=113)

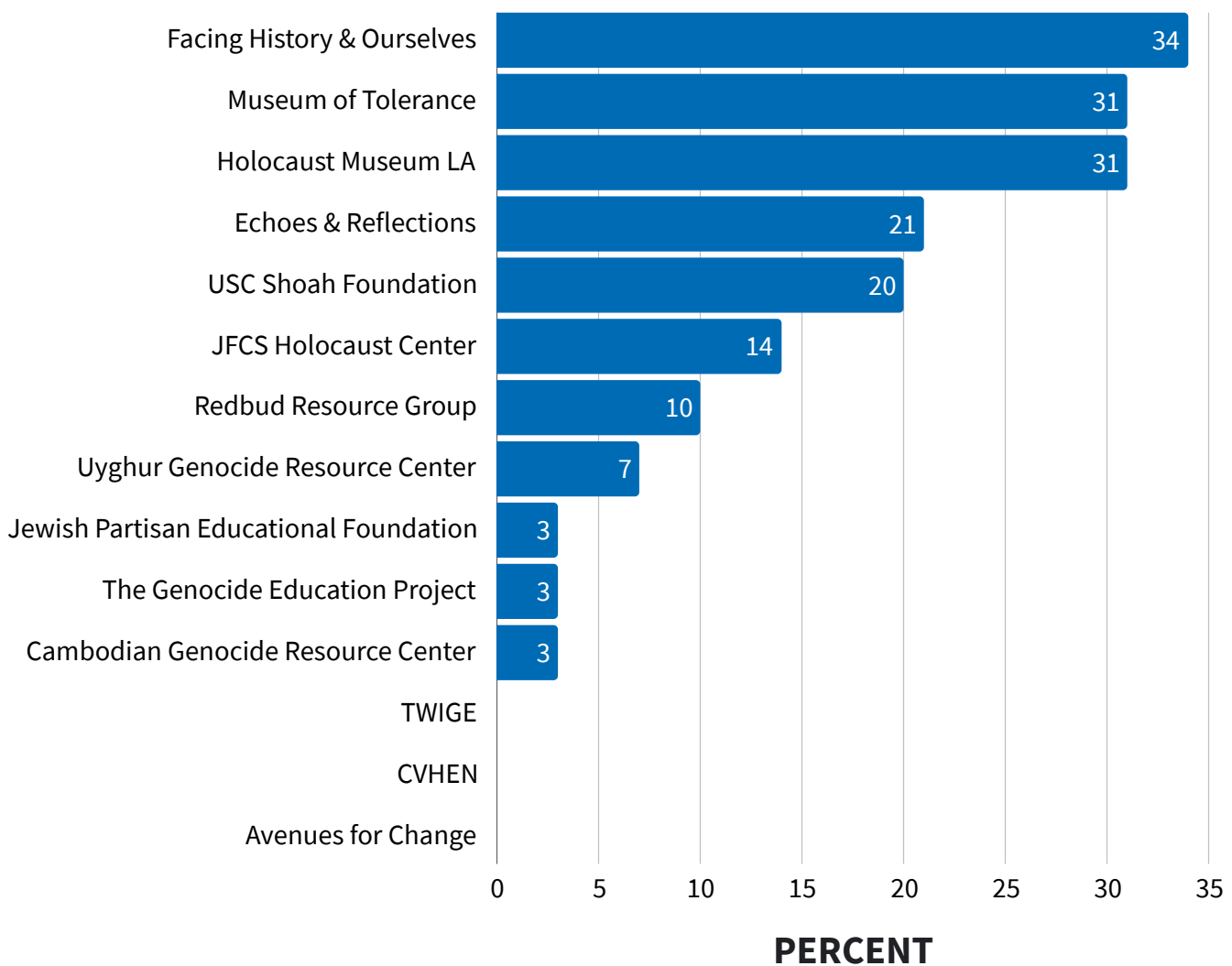
GRAPH 5: HOW TEACHERS ARE IMPLEMENTING HOLOCAUST AND GENOCIDE EDUCATION IN SCHOOL YEAR 2023-24



GRAPH 6: COMPARING TIME SPENT ON HOLOCAUST AND GENOCIDE EDUCATION IN SCHOOL YEAR 2023-24 COMPARED TO 2022-23



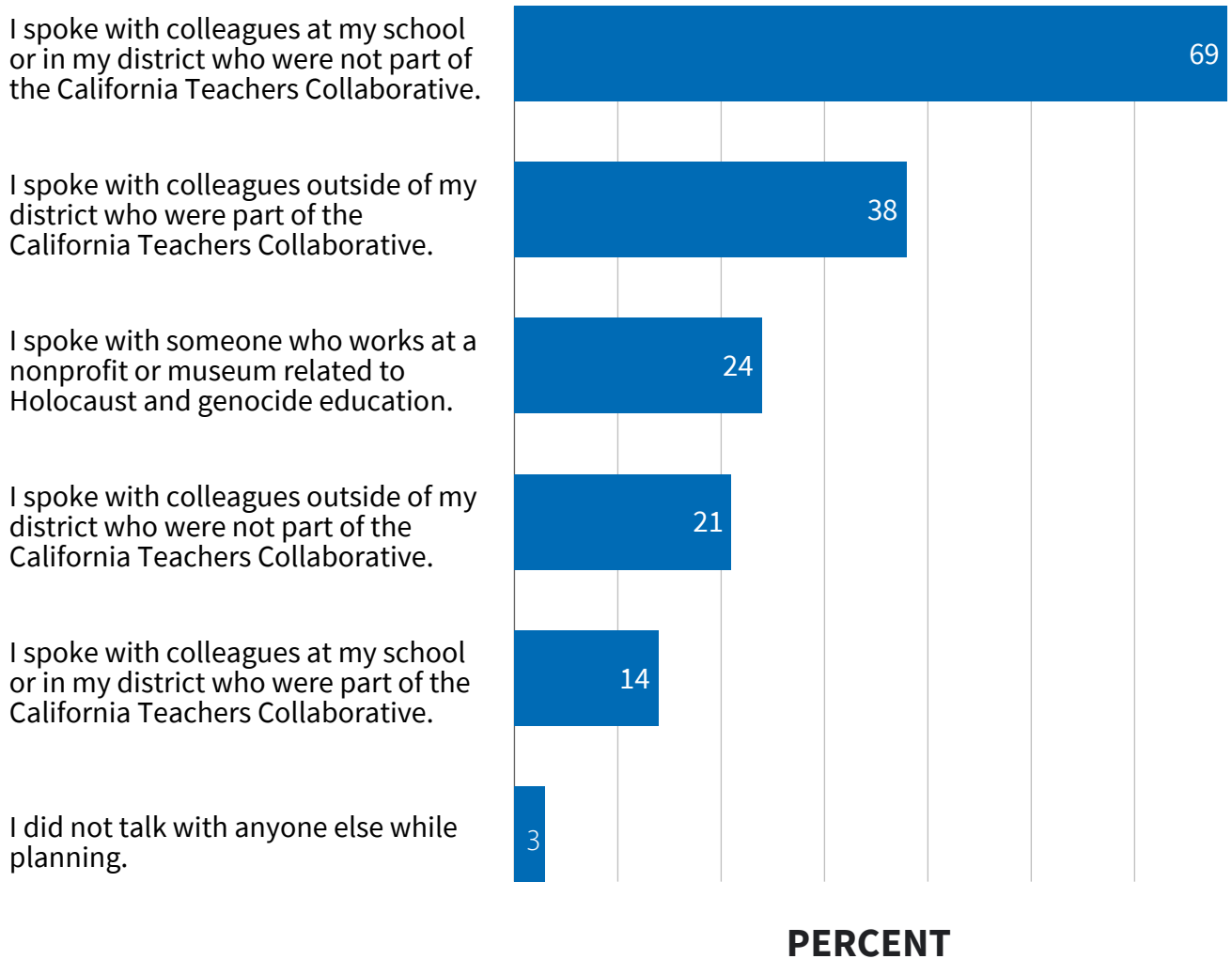
GRAPH 7: PROPORTION OF TEACHERS WHO PARTICIPATED IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES WITH COLLABORATIVE MEMBERS (*Outside of the Summer and Winter Institutes*)



Note that teachers could mark more than one.

Implementation Survey Data (N=30)

GRAPH 8: PROPORTION OF TEACHERS WHO TALKED WITH COLLEAGUES ABOUT PLANNING TO TEACH ABOUT THE HOLOCAUST AND GENOCIDE



Note that teachers could mark more than one.

Implementation Survey Data (N=30)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study was funded by the California Teachers Collaborative for Holocaust and Genocide Education, which was established by the JFCS Holocaust Center with support from the California Department of Education, the Marin County Office of Education, and the State of California. We thank the many teachers who shared their experiences participating in the Collaborative with the study team. We additionally are grateful for the contributions from Rebecca Hausammann, Morgan Blum Schneider, and Simone Miller.

SUGGESTED CITATION

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