

# Portfolio District Reform Meets School Turnaround:

**Early Implementation Findings from the  
Los Angeles Public School Choice Initiative**

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*Thinking Systemically: Improving Districts Under Pressure*  
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# Popular Policy Solutions to Low-Performing Schools

## Portfolio Management

- Intersection of market-based reform, standards-based reform & differentiation of schools
  - Competition
  - Accountability to standards
  - Greater autonomy
  - Diverse schooling options
- Diverse set of service providers operate schools
- Shift away from centralized bureaucracy
  - District as “strategic manager of change” & “performance optimizer”

(Bulkley, 2010; Lake & Hill, 2009)

## Turnaround Reform

- Designed to improve conditions in chronically underperforming schools by changing:
  - Staffing
  - Governance
  - Support
  - Instruction
- Expects improvement in very short period of time
- Ranges from the dramatic (e.g., school closure) to the modest (e.g., adding external PD provider)

(Herman et al., 2008; Jambulapati, 2011)

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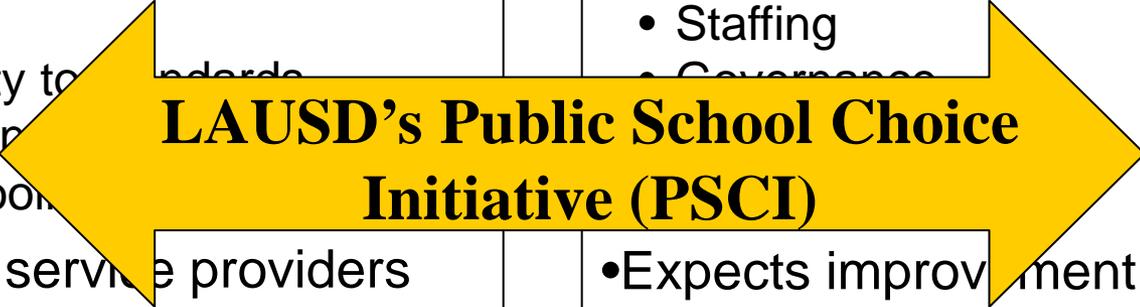
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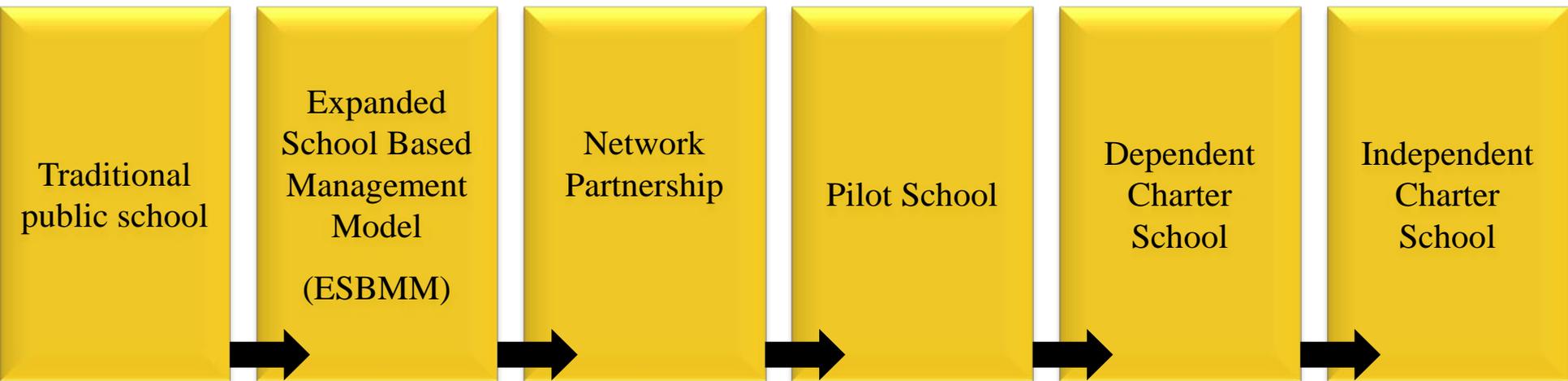
**LAUSD's Public School Choice Initiative (PSCI)**

# What Is PSCI?

- Resolution passed by LAUSD Board on August 2009
- Invites internal and external teams to compete to operate the district's lowest performing schools ("focus") & new campuses ("relief")
- Designed for gradual scale up until all schools districtwide are high performing
  - Initial target: 250 focus & 50 relief schools
  - Third cohort of schools participating this year
- Teams respond to detailed RFP: proposals range from 100-300 pages
  - Describe plans for managing the school
  - Receive support from LAUSD & LASDI (i3 grant)
  - Select from 6 governance models ...

# Governance models under PSCI

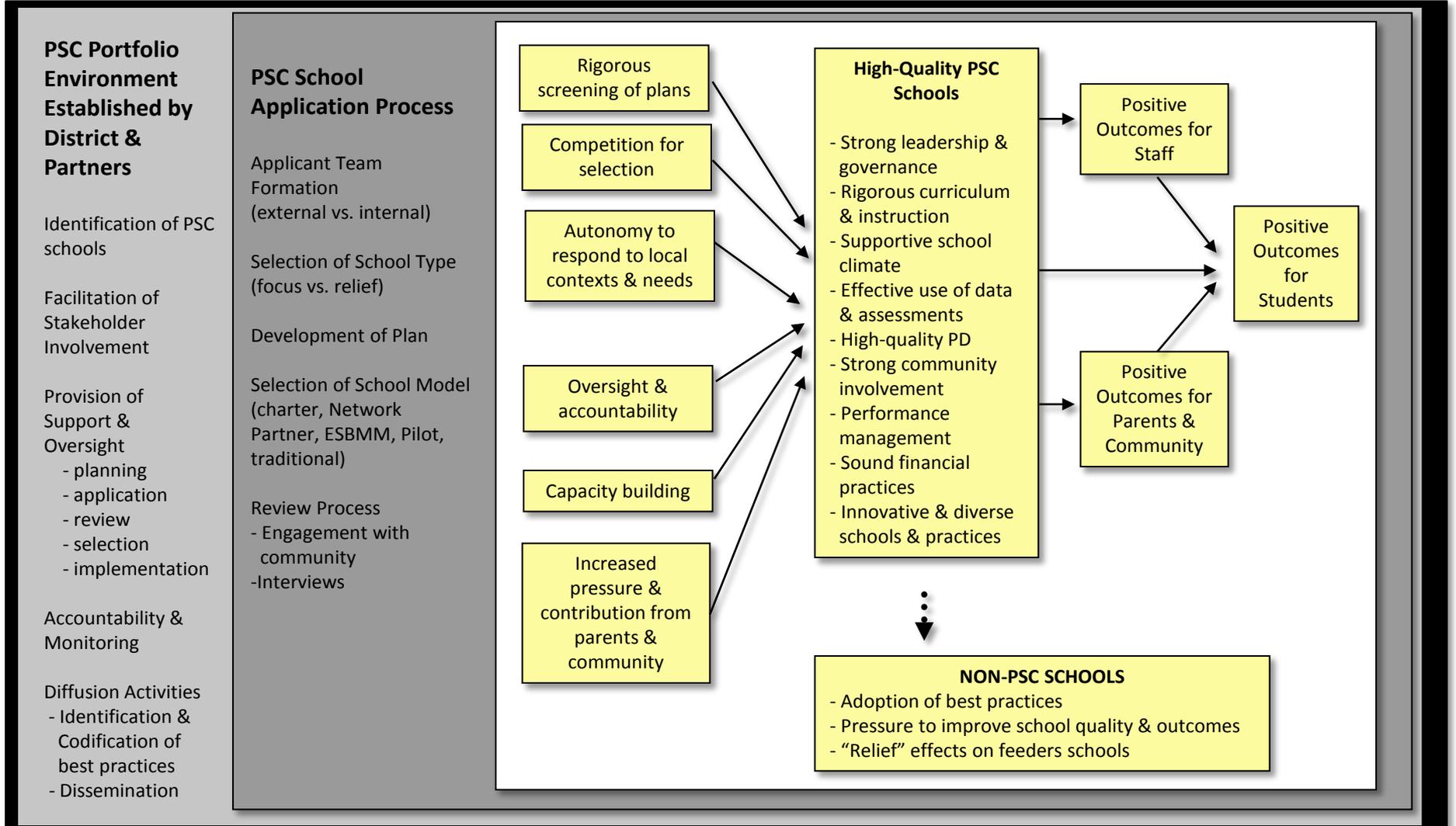
(Least to most autonomous)



# What Is PSCI?

- Plans go through multi-stage review:
  - Panel of internal/external experts rate each proposal
  - Teams present plans to parents/community, who voted in first 2 rounds
  - Superintendent's review panel makes recommendations to Superintendent
  - Superintendent makes recommendations to Board
  - 7-member Board makes final decision
- Teams selected open their school that fall
  - Start-up & implementation support provided by LAUSD & LASDI
  - Accountability process: goal-setting, evaluation visits

# PSCI: Theory of Change



**District, Community, School, Classroom Context**

Capacity; motivation; leadership; politics; other accountability policies & competing interventions; community, school, staff & student characteristics

# First cohorts of PSCI schools

	PSC 1.0	PSC 1.5	PSC 2.0	PSC 2.5	PSC 3.0
Number of sites (Relief/focus)	30 (18/12)	2 (2/0)	13 (10/3)	1 (0/1)	37 (15/22)
Number of schools (relief/focus)	36 (24/12)	2 (2/0)	27 (24/3)	1 (0/1)	45 (23/22)
<b>Selected Teams:</b>					
Traditional	15	2	3	0	
ESBMM	8	0	2	0	
Pilot	8	0	12	0	
Network Partner	3	0	1	0	
Affiliated Charter	0	0	0	0	
Independent Charter	5	0	7	0	
Unknown (restructure)	0	0	2	1	

## Research Questions

- How were the key mechanisms of change outlined in the district's vision of the PSCI reform enacted?
- What were the early successes and challenges?
- What can be learned from these early lessons to inform future turnaround efforts?

# Data Collection

<b>Leader Interviews</b>	9 district leaders 10 partner organization leaders
<b>2.0 Design Team Leader (DTL) Survey</b>	36 respondents out of 45 80% response rate*
<b>2.0 Case Studies</b>	3 focus and 2 relief
2.0 Design Team Leader Interviews	21 (5 schools)
2.0 Parent Focus Groups	10 groups, 30 parents total (5 schools)
2.0 Observations	27
<b>Non-Case Study Observations</b>	28

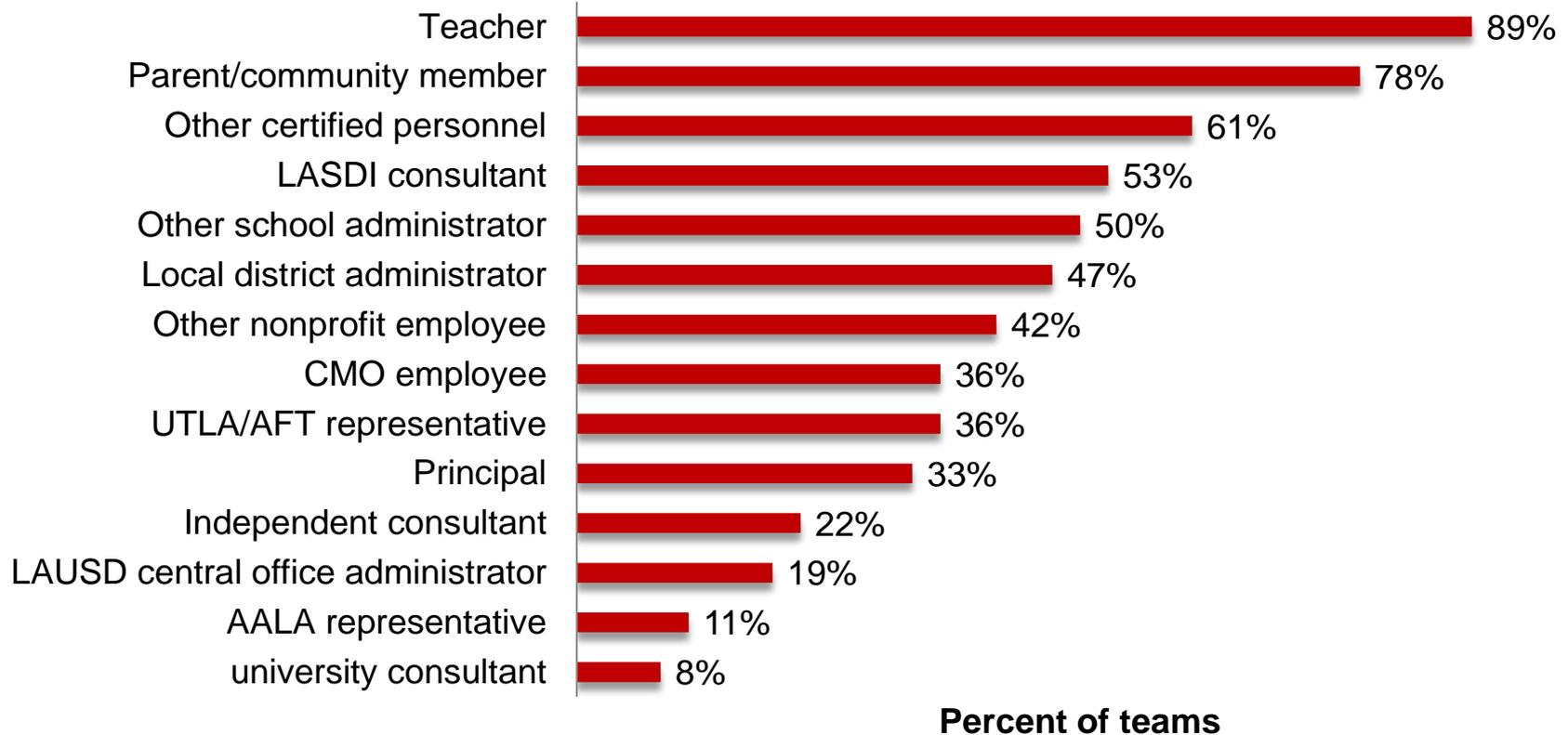
*\*non-respondents did not differ significantly from whole sample on observable characteristics*

# Main Findings

- Early Successes
  - Attracting a multitude of actors to participate in the design teams
  - Scaffolding the plan development process
  - Ensuring transparency
- Challenges
  - Establishing high levels of understanding & support
  - Maintaining neutrality & perceptions of a fair process
  - Attracting a sufficient number of applications
  - Ensuring competition does not detract from the focus on quality
  - Communicating with & engaging parents & community members

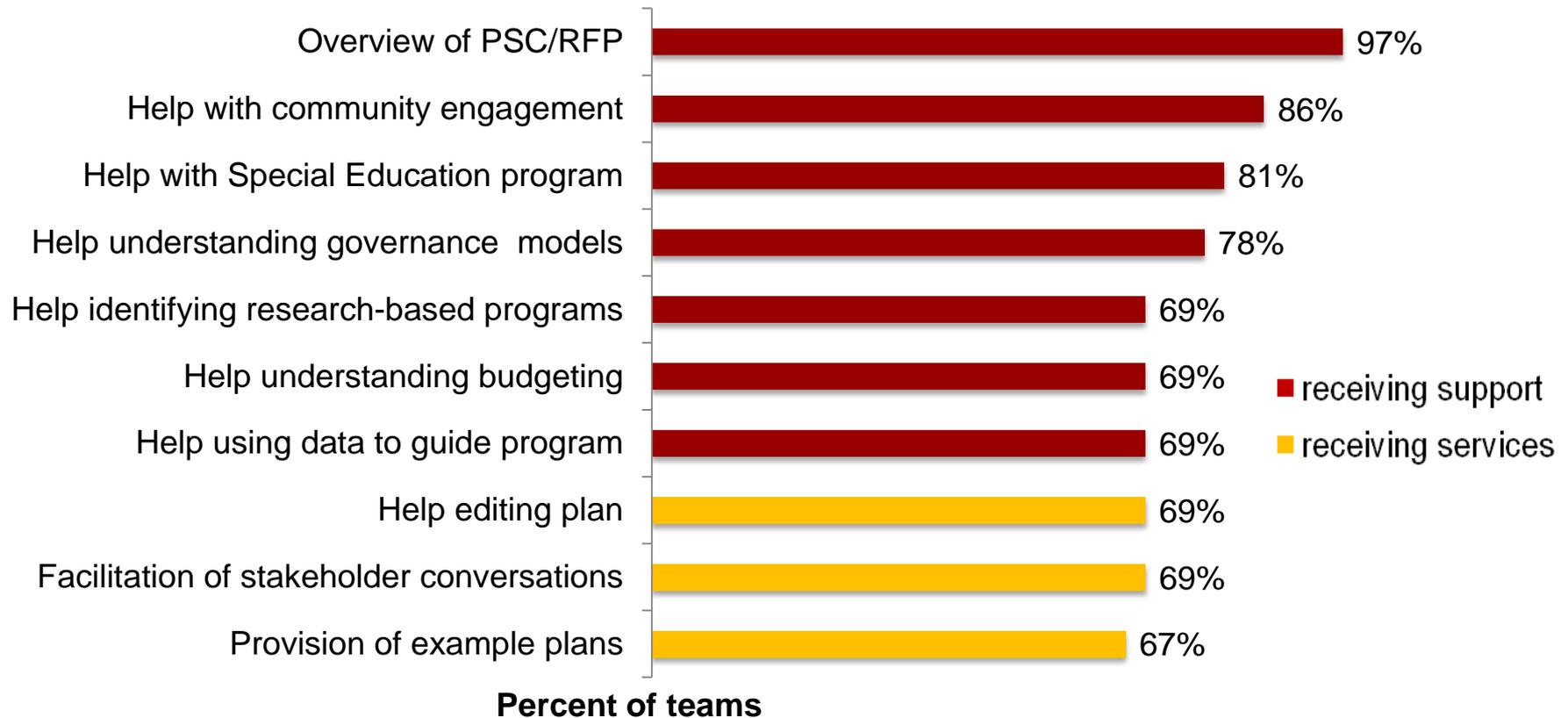
# A Multitude of Actors Were Involved in Design Teams

*Were the following individuals involved in writing your team's plan?*



# LAUSD and Partners Provided Strong Scaffolding for Plan Development

*Did you and/or your team receive of the following support or services?*



# LAUSD & Partners Ensured that Process Was Transparent

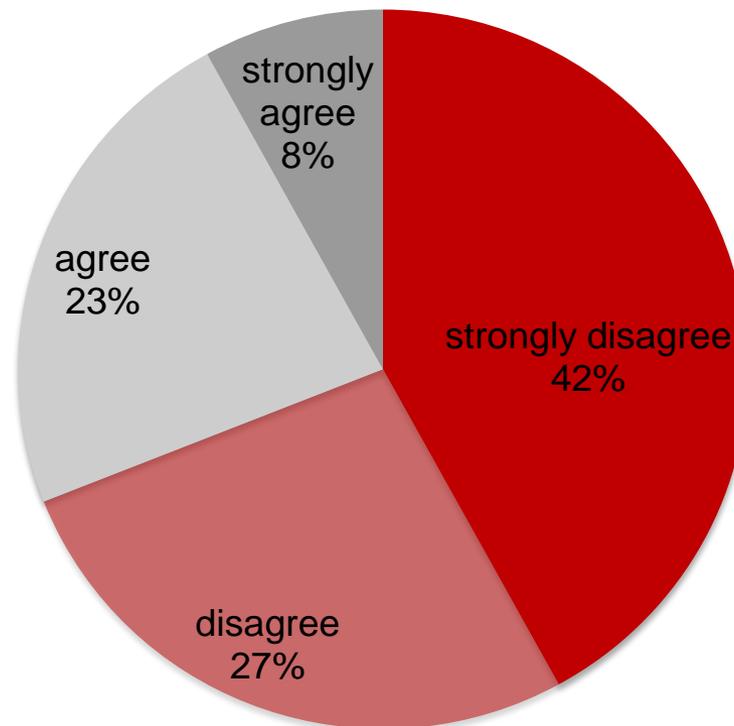
- All proposals & materials made available on PSC website
- Decisions quickly made public via website & email
- Transparency may have led to “disorientation” for some
- Publicly posted decisions frequently changed mid-course in response to stakeholder input

# Cases Varied in Their Level of Understanding & Support for TOC

- Cases & survey data indicated weak understanding of several core elements including:
  - Autonomies, governance models, waivers, accountability
- Inconsistent messaging from stakeholders & confusion due to transparency
- Mixed levels of support conveyed for PSC goals & mixed reasons for applying
  - Some endorse approach & mechanisms
  - Others saw the initiative as divisive
  - Cases confirm that *preservation* was a more salient driving force than *innovation*

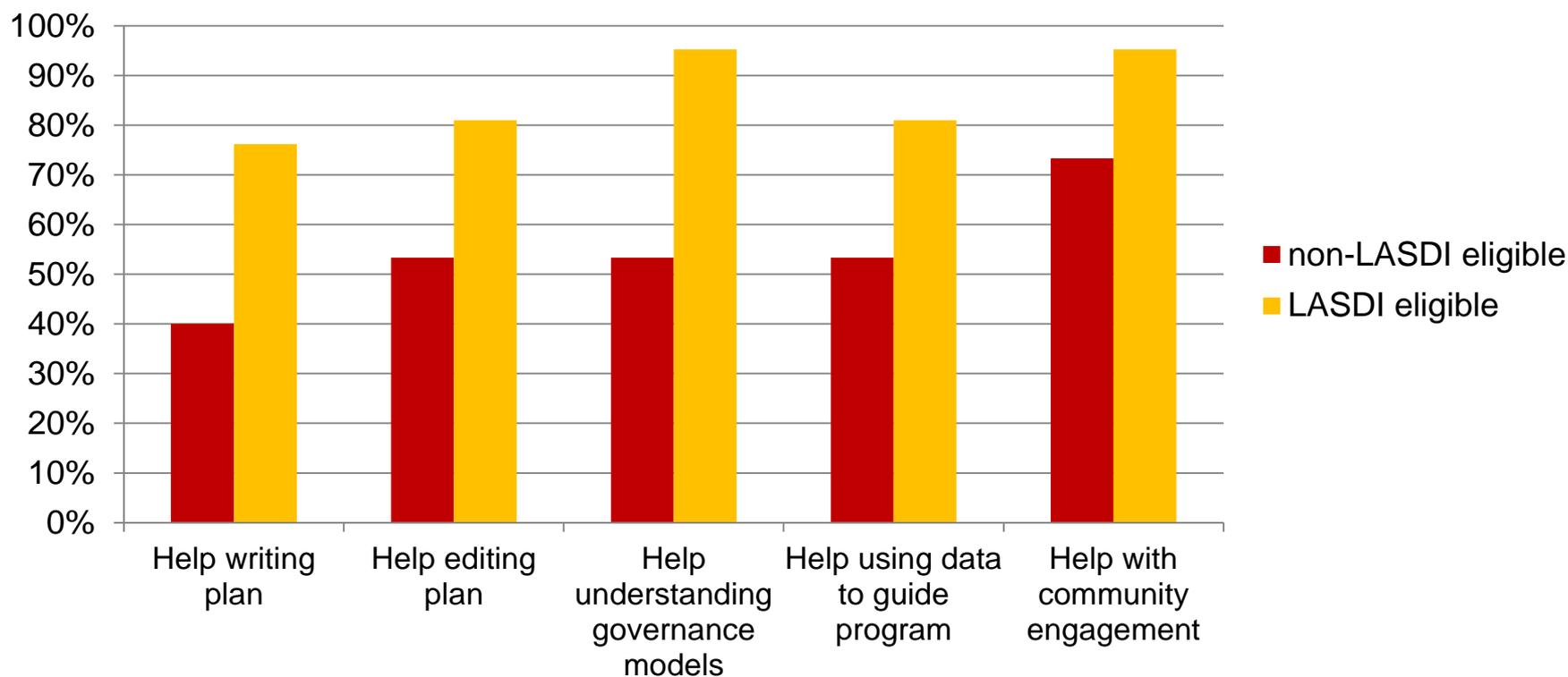
# PSC Process Was Widely Perceived To Be Unfair & Marred by Politics

*To what extent do you agree with the following statement?  
I believe that the PSC review & selection process is fair to all applicants.*



# Inequitable Delivery of Support Contributed to Perceptions of Unfair Process

*Did you and/or your team receive any of the following support, assistance, or services?*



Percent of teams reported received support

# Supply of Applicant Teams Decreased from PSC 1.0 to PSC 2.0

	PSC 1.0*	PSC 2.0*
Number of <u>schools</u> involved	38	28
Average number of LOIs submitted per <u>school</u>	6.0	5.0
Average number of proposals submitted per <u>school</u>	2.6	1.8
Number of school <u>sites</u> involved	32	14
Average number of LOIs submitted per <u>site</u>	7.1	10.1
Average number of proposals submitted per <u>site</u>	3.1	3.6
Total number of LOIs submitted	227	141
Total number of proposals submitted	100	51

*\*PSC 1.0 includes 1.0 & 1.5 schools, PSC 2.0 includes 2.0 & 2.5 schools*

# Competition Seen As Detracting from Focus on Plan Quality

- Multiple case study respondents said competition took valuable time away from designing school & writing plan
- More than  $\frac{3}{4}$  of teams reported:
  - Contacting Board members, local districts, teachers, community members to encourage support
  - Mobilizing parents to vote
- Reports of electioneering also illustrate negative consequences of competition
- Competition blamed for intentional proliferation of misinformation

# Parents and Community Indicated Limited Understanding and Engagement

- Low turnout at meetings and advisory vote
- Focus groups indicate particular misunderstandings of
  - PSCI goals and process
  - Advisory Vote
  - Governance models
- Parent engagement and understanding constrained by
  - Language and literacy issues
  - Mixed quality of information
  - Structural and technical factors

# Conclusions & Implications

- LAUSD adapting reform to address challenges
  - Changes to support, parent engagement, inclusion criteria, selection process, applicant types
- Implications for policy & practice
  - Reform takes time: expecting fast results may be unrealistic
    - Multitude of new policies & processes needed for portfolio management
    - Changing local context requires adaptation over time
  - Capacity questions: are there enough teams willing & able to take on the turnaround challenge?
  - Customizing school improvement plans to a community is a challenging undertaking
  - Stakeholder support & buy-in is essential
  - More research is needed

