

Communities Divided: How to Navigate Polarizing Debates

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#MASCMASS23

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The image shows two overlapping news article screenshots. The top-left screenshot is from WWLP.com, featuring the headline "Mask debate heats up ahead of school reopenings" and a photo of a pedestrian crossing sign. The bottom-right screenshot is from CNN, featuring the headline "Turmoil erupts in school district after claims that critical race theory and transgender policy are being pushed" and a photo of a group of people protesting with signs that say "We the Parents Stand Up!".

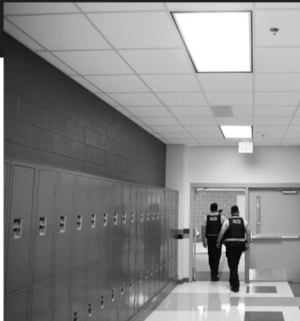
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NEWS SOUTH LAKE PODCAST U.S. NEWS WATCH NOW

U.S. NEWS

Why many districts are struggling over whether to keep officers in schools

Policing in schools is being debated across the country in a... the disparate treatment of minority students.




OPINION

Why does Dartmouth High School still have a Native American mascot?

Is using an Indigenous American logo valid representation or blatant appropriation? Naturally, the answer lies in the eye of the beholder. But it matters who the beholder is.

By *Marcela Garcia* Globe Columnist. Updated March 21, 2022, 3:31 p.m.



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The New York Times

America's School Board Meetings Are Getting Weird — and Scary

Sept. 6, 2021



Chalkbeat



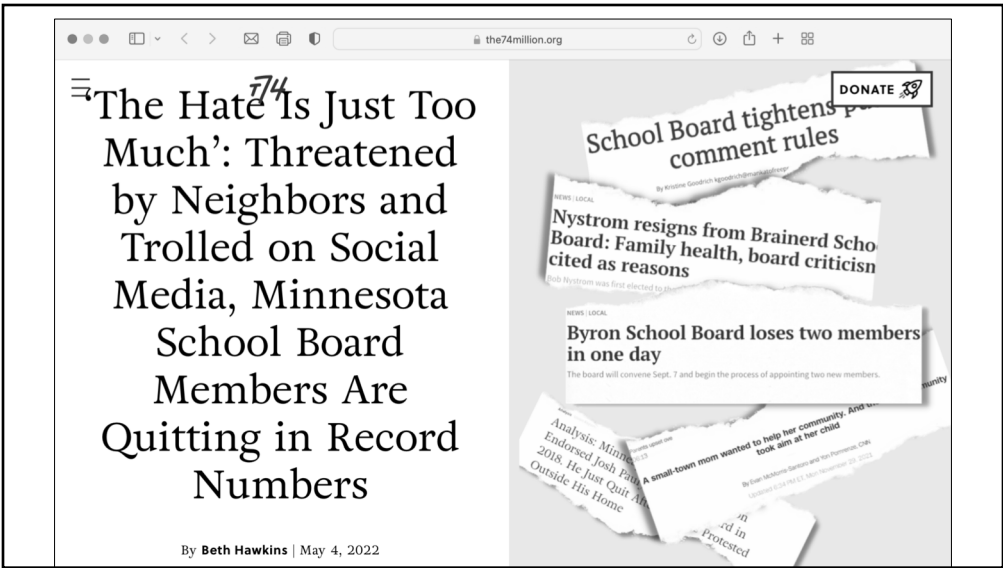
Aaron Ontiveroz / The Denver Post

FIRST PERSON

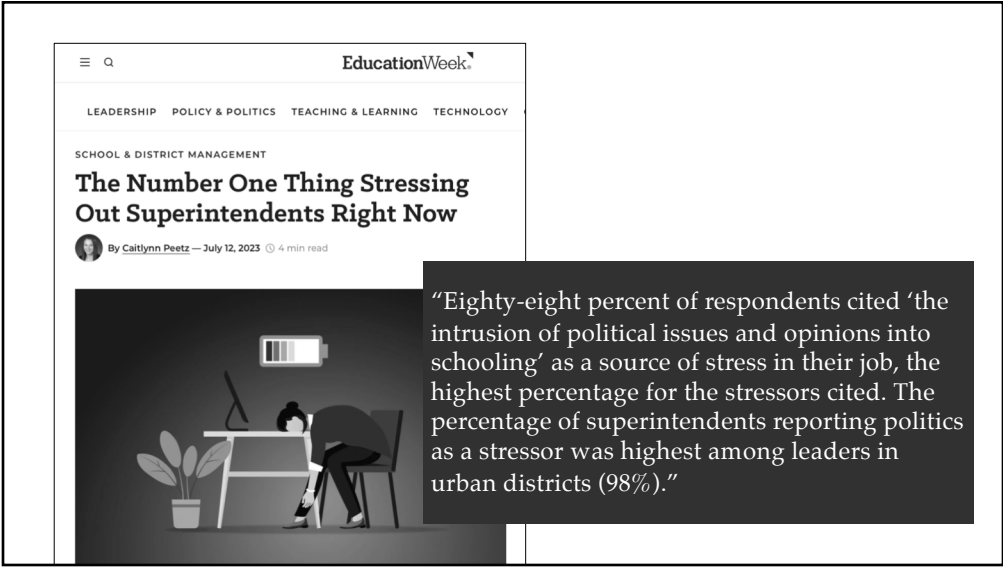
I voted for masks in school. I worried for my safety after.

My story isn't unique. What will this mean for future school boards?

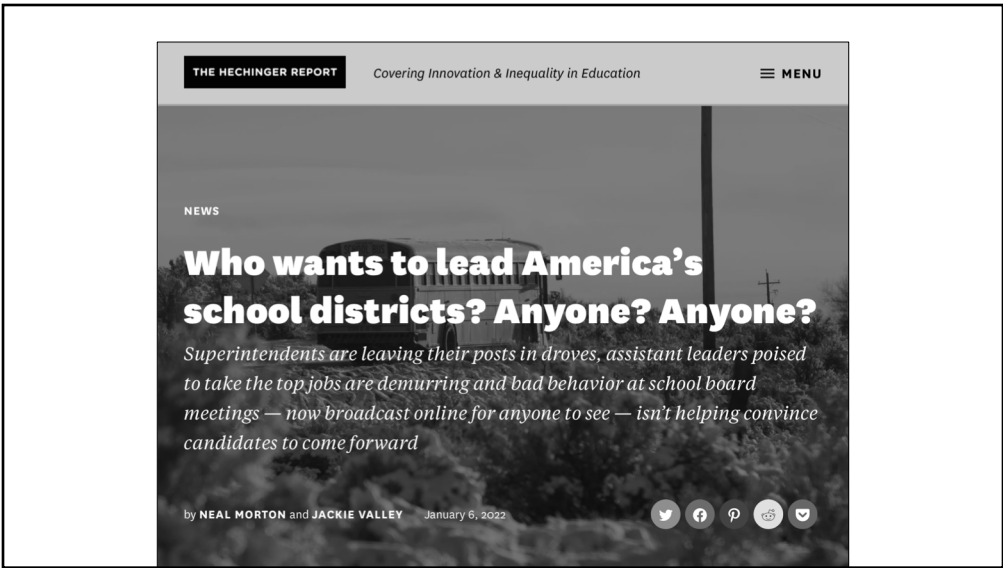
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AP NEWS

The Facebook Papers Trending News Coronavirus pandemic Prop gun shooting MLB

Tea party 2.0? Conservatives get organized in school battles

By THOMAS BEAUMONT and STEPHEN GROVES September 1, 2021


Click to copy



OPINION

Meet the PAC that's taking school boards across America from the PC left

By Deryn Murdock March 4, 2022 | 5:53pm | Updated



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NATIONAL REVIEW


Virginia School District Considers Bringing Back Confederate School Names after 2020 Changes

Brittany Bernstein
May 19, 2022 · 2 min read

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A Virginia school board is discussing whether to restore the names of two schools

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The image shows a screenshot of an NPR article. The article title is "Why education was a top voter priority this election" by Anya Kamenetz, dated November 4, 2021. Overlaid on the article is a document titled "Executive Order NUMBER ONE (2022) ENDING THE USE OF INHERENTLY DIVISIVE CONCEPTS, INCLUDING CRITICAL RACE THEORY, AND RESTORING EXCELLENCE IN K-12 PUBLIC EDUCATION IN THE COMMONWEALTH". The document is from the Commonwealth of Virginia, Office of the Governor. A quote box on the right side of the document reads: "Our children deserve far better from their education than to be told *what to think.*"

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The image shows a screenshot of a GLOBE MAGAZINE article titled "The 'anti woke' legislation making K-12 teachers in New Hampshire nervous". The article is by Linda K. Wertheimer and was updated on September 28, 2023. A quote from a former social studies teacher reads: "I don't know how you can have a lesson on the Holocaust and genocide and the issue of racism can't come up," says a former social studies teacher. Below the text is a black and white photograph of a classroom. The classroom has a large world map on the wall with the text "THE future OF THE WORLD" above it and "IS IN THIS Classroom" below it. There are several posters on the wall and a few chairs in the foreground.

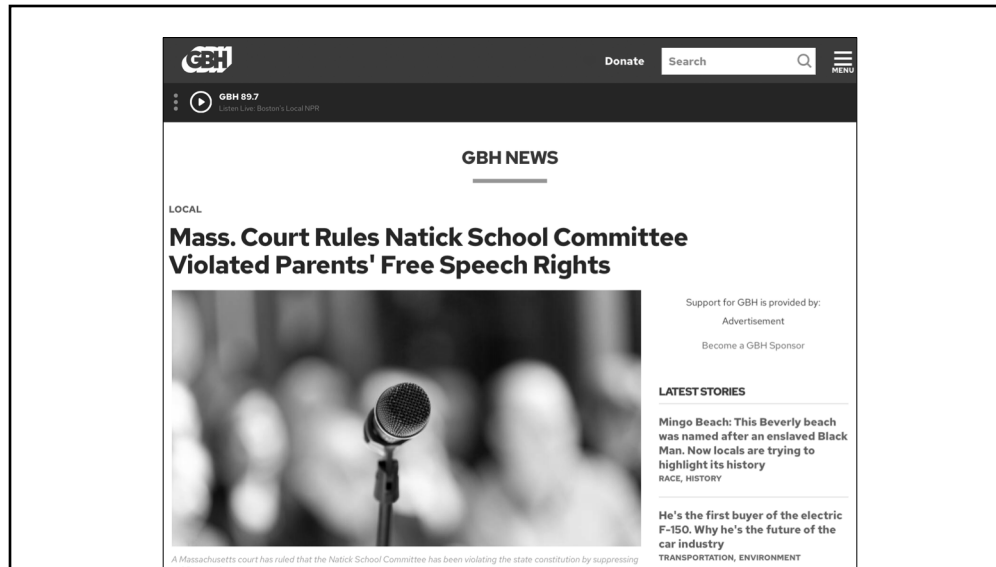
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Social Media

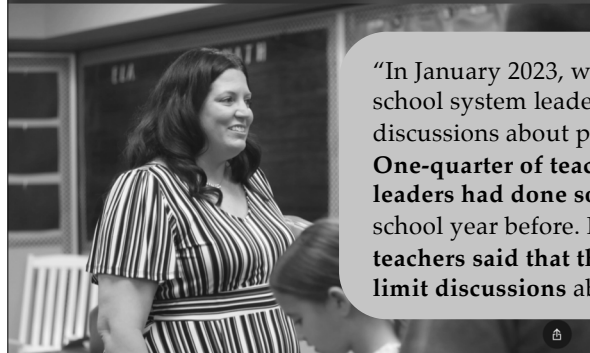


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BROOKINGS Q ☰

<https://bit.ly/3ZqV2jb>

RESEARCH
**Partnerships with parents are key to solving
heightened political polarization in schools**



“In January 2023, we asked 1,439 teachers if their school system leaders had directed them to limit discussions about political or social issues in class. **One-quarter of teachers said their school system leaders had done so**—the same percentage as the school year before. However, a striking **65% of teachers said that they decided *on their own* to limit discussions about political or social issues.**”

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Why did you decide (on your own) to limit discussions about political and social issues in class?

Reasons	All Teachers (%) (n = 818)
I am not sure that my school or district leaders would support me if parents expressed concerns	49
I am afraid of verbal or physical altercations with upset parents	36
I don't feel confident that I know enough about these topics to address them with my students	32
I am afraid of losing my job or teaching license	32
My school or district leaders have not issued any guidance about how to address these topics	26
I'm not sure what topics I am allowed to address in the classroom	25
I have to get my instructional materials or lesson topics approved	10
I have to notify parents about the content of my lessons	4

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Brookings Institute (August 10, 2023)

“Our national surveys of educators reveal points of tension between families and schools. However, these same surveys underscore the influence of parents and the importance of **building trusting relationships** with families to head off potential conflict early.”

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Brookings Institute (August 10, 2023)

Districts should take a two-pronged approach:

PROACTIVE STRATEGY

to build trust and engage
parents in conversations
about their children's
learning

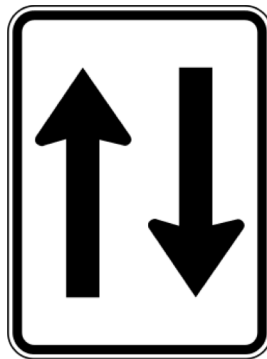
REACTIVE STRATEGY

to manage conflict when it
does occur to reduce the
burden on educators

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Effective communication is a two-way street.




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Beyond the School Committee meeting:
Other opportunities to listen and engage

- Community Forums
- Focus Groups
- Surveys / Polls / Questionnaires
- Listening Sessions / Coffee Hours
- Local Events and Activities

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Reporting back what you've heard

An illustration of a black clipboard with a silver clip at the top. It holds a white sheet of paper with a checklist. The checklist has three items, each with a small square box containing a checkmark. Below the checklist, there are several horizontal lines representing text, and a circular stamp or seal is visible at the bottom right of the page.

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Process matters.

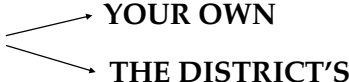
The more controversial the topic, the more important it is to:

- **design**
- **communicate**
- **implement**
- and **document**

a thorough vetting and decision-making process.

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How to navigate polarizing debates

1 Refer back to core values. 

2 Maintain your composure. Know when not to respond.

3 Don't go it alone. Get cover.

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How to navigate polarizing debates

- 4** Focus on the issues, not the players.
- 5** Don't be dismissive of opposing viewpoints.
- 6** Don't retreat on important work just to avoid backlash.
- 7** Strengthen relationships and trust with families across the ideological spectrum.

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Stay on Message:
Keeping Your Strategic Plan at the Forefront

TODAY: 11:15 am – 12:15 pm
Hyannisport West

A horizontal row of hands holding several interlocking gears of various sizes. The hands are positioned as if they are supporting or adjusting the gears. The background is a light gray gradient.

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Questions & Comments

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