

# Managing Polarization in School Communities



**FORWARD**

**From Polarization to Progress**



# And...

**Yet, there was this...**

*“You should die- watch your back”*

*“How dare you work in education”*

*“How can you look at yourself in the mirror”*

*“You shouldn’t talk to them, they are evil”*

*“Don’t invite them in the room”*



# Have you been there?

So many are losing their jobs, leaving their jobs or just really struggling with mental health and motivation to keep doing this!

What are a few examples you are dealing with?





# My story

**Support. Gather. Partner**



## WHAT IS POLARIZATION?

---

"Societies are fracturing as the **forces of division** grow stronger, driving people apart. We are **losing trust** in each other and in the future. Feelings of frustration, powerlessness and a loss of belonging are making us vulnerable to **'us versus them'** stories, which turn us against each other" and **prevent us from making progress** on issues critical for the public good." (More in Common Organization website)

# LEARNING ABOUT HIGH CONFLICT



## Why does it matter?

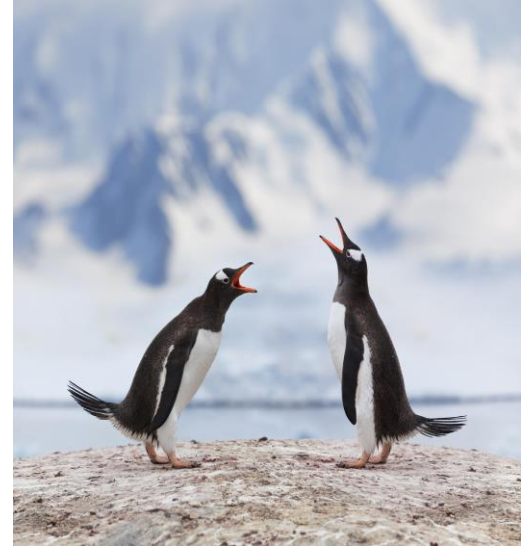
- **87% of Americans are frustrated** with extreme political and cultural divisions. (Starts with Us)
- **67%** of the public are a part of the exhausted majority, and they also **believe that we can overcome differences** & make progress. (More in Common)
- Disagreement, when managed well, **gets greater results** than avoidance- spurs better ideas, creativity, innovation, diverse perspectives. (Achor, HBR, Grant)
- Most people assume a **false polarization** of “the other side.” People generally overestimate disagreement and were pleasantly surprised by the amount of agreement. (Harvard Business Review)

**WE CAN MAKE PROGRESS!**

# GOOD AND HIGH CONFLICT

## What is high conflict and extreme polarization?

Good Conflict	High Conflict
Humility	Certainty
Complexity	Simplicity
Passion	Righteousness
Curiosity	Assumptions
All sides want to find a solution	All sides just want to fight
Can find humanity in the other side	Thinks the other side is evil





# MANY TIMES, WE CAN HELP THINGS UNFOLD DIFFERENTLY

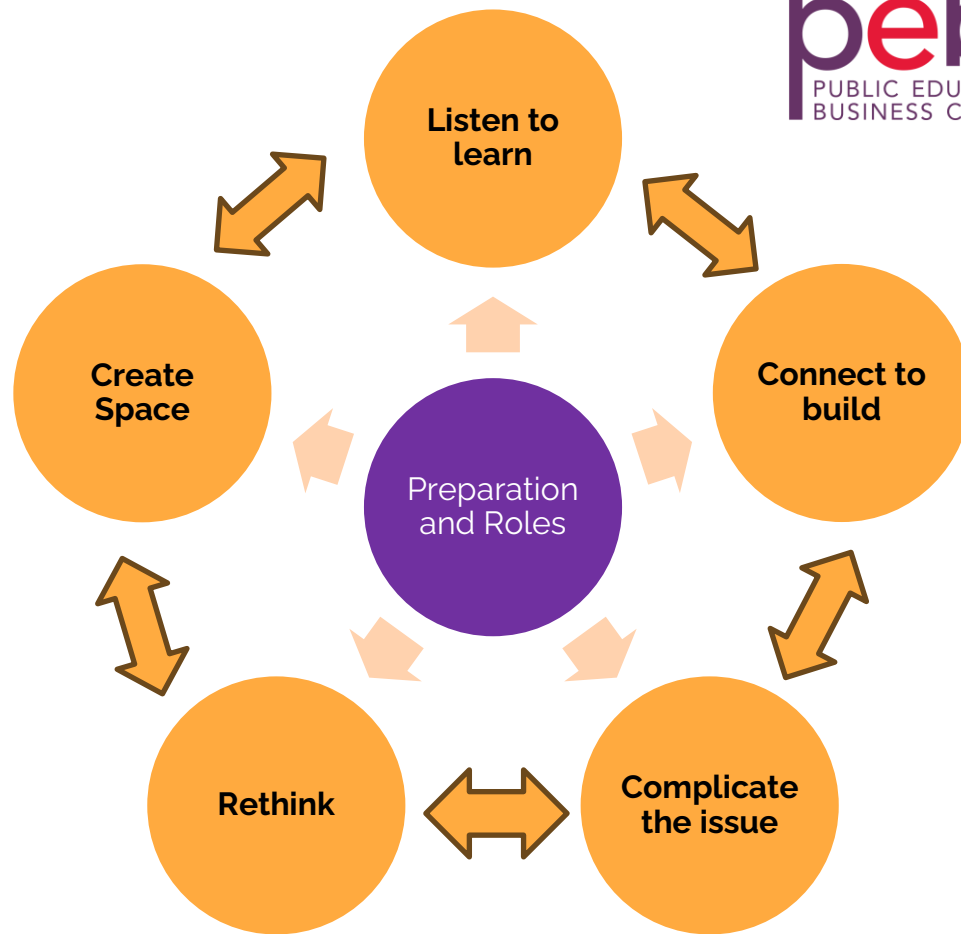
## There are mindsets, skills and strategies that can help us:

- Prevent polarization/high conflict
- Build connection and humanity
- Build trust
- Support community building
- Support inclusive democracy
  - At the board, community, state, country levels

## What are the elements we need to lean into?

- Relationship building
- Seeing humanity in all
- Open mindedness
- Empathy
- Listening

# THE FRAMEWORK



# Preparation & Roles

**Listen to  
learn**



# Listen to Learn

## Listen to Understand: Learning

---

### **Why does REALLY listening matter?**

Because the desire to be understood and feel as though you belong is a foundational aspect of humanity

### **How do we really listen?**

Be curious, receptive, humble and vulnerable.

Focus on the person you are hearing, after they speak, check for understanding. This is called Looping.





**Connect  
to Build**



# Connect to Build

## Relationships and Humanity: Learning

*"Fleeting, pleasant encounters help expand the definition of US (rather than THEM). These interactions are small inoculations, which taken regularly, protect us from making the errors in judgement and interpretations that can lead to high conflict."* From High Conflict

Thus, getting to know someone on a personal level, understanding their individual experiences, and recognizing their humanity can break down stereotypes and reduce negative attitudes.



**Complicate  
the issue**

# Complicate the Issue

Reduce the binary

---

Simplification of people and issues can lead to more conflict.

Humans, issues and problems are complex.

But we simplify things to make sense of them. But when we take that to an we can create:

- Us vs. them
- Fear of the other or other side
- Right vs. wrong
- Oversimplified problems that create oversimplified solutions





**Rethink  
the  
Issue**




# Rethink

Are there new ways to think about the issue in conflict?

---

- Often times, there is another way to consider the conflict or problem. We just need to get out of our binary ways of thinking!
- When we do this, we can often find more places of agreement (or at least not as deep disagreement).



A night landscape featuring a starry sky, mountains, and a lake. A large orange circle is centered in the image, containing the text "Create Space".

**Create  
Space**



# Create Space

Responding to High Conflict:

---

Know your limits.

Sometimes you have to de-escalate or disengage.



# Resources

---

- High Conflict, Amanda Ripley (book)
- Constructive Dialogue Institute (organization)
- Think Again, Adam Grant (book)
- Possible, William Ury (book)
- PEBC FORWARD workshops- contact me!





*Thank  
you*

**Stay Connected**  
**[kanthes@pebc.org](mailto:kanthes@pebc.org)**