

# Communities Divided: How to Navigate Polarizing Debates

**Chris Horan**

 @chrishorancomm  
#MASCMASS22

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A screenshot of two news articles. The top article is from CNN, titled "Turmoil erupts in school district after claims that critical race theory and transgender policy are being pushed". The bottom article is from WWLP.com, titled "Mask debate heats up ahead of school reopenings". The WWLP.com article includes a photo of a protest and a graphic of a school crossing sign.

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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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**nbc NEWS** SOUTHLAKE 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 racial re- the disparate treatment of minority students.



EducationWeek

## School Boards, 'Domestic Terrorism,' and Free Speech: Inside the Debate

By Andrew Ujifusa — October 20, 2021 13 min read



4

**AP** 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

Facebook Twitter Email

Click to copy

The New York Times

PLAY THE CROSSWORD

## *Energizing Conservative Voters, One School Board Election at a Time*

Republicans hope that concerns about critical race theory can help them in the midterm elections. The issue has torn apart one Wisconsin suburb.

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OPINION

Facebook Twitter Facebook Email Share

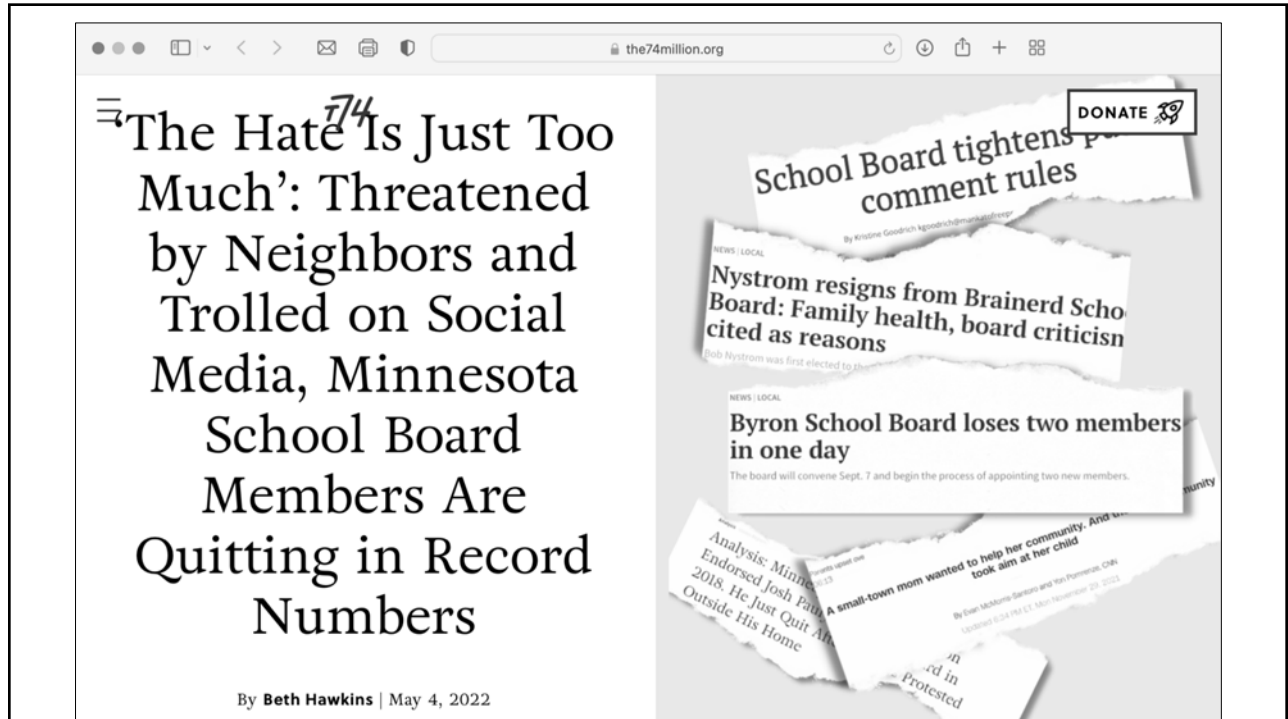
# Meet the PAC that's taking school boards across America from the PC left

By Deroy Murdock

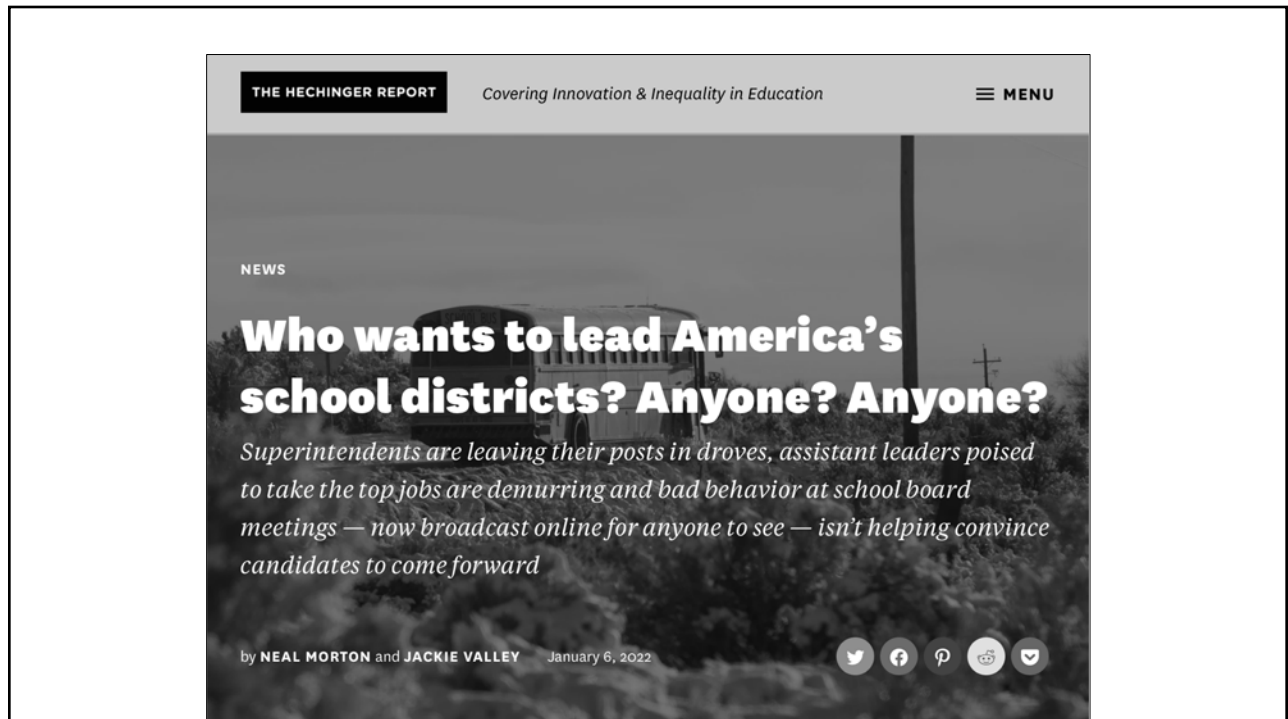
March 4, 2022 | 5:53pm | Updated

Ryan Girdusky founded the 1776 Project Political Action Committee in May 2021. Shutterstock

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U.S. **The New York Times** PLAY THE CROSSWORD Account

## In Landslide, San Francisco Forces Out 3 Board of Education Members

The recall, which galvanized Asian Americans, was a victory for parents angered by the district's priorities during the pandemic.

Give this article 1.4K



Gabriela López, the president of the San Francisco school board, was one of three members targeted in the recall. Gabrielle Lurie/San Francisco Chronicle, via Associated Press

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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 that were once named for Confederate generals before they underwent name changes in 2020, according to a new report.

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The image shows a screenshot of an NPR article from November 4, 2021, titled "Why education was a top voter priority this election" by Anya Kamenetz. The article is partially obscured by a large image of a Virginia Executive Order. The order is 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". A quote from the order is highlighted in a grey box: "Our children deserve far better from their education than to be told *what to think*." The order text continues: "By virtue of the authority vested in me as Governor, I hereby issue this Executive Order to ensure excellence in K-12 public education in the Commonwealth by taking the first step on Day One to end the use of inherently divisive concepts, including Critical Race Theory, and to raise academic standards."

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The image shows a screenshot of a WBUR article from March 21, 2022, titled "How one Mass. school board got caught in the culture wars" by Willa Elmore and Rob Oakes. The article is partially obscured by a photograph of a school board meeting. In the foreground, a sign on a table reads "98 days of Forced Masks OUR kids". In the background, a woman is speaking at a podium, and a sign on the wall reads "Class of 2019". To the right of the photo, a snippet of text is visible: "blessed with beauty and cursed with meanness. I've played the villain and the hero, Went from the highs of a hundred to the lows of I have lived and died countless times, No one could tell me otherwise. I, Am a leader."

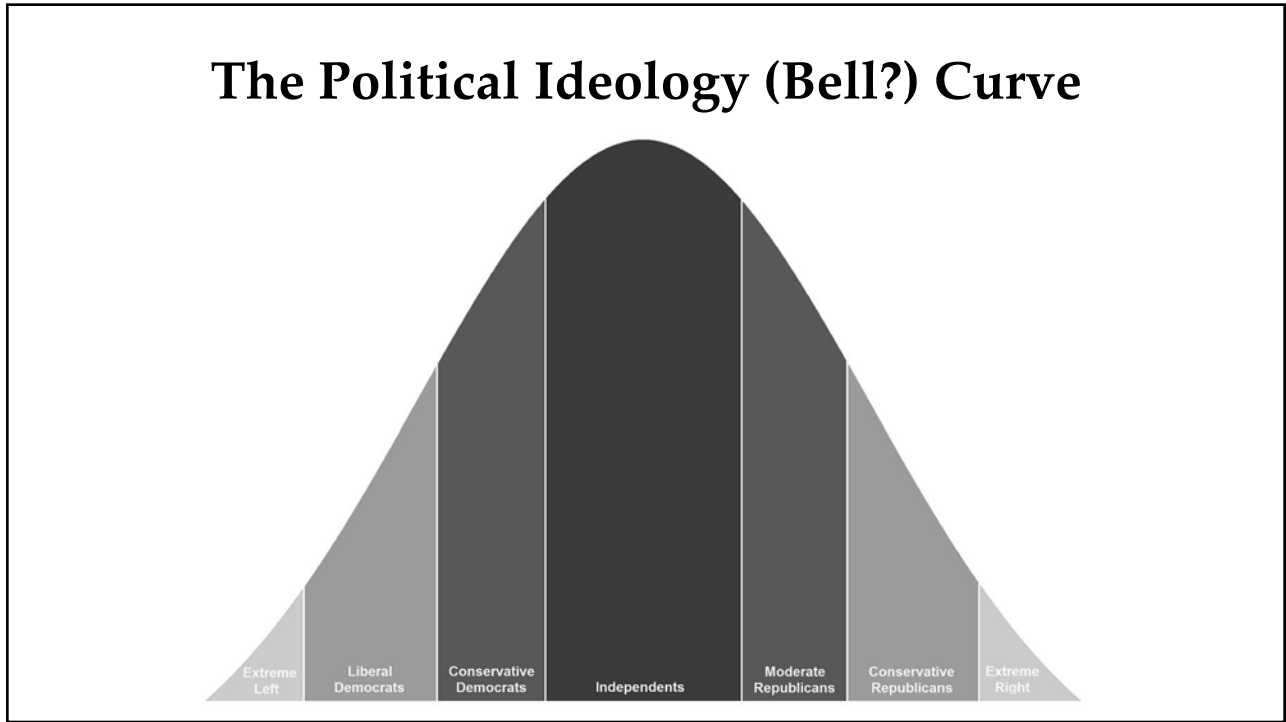
12

The screenshot shows the GBH News website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the GBH logo, a 'Donate' button, a search bar, and a menu icon. Below the navigation bar, there is a section for 'GBH 89.7 Listen Live: Boston's Local NPR'. The main content area features the 'GBH NEWS' header and a 'LOCAL' sub-header. The primary article is titled 'Mass. Court Rules Natick School Committee Violated Parents' Free Speech Rights'. To the right of the article is a sidebar with a 'Support for GBH is provided by: Advertisement' and 'Become a GBH Sponsor' link. Below that is a 'LATEST STORIES' section with two items: 'Mingo Beach: This Beverly beach was named after an enslaved Black Man. Now locals are trying to highlight its history' (RACE, HISTORY) and 'He's the first buyer of the electric F-150. Why he's the future of the car industry' (TRANSPORTATION, ENVIRONMENT). A small caption at the bottom of the article reads: 'A Massachusetts court has ruled that the Natick School Committee has been violating the state constitution by suppressing'.

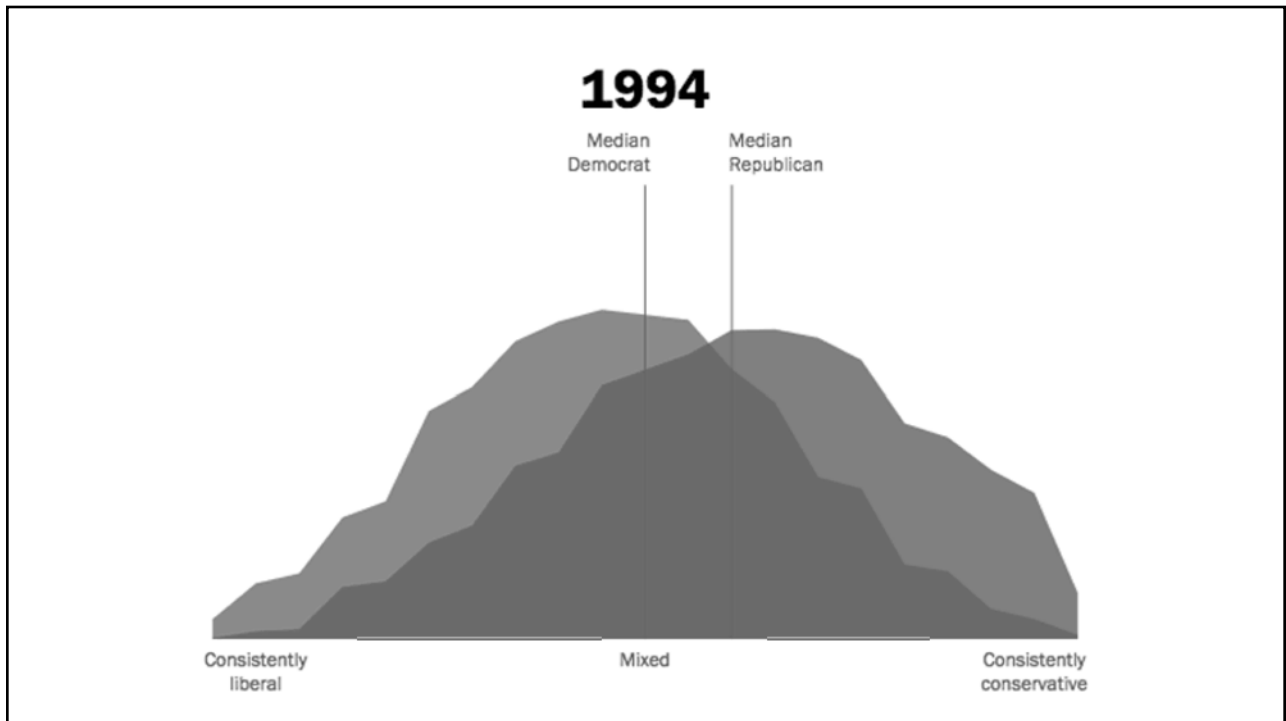
13

The screenshot shows an opinion article on a news website. The title is 'Why does Dartmouth High School still have a Native American mascot?'. The sub-headline asks, '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.' The author is 'By Marcela Garcia, Globe Columnist, Updated March 11, 2022, 3:31 p.m.' Below the text is a photograph of two football players in white jerseys with 'INDIANS' written on them. The player in the foreground is wearing jersey number 12 and is holding a football. The player behind him is also in a white jersey. Below the photo is a caption: 'The Dartmouth High School football team in 2014. BARRY CHIN/GLOBE STAFF'. At the bottom of the article, the text begins: 'Brad Lopes II, a member of the Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah), felt confused when he learned that a local news outlet had reported that his tribe was officially in support of an Indigenous American'.

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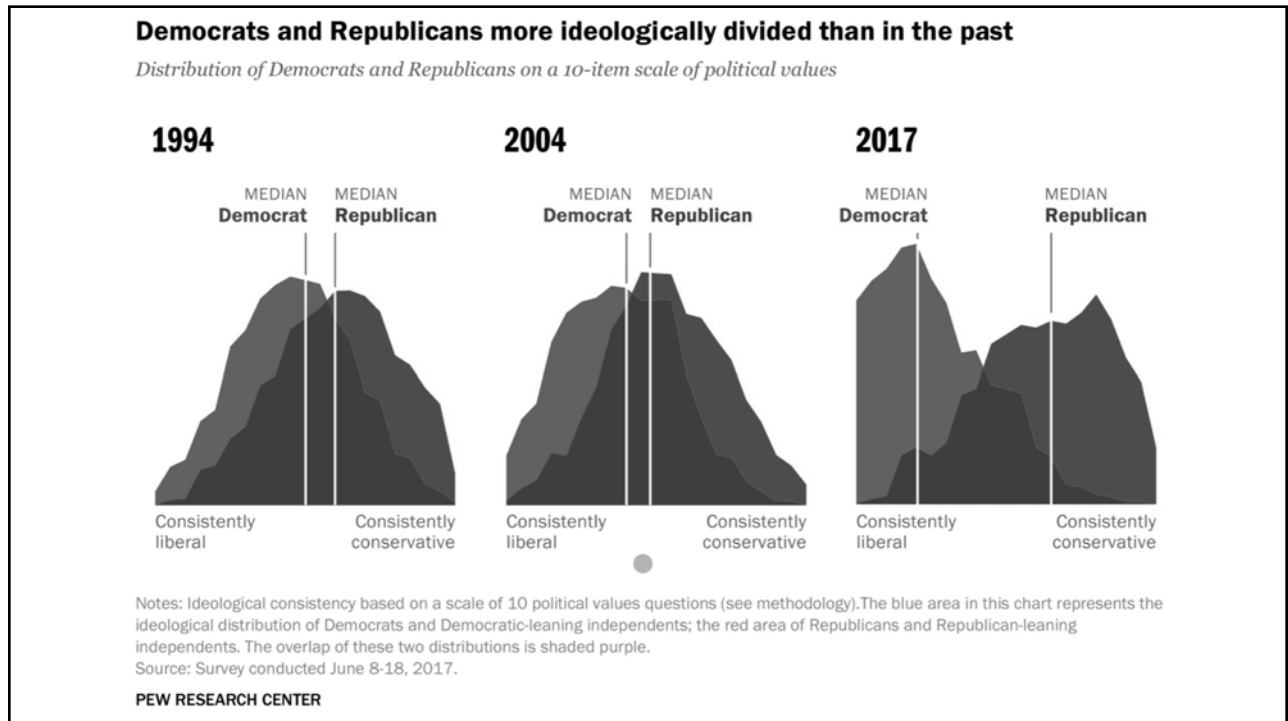


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## School Committee Meetings



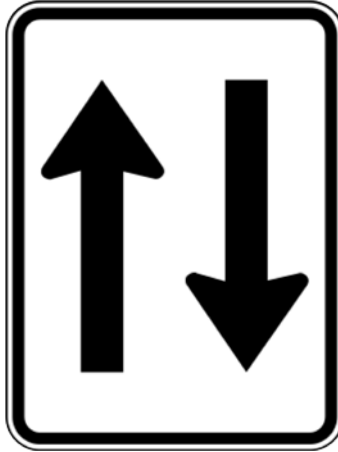
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## Social Media



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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



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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. 
  - YOUR OWN
  - THE DISTRICT'S
- 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.

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## Questions & Comments

**Chris Horan**

617-852-1340  
horancommunications.com



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