



Challenging Meetings

- Have you ever been in a meeting where a contentious statement about students, families, colleagues, or equity made it challenging to have a productive conversation?
- How did the statement or statements impact the emotional tone and energy in the room?
- What was your experience of the space and the meeting?
- How was or wasn't the tension addressed and/or resolved?

If you are facilitating such a meeting, here are some simple guidelines for response:

- 1. Assess the emotional tone and energy in the room (the group dynamic):**
Do a quick scan of the room to assess other people's reactions to the comment. Look for non-verbal cues (facial expression, body language, gestures, hand-raising, etc.).
- 2. Pause the meeting to name the tension in the room:** "It seems like there's a lot of strong emotion in the room. I want to name that it's normal for emotion to surface when discussing equity issues, and I want to make some space for you to work through whatever you're feeling before we continue our discussion."
- 3. Insert a dyad to let people process the feelings that have come up:**
"Take a moment, turn to a partner, and take X minutes each to share whatever feelings or thoughts have come up for you. Try to focus on what YOU are needing and feeling, as opposed to focusing on others."
- 4. Find something to affirm and validate what may be lying BENEATH the statement:** "It sounds like you have strong feelings about this, and I imagine that frustration comes from wanting something better for..." or "It sounds like you have some specific experiences with... that must be very challenging."
- 5. Find ways to redirect toward our core values & vision:** "I hear your frustration, and I want to remind us to stay connected to our core values as a community and to what's still possible for..." or "It's true that we have students and families that are struggling with these issues, but we need to be careful not to default to making generalizations..." or "Let's take a moment to use our community agreements to reflect on our group dynamic at this moment... What do we need from one another to stay in community?" or "I bet this was not your intent, but that statement could be heard as (judging, hurtful, inflammatory)... Do you want to clarify what you meant?"
- 6. Be sure to follow up with particularly affected individuals - and the person who made the comment - after the meeting.** Consider how you might address this topic in your next meeting.