

A Special Obligation

"The public schools belong to all Americans. As guardians of our constitutional principles, teachers and administrators have a special obligation to protect the religious liberty rights of students of all faiths and none, and to ensure that religion and religious conviction are treated with fairness and respect."

Faith Matters: Religion in American Public Life
The American Assembly at Columbia University

Finding Common Ground

It doesn't take much these days for a tranquil community to explode in conflict when any group of people feel that their rights are being trampled on by new policies or other groups pushing their political agenda. Conflicts over issues as diverse as school reform, academic methods, harassment, holiday celebrations, science curriculum, family-life instruction, library book selection, campus safety and extra-curricular clubs, can quickly divide a community and paralyze a district's effectiveness.

But we have good news. Over the past two decades BridgeBuilders has found that there are far more people in most communities who will help cultivate an environment that will treat their differences fairly than there are those who wish to force their views on others.

We have a proven track record in helping conflicted communities redefine the common ground so they can resolve their differences while rebuilding mutual respect in their communities. A Common Ground environment displays these attributes:

- *Government power is not used to indoctrinate or disparage in matters of faith, values or politics.*
- *Policy-makers see as part of their responsibility the need to protect a higher common good.*
- *People are not asked to participate in a public school system that is biased themselves.*
- *Differences in worldviews are respected and treated fairly.*
- *All participants learn to respect each other's liberty of conscience and realize that they best guard their own rights by protecting the rights of those with whom they disagree.*
- *All the stakeholders are included in attempts to build consensus or implement reform.*

Certainly Common Ground Thinking will not resolve all conflicts, but these time-tested processes have helped many communities resolve cultural disputes that involve conflicts of conscience and differences in faith and values.

Below is a partial list of agencies that have benefited from services offered by BridgeBuilders in training, consulting and facilitation.

*United States Commission on Civil Rights
First Amendment Center
American Association of School Administrators
National School Boards Association
Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
California School Boards Association
California Association of School Administrators
California Department of Education
Pennsylvania School Boards Association
Ohio Public School Administrators
Washington Council of School Attorneys
Christian Educators Association
Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network
The American Assembly at Columbia University
University of La Verne
Learning First Alliance
Educational Leadership
The School Administrator
Religion in Education
Phi Delta Kappa Fastback
Family Health Council
Healthy Schools, Healthy People
Oxnard Police Department (Gang Prevention Task Force)
Healthy Kids Resource Center*

Numerous county offices of education, local school districts and government agencies

BridgeBuilders utilizes its own materials as well as those from the First Amendment Center and strongly encourages school districts to consider their 3R's Projects in various states to help build common ground.



7228 University Drive, Moorpark, CA 93021
Tel: (805) 529-1728 • Fax: (805) 529-5709
waynej@bridge-builders.org

Colorado Office: 401 South 4th Street, Westcliffe, CO 81252
(719) 371-1158 • phyllis@bridge-builders.org

Resolving Cultural and Religious Conflicts through

Common Ground Thinking



BridgeBuilders
bridge-builders.org

Helping people find the common ground beyond their deepest differences.

You Helped Us Understand

"You helped us to understand better the perspective of parents and community members who question much of what we believe to be appropriate and necessary for students. You suggested strategies to help us find common ground from which to build trust and begin dialogue. You gave us confidence in our ability to speak with both sensitivity and information."

Judy Maurice

Assistant Superintendent - Imperial County Department of Education

BridgeBuilders

...can help you win the peace

Common Ground Thinking provides a proven framework to rebuild mutual respect and cooperation across diverse philosophical lines. Based on legal interpretations of our First Amendment, a mutual commitment to treat our civic institutions as a shared treasure and ground-breaking common ground initiatives, this approach offers a true multicultural approach that not only resolves conflict but also rebuilds the mutual trust so necessary in our society.

Here's how we can help...

Mediation

Common Ground Thinking can help a roomful of people representing diverse constituencies to define a common ground that is fair for everyone. As unbelievable as it sounds we've helped deeply divided community groups in a few hours' time find unanimous solutions to their concerns, and establish ongoing strategies to work in a more cooperative environment.

- We can help you form a Common Ground Task Force to deal with controversial issues where claims of conscience pit one interest group against another.
- We can train the task force to rethink their differences in a common ground framework by applying First Amendment legal principles.
- We can facilitate their negotiations to help submit a policy to the board or other management group that has the broad backing of the community.
- And, we can help with strategies to implement those policies that will bring the community together.

Training

BridgeBuilders offers a combination of training workshops that can help administrators, teachers and community members appreciate and implement a Common Ground approach to society's most divisive issues. This training has been utilized at staff retreats, for professional development, court-ordered diversity training and in parent forums.

These workshops come in half-day and full-day versions and will be tailored for the specific group and subject matter that will best meet your objectives.

- We can help your staff understand and appreciate the application of the First Amendment as it relates to their role in dealing with the public. We have found that the way the first person who responds to a community concern will determine whether it is resolved amiably or blows up into community-wide controversy.
- We can also help students and parent groups discover how to be true to their values without being a disruptive influence for others.
- We can equip key people in your district to implement a First Amendment conflict resolution model that will enhance your district for years to come.

Consulting

BridgeBuilders also offers mediation and consulting services to communities already caught in the midst of conflict, or approaching an issue that has the potential to significantly divide the community. When cultural conflicts threaten, we can help you devise the best strategy to resolve the conflict and rebuild mutual respect in your community.

Please contact us if we can help you navigate a difficult issue. Your first consultation is always free. Here, like no where else a small amount of pro-active effort can save your district the time and pain of unnecessary conflict.

You Proved Us Wrong

"Some board members were sure that we would find no resolution to the conflict. They expected all-out confrontation. You proved them wrong. Your uncommon mix of information, interaction skills and level-headedness was just what this community required. We have the ugly events behind us. We now count several former protesters among our most eager supporters."

Gary Knox

Superintendent - Crane School District

A Clear Understanding

"You bring a deep commitment to civil dialogue and a clear understanding of the First Amendment to very complex and controversial issues. We are especially pleased that someone with both religious conviction and civic understanding is available to facilitate dialogue between parents and schools. We look forward to many opportunities to work with you in our shared mission of creating a common vision of the common good in public education."

Charles Haynes, Ph.D.

The First Amendment Center



Wayne Jacobsen
President

Meet Our Team

WAYNE JACOBSEN, as the founder and President of BridgeBuilders, is a nationally recognized specialist in disarming cultural conflicts, especially those that involve church/state issues. His workshops have been used at state and national education conventions as well as at local school districts across the United States. He has mediated conflicts

to near-unanimous consensus and has written on these issues for a host of education journals. He was called to testify before the United States Commission on Civil Rights and was on the drafting team of The American Assembly's consensus document on *Religion in American Public Life*. He also helped the First Amendment Center facilitate the new *Sexual Orientation and Public Schools* guidelines.



Phyllis Coletta
Consultant

PHYLLIS COLETTA is an attorney and consultant with BridgeBuilders. Her sixteen years in litigation convinced her that the courtroom was the wrong venue to solve conflicts since it only resulted in greater animosity rather than reconciliation. A certified teacher, Phyllis returned to the classroom to teach high school English and discovered first-hand the difficulties faced by schools in a fast-changing

and diverse political, cultural, and religious environment. Now, trained as a mediator she combines those experiences as a peacemaker in helping school districts use a First Amendment model to resolve conflicts by helping opposing factions find lawful and fair resolutions without compromising their principles and values.