# Governance and Contextual Literacy

The lay of the land and underlying structures

The Spirit of Leadership in Action
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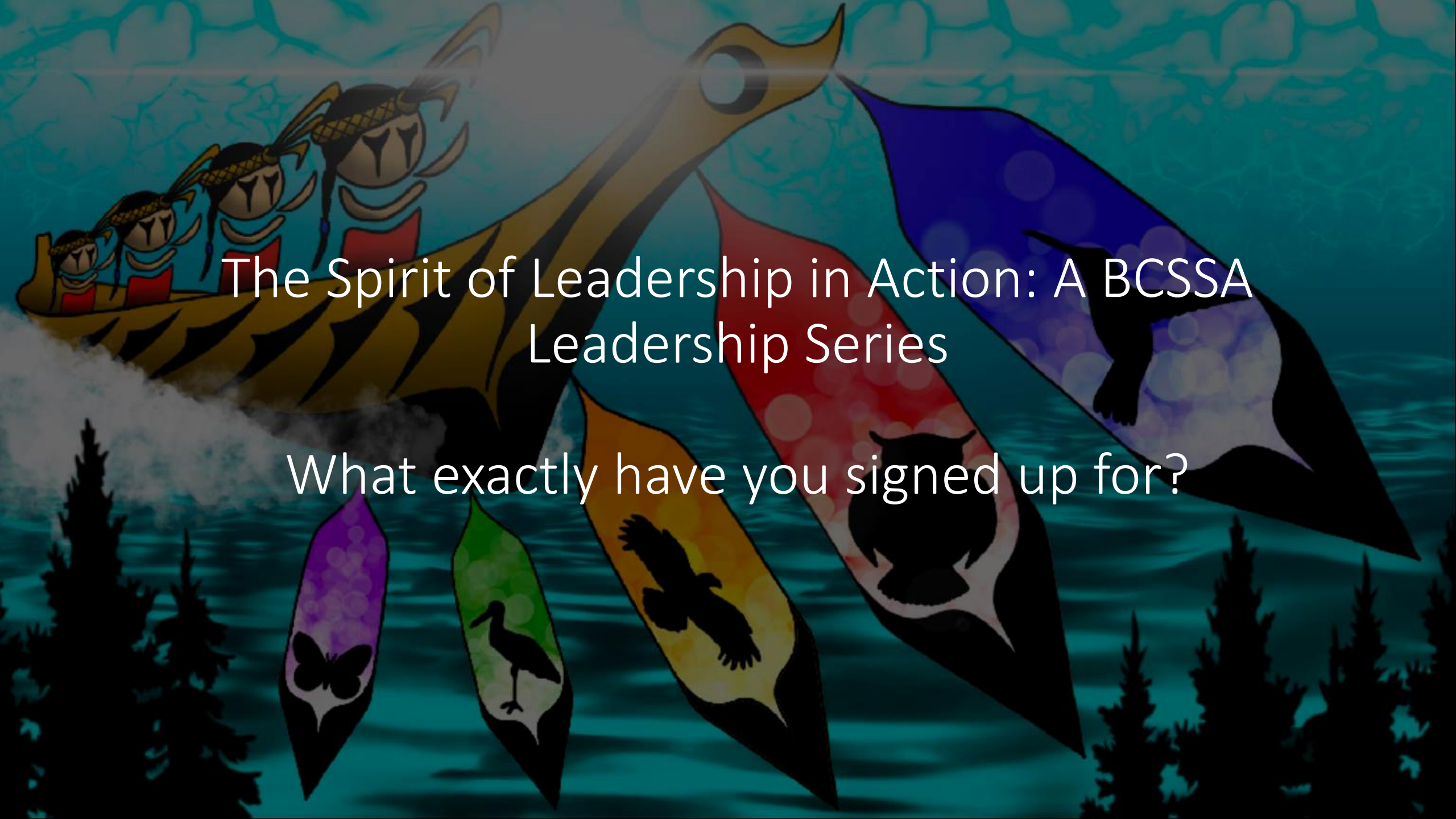
August 2023

Whistler is on the unceded shared territory of the
Skwxwú7mesh Nation
and the
Líl̓wat7úl Nation

*Photo Courtesy SD48*

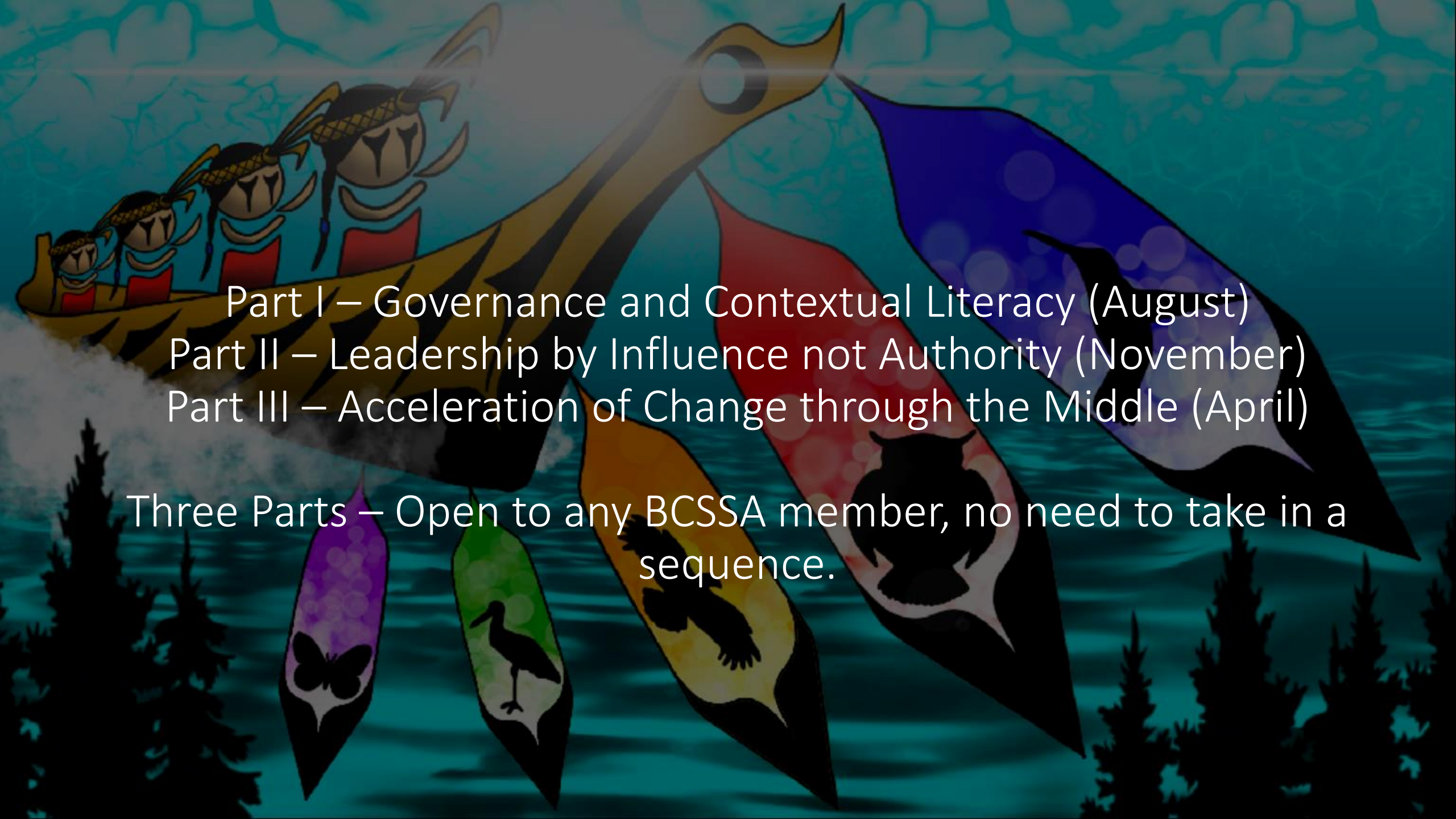
# Learning Intentions

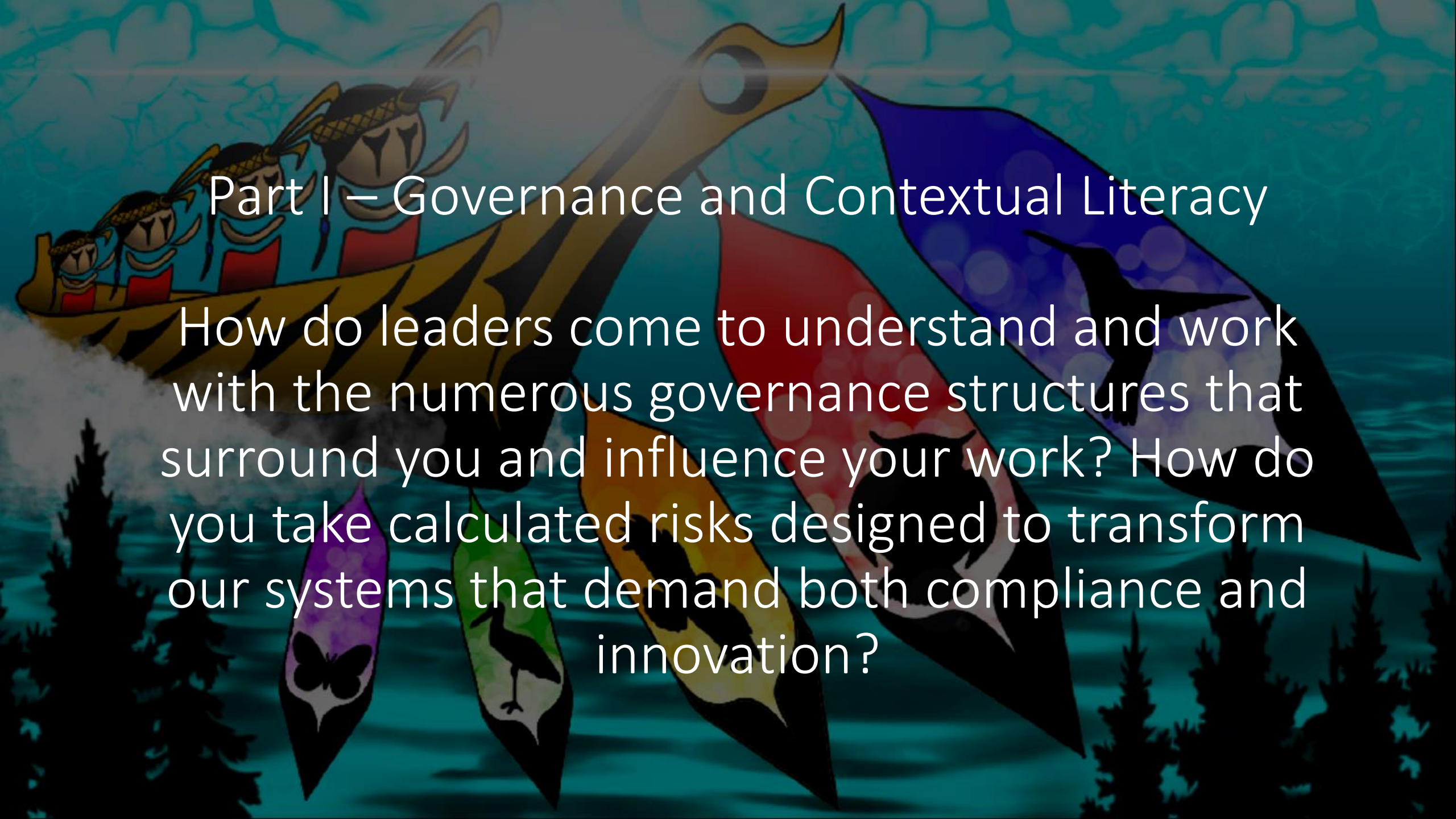
- Talk about praxis and this series – what it is intended to do
- Governance – what does it mean and what underlying structures shape how we relate with one another
- Contextual literacy – how do you come to read the lay of the land as your work unfolds
- Network with colleagues – learn with and from each other
- Introduce recent trends and thoughts on leadership and practice from colleagues around the globe
- Share and provoke – provide ourselves and BCSSA with food for thought about the context and complexity of your work and the supports you need



# The Spirit of Leadership in Action: A BCSSA Leadership Series

## What exactly have you signed up for?


Part I – Governance and Contextual Literacy (August)
Part II – Leadership by Influence not Authority (November)
Part III – Acceleration of Change through the Middle (April)
Three Parts – Open to any BCSSA member, no need to take in a sequence.

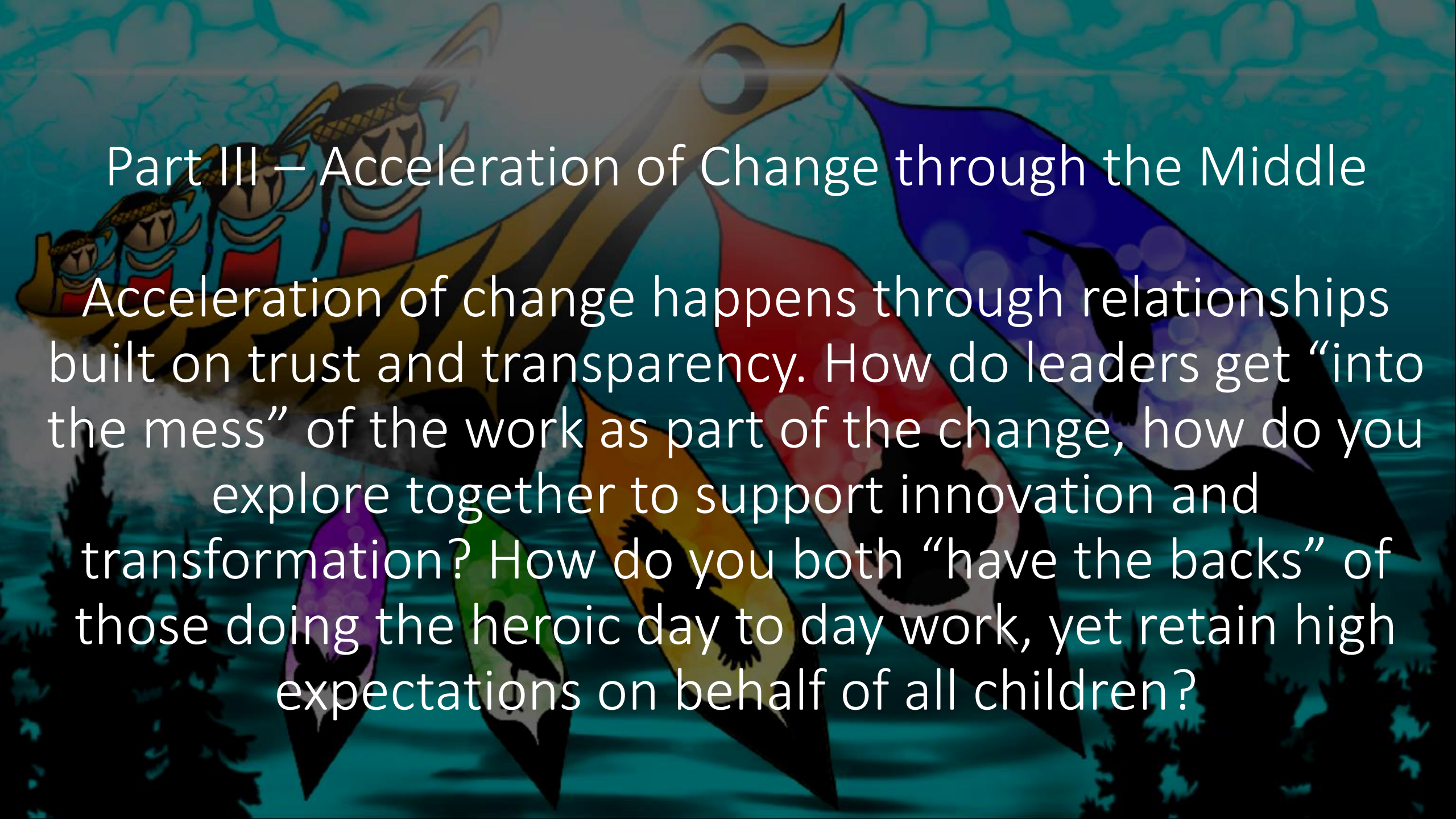


# Part I – Governance and Contextual Literacy

How do leaders come to understand and work with the numerous governance structures that surround you and influence your work? How do you take calculated risks designed to transform our systems that demand both compliance and innovation?

# Part II – Leadership by Influence not Authority

How do leaders build, nurture and sustain relationships as foundational to advancing and rethinking our work and systems? From the importance of a co-constructed vision to building momentum and aligning values and beliefs that challenge and change our structures and practices.



# Part III – Acceleration of Change through the Middle

Acceleration of change happens through relationships built on trust and transparency. How do leaders get “into the mess” of the work as part of the change, how do you explore together to support innovation and transformation? How do you both “have the backs” of those doing the heroic day to day work, yet retain high expectations on behalf of all children?

# The Face of Governance

- Bands, First Nation Leaders
- Minister, Deputy Minister, Assistant Deputy Ministers, Executive Directors
- Board Chair, Vice-Chair, individual trustees
- Local Teacher Union President and Executive
- Local Support Staff President and Executive
- Local Principals and Vice-Principals' Associations, BCPVPA
- Local Exempt Staff Associations
- District Parent Advisory Councils
- Religious groups
- Community Organizations
- "Other" – Students, MLAs, "the public", BCPSEA, BCSTA, BCSSA, BCASBO

# To lead effectively

- You not only need to be aware of the governance structures that impact your work and the relationships you have
- You have to be aware of the power structures and formal and informal relationships that dictate how governance unfolds at the table and in the community
- Who are the leaders of these “organizations and groups” – what is your relationship with them, and what are their own relationships with their executives, members, and the public?

# One example – When an Election Looms

Once an election has been called - there are three rules of the road for the ruling party (which often impacts you):

1. Tell good news stories
2. Don’t rock the boat
3. Deliver on promises

# If that's what government is doing…what about opposition?

1. Woe is me the state of the nation/province
2. Do whatever you can to rock the boat
3. Describe in detail broken promises or create a new narrative of unmet need (or lack of trust)

# Other impacts of governance and relationship structures

- You need to know and understand the unwritten commitments that people have made to each other
- Who has said what to whom (internal commitments) in order to sustain the positions of power in which they find themselves?
- How are you aware, or how are you reading the lay of the land, to understand what these commitments might be

# Reminder - Governance Structures that Impact You

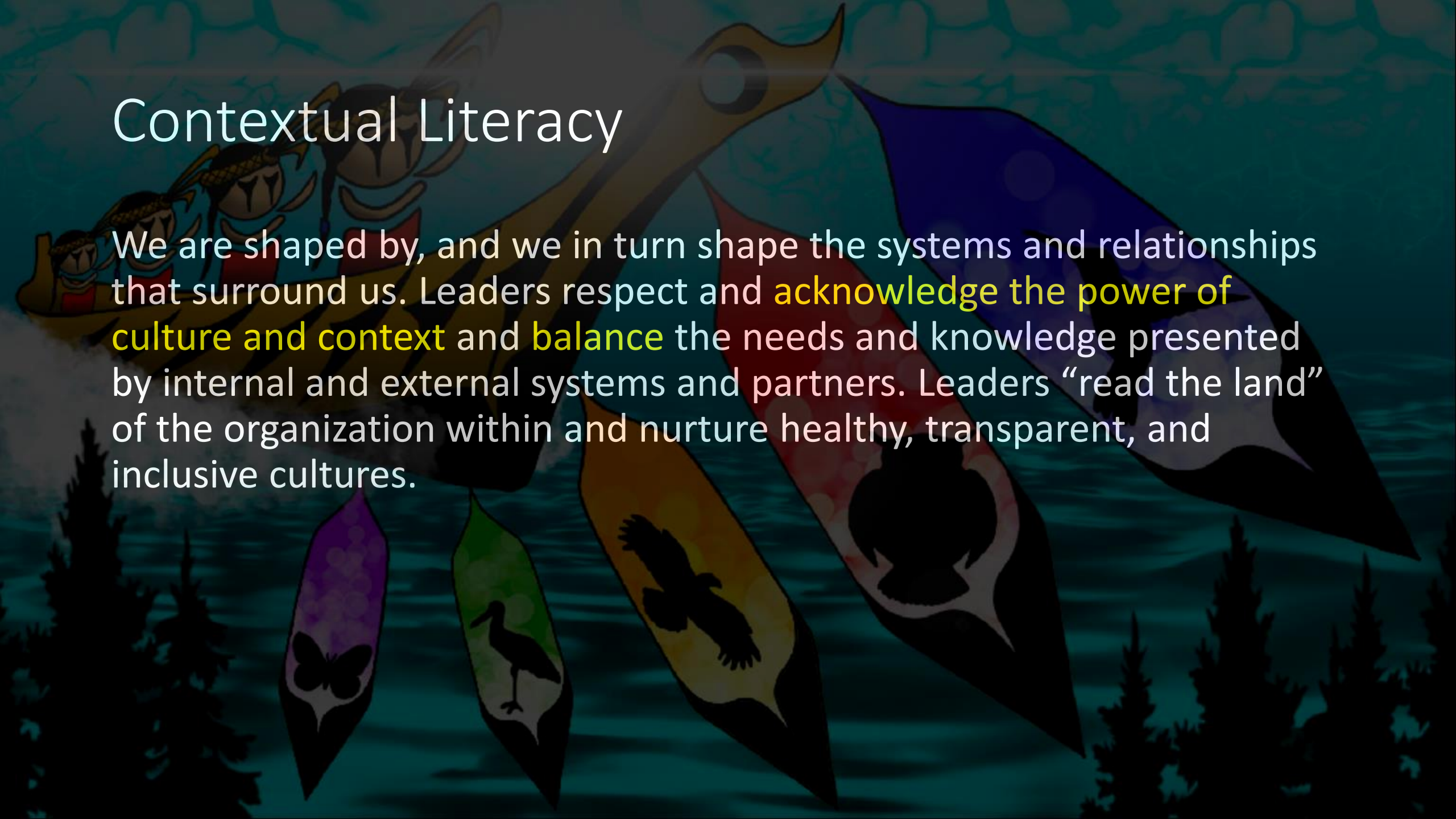
- Bands
- Faith Groups
- Community Organizations
- Municipal Government
- Ministry of Education and Child Care
- Boards of Education
- Teachers
- Support Staff
- Principals and Vice-Principals
- Exempt Staff
- Parents
- “Other” – students, MLAs, “the public”

# “Other”

Sometimes this is the most difficult group of all – no formal governance or structure, not sure of the rules of the road.

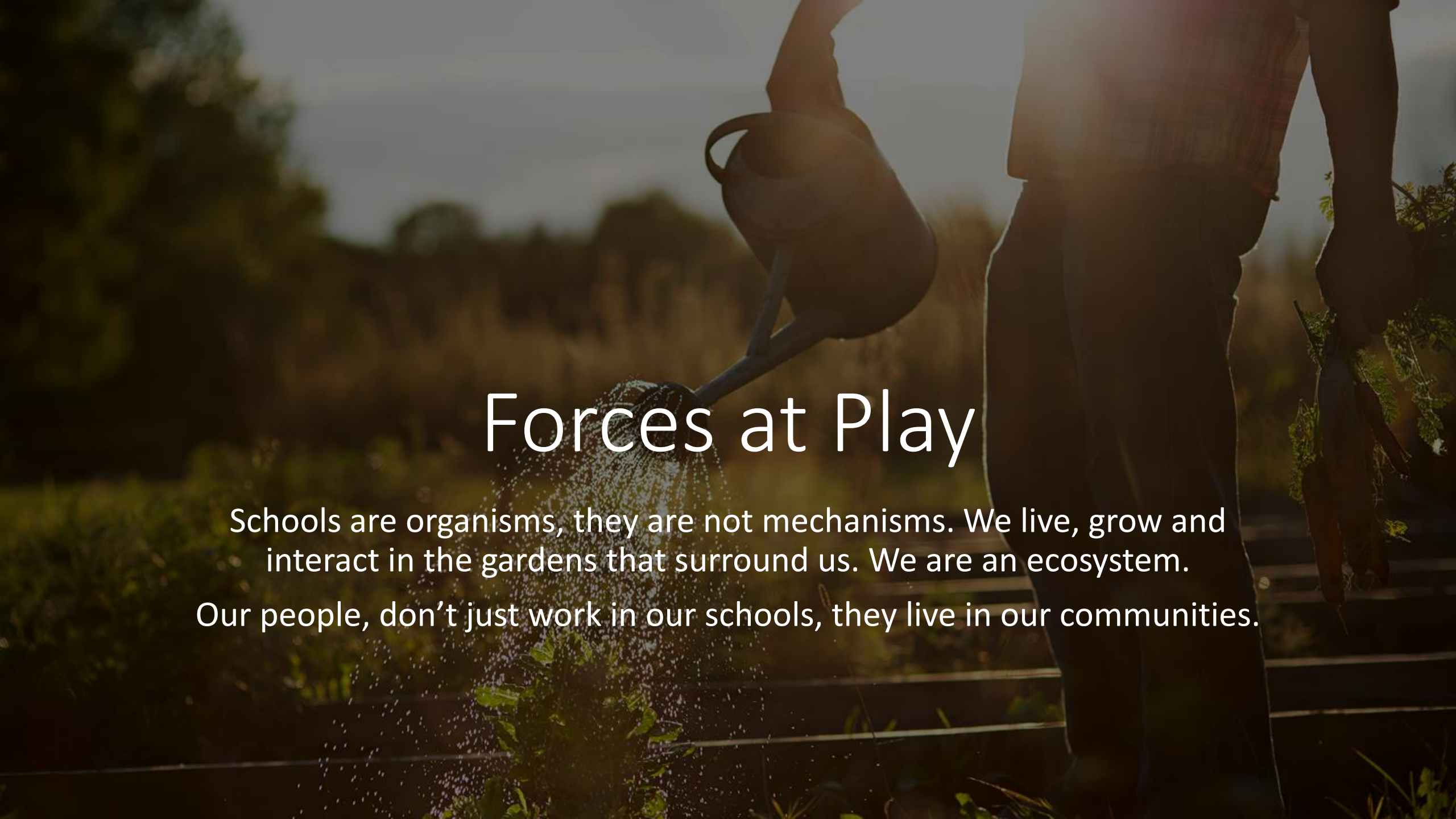
These others, often emerge depending upon the lay of the land in any given day. What is capturing the attention of the public and who steps up to give voice (or express voice) to an issue?

Governance is about politics, with that, let’s talk about contextual literacy in today’s political arenas and era



# Contextual Literacy

We are shaped by, and we in turn shape the systems and relationships that surround us. Leaders respect and acknowledge the power of culture and context and balance the needs and knowledge presented by internal and external systems and partners. Leaders “read the land” of the organization within and nurture healthy, transparent, and inclusive cultures.



# Forces at Play

Schools are organisms, they are not mechanisms. We live, grow and interact in the gardens that surround us. We are an ecosystem.

Our people, don’t just work in our schools, they live in our communities.

# What is our current context and how is it shaping us (and those around us)?

# Understanding political tides

- “We find that the rise in global populism over recent decades has been astounding, with more populist leaders and parties in power today than at almost any time in recent history.”

- Populism is at a 30 year high.

# What is populism (of all stripes)

1. Foundation of democracy – you care about those who don't vote for you.
2. Populism doesn't work that way.

GEOPOLITICS & SECURITY

High Tide? Populism in Power, 1990-2020

# What is populism (of all stripes)

- There is one “true people”
- Anyone who opposes those “true people” – is betraying the country
- Even the system itself – can betray the people
- Therefore, attacking, curtaining the rights of opponents is justified – they are traitors to the country and the true people

GEOPOLITICS & SECURITY

High Tide? Populism in Power, 1990–2020

# What is populism (of all stripes)

- Populism 101 – A Key Element
- A unwillingness to give “loser’s consent” – acknowledgement that elections are legitimate
- If the “system” is corrupt and doesn’t represent the “true people” what else can an electoral defeat be but a demonstration of corruption by elites who have captured the country’s power

# Understanding political tides

- Populism 101
  - You would hope that a strong and compelling message to voter should carry the day.
  - “Populism appears when there are real social and economic problems that need to be addressed and when the parties that are supposed to provide representation for citizens have failed to solve real challenges for too long.”

# Understanding political tides

- All politicians, to some degree, rail against the status quo
- Populist leaders see the “people” as a unified base with unified goals and these goals are not open to debate and evidence.
- Since the “base” are only a subset of the people – the leader themselves is the messenger, the lightning bolt and the only legitimate source of political authority.
- Nothing (even the law) should not constrain the leader, as they are the very embodiment of the will of the people.
- “It is not conceivable, in the populist worldview, for leaders to abuse their power, as any exercise of power on their part is done in the name of the people, by definition.”

# Understanding political tides

Populists are united by two claims:

(1) that a country's 'true people' are locked into a moral conflict with 'outsiders' and

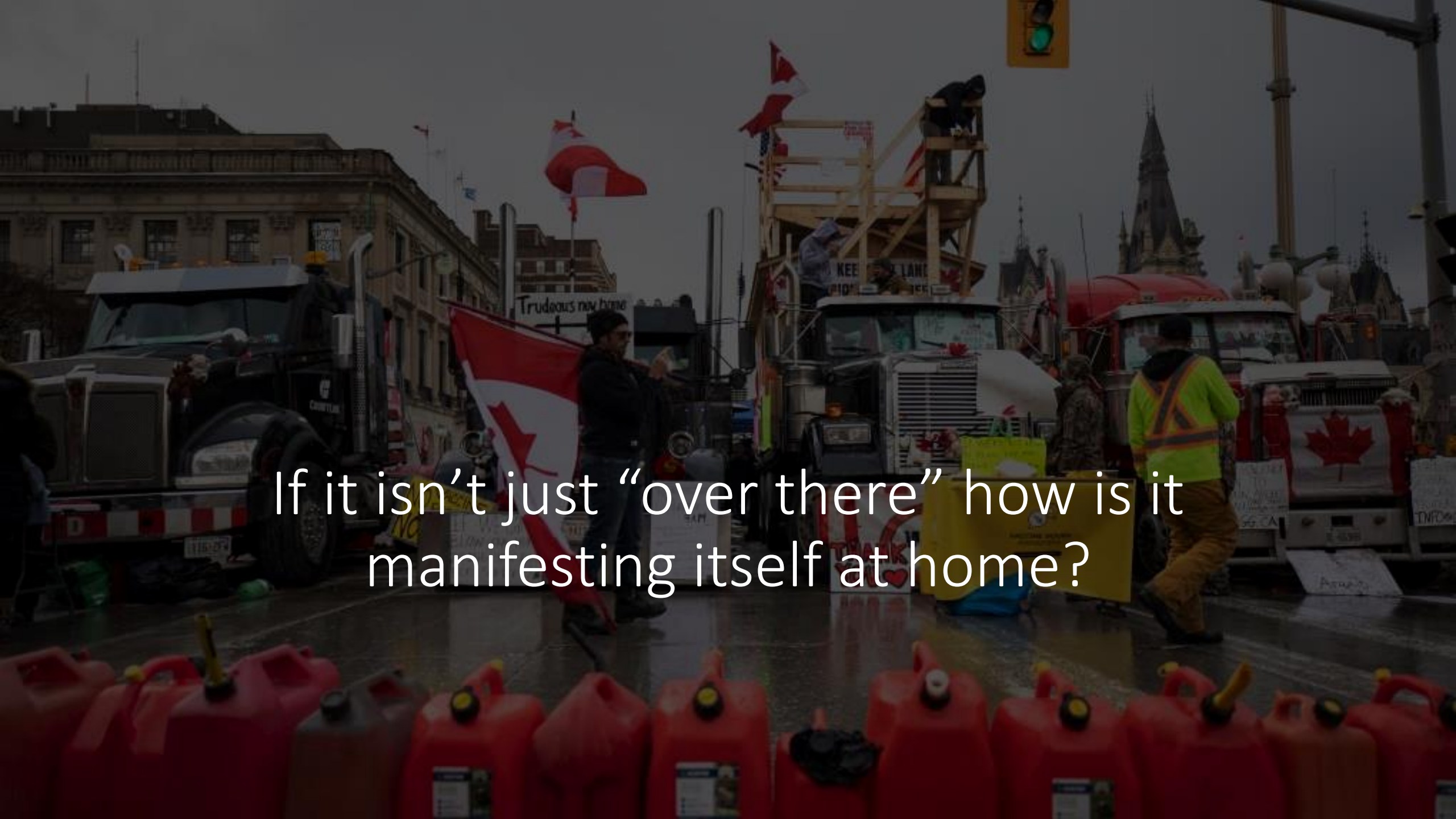
(2) that nothing should constrain the will of the 'true people.' (or its leader…)

What does this mean?

- Politics is not a contest between policy positions – it is a moral battleground between right and wrong. Between the true people, and the elites or anyone deemed to be an outsider.
- Typical flashpoints – ethnic and religious minorities, immigrants, criminals, the "corrupt elite."

# And it isn’t “over there” – it’s “right here”

- In Canada, the 2022 Freedom Convoy is our own marker of this discontent. This unrest has a foundation in the forces of globalization and automation that has “hollowed out the working class over decades” (O’Shaughnessy, 2022).




# If it isn’t just “over there” how is it manifesting itself at home?

# Oh, Canada

What's in the water out there?

# A focus on young adults (18-35)

- How is polarization manifesting itself in Canada, particularly, among young adults?
- How do we bridge this intergenerational gap? The gap between what young adults feel matters to them and the challenges to addressing these issues in public forums/policy?
- How is polarization distracting us from progress on real issues such as affordable housing, uneven development, the pandemic, and climate change?

# The lay of the land

- They are said to feel increasingly alienated by the democratic process
- 44% of young adults believe the political stability in Canada is threatened, 38% believe political division will increase
- Until recently, there was a saccharine consensus that we had dodged the rising tide of polarization afflicting other rich nations. If that feeling clearly missed some canaries in the coal mine, the Freedom Convoy finally jolted us awake.

# Three threads that lead and shape us

1. Ottawa (and sometimes local) bloodsport of politics.
2. The internet/social media misinformation and disruption of mainstream media
3. The pandemic – fueling and deepening the divide

# 1. Politics and the Political Arena

- Practitioners of identity politics of all stripes have become dismissive, even hostile, to the views of those they deem oppressors.
- “a loss of viewpoint diversity and a default to simplification, binaries, in-group romanticization and out-group demonization.”

# Politics as Performance

- Next to each member of Parliament's desk in the temporary House of Commons in West Block is a new feature: a tiny monitor broad-casting the House's live video feed. When an MP stands in Question Period, they can watch the camera cut to their seat and see their own performance from the corner of their eye.
- Today, the incentives have shifted. Many MPs control their own broadcast channels. Thanks to new streaming technology, MP's offices are easily clipping their interventions in the House and posting them to social channels.
- "these videos offer some perverse incentives."

# Politics as Performance

- One Conservative politician admitted MPs now think about Question Period exclusively in terms of what can be clipped and shared on social media.
- Erin O'Toole, the former Conservative leader, let this secret slip in his goodbye speech to Parliament as he resigned his seat. "Performance politics is fuelling polarization, virtue signalling is replacing discussion, and far too often we are just using this chamber to generate clips, not to start national debates,"

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# The narratives of polarization

- We can see this play out in how parties talk to their own members and supporters.
- The Liberals have, in recent years, sent out fundraising missives accusing their opponents of “taking orders from Canada’s NRA.”
- The Conservatives have accused the media of being in league with the Liberal Party and “swearing, shouting and heckling” during press conferences.
- The NDP, for its part, has emailed supporters with allegations that their opponents are “gathering in lavish rooms of exclusive members’ only clubs where regular working people aren’t allowed. They’re enjoying free food, drinks and gifts paid for by the corporate lobbyists.”
- These claims are, at best, misleading, and are frequently outlandish. Yet they can appear in supporters’ email inboxes as often as five times a day, marked “URGENT.”

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# Follow the money…

- These tactics make a moral imperative out of both party loyalty and rejection of their opponents. As a recruitment tool for new voters, this is a lousy strategy, although it does tend to keep party faithful in the fold.

- There is one area where it has become incredibly effective: fundraising.

# Follow the money…

- Conservative in particular tight with 3 consecutive losses
- Impressive fundraising machine – MPs expected to put fundraising high on their agenda
- MPs need to whip up anger and distrust to raise money, in turn, their followers become even more extreme.

# Follow the money…

- MPs deemed insufficiently loyal to the cause may face nomination challenges. Caucus members who don't raise enough money or who fail to go sufficiently viral online are unlikely to be tapped for senior roles in the party. Worse yet, Conservatives labelled ideologically impure are likely to face social media backlash, a deluge of nasty emails, even death threats.
- One Conservative MP said, bluntly, they have grown afraid of their own members.

# Afraid of their own members

- Stoke the fires of distrust = more donations
- Don’t go viral online, or don’t raise enough $ = not tapped for senior roles within the party
- Not seen as ideologically pure = attacks, even death threats
- “we’ve grown afraid of our own members”
- If you can’t shift the middle to win – where do you go? Further right, further radical “It’s a risk, but it will be worth it to win.”
- Only other place to go – anti-immigration

# This isn’t one party, it’s all parties

- As partisans see each other in increasingly negative terms, parties see a benefit in stepping up the demonization of each other. This becomes particularly acute when partisans attribute problems not just to the policies of their rivals, but to a deep moral defect in the opposing party itself.

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# A lack of confidence in governance structures

- They’re right that the mechanics of our state are under strain. “Canadians don't realize the impact that COVID had on their cities,” a former mayor of a major Canadian city told me. The closest and most present level of government for most Canadians is municipal.
- “Cities were absolutely hammered. Our revenue sources dried up,” the mayor continued. “At the beginning of COVID, I had to lay off almost 20 percent of my workforce.” It was a trend that repeated across the country. The services that keep our cities functioning, unseen to most people, seized up. A mental health crisis exploded. At the same time, an affordability crisis worsened and an opioid crisis deepened.

# A lack of confident in governance structures

- We heard a consistent frustration about the federal government's inability to meet its own lofty rhetoric on fixing dire problems. For example, the Liberal Party made a pointed election promise in 2015 to finally provide one of the most basic services for Indigenous communities: clean drinking water. Although142 long-term boil water advisories have been lifted since November 2015, 28 communities still face long-term boil water advisories, and many others face frequent, short-term ones.
- This is an aspect of what has been called a crisis of state capacity. As researcher Samuel Hammond puts it, at the most basic level, "state capacity simply refers to a government's ability to adopt a policy and have it faithfully enacted through some combination of competence, credibility and political will."[16] In the wake of the pandemic, as many Western countries struggled to cope with basic public health logistics, their citizens became increasingly disillusioned with their governments' inability to do what they set out to do.

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# Think MOECC Capacity

- Food Futures
- Accessibility Framework
- Dump money, dump expectations, but what about the leadership?
- Jordan simply telling people what to do and giving some money isn't leadership.
- "We heard a consistent frustration about the federal government's inability to meet its own lofty rhetoric on fixing dire problems."
- They make promises that we all know are unrealistic, then they set about demonstrating that they are incapable of doing what we voted for them to do.

- With a political climate that seems incapable of not just resolving these issues, but of even effectively mediating debates about them, interpersonal conflict follows. One participant from Nova Scotia highlighted the tensions between settler and Indigenous fishers: There has been a rolling conflict for years.[17]“I’m constantly arguing with my family about this,” they said.
- An Albertan noted that the regional conflict inside the country has gotten so dire “I feel like I get mistreated in other provinces if I say where I’m from.”

# Lack of faith in mainstream media

- Political polarization and bias – think Fox, think CNN. People lose faith that the reporting is objective and fair.
- Misinformation and fake news – inadequate fact checking further erodes confidence and people turn to social media or other sources
- Corporate ownership and commercialization – large media often owned by large corporations. Conflict of interest and editorial bias. Pursuit of profits can lead to sensationalism.
- Lack of diversity and representation – main media may not be representing the diversity of communities. Belief about marginalization or inadequate representation of all views.

# Lack of faith in mainstream media

- Decline of success = lack of funding = lower quality, less vigilance = further erosion of trust and confidence
- Public perception of sensationalism – public believes they are being manipulated
- Mistakes and retractions:
  - Brian Williams (NBC News Anchor) – his background in the Iraq war (temporarily removed)
  - Rolling Stone – Sexual Assault on Campus – didn't happen – story was retracted
  - CNN Anthony Scaramucci – linked to Russian investment fund – untrue, 3 journalists fired
  - NY Times, CBS News, Washington Post, Fox News…all have had major retractions

# Think of this context

- There is a widespread lack of faith in government and their narrative
- There is a perception of mistrust of mainstream media
- Where then do you turn for “the real story?”

Your friends, your family, social media, people that you trust and hang around with…

# Why tell this story?

Because these polarizing narratives, fueled by social media and technology, are in the ears of our children, our parents, our community members.

I am certain that this does not help our current mental health and anxiety challenges that we see in children.

To me, I don’t think populism or polarization is about hope or fighting for the truth and the heart of the country – but to others, it is the only hope.

What is the narrative we want for our children, for our schools, for our society?

How do we – as systems of education – understand this context and prepare our children and youth for a better future?

# And there are real issues to resolve…

- The rising costs of living, housing and the homeless challenge
- Mental health and the opioid crisis
- Lack of faith in institutions and the media
- Substantial labour shortage
- Supply shortages
- Infrastructure and service shortages
- Medical health services, care for the elderly and an aging population
- Climate change

# The bottom line – The Narrative I'm trying to weave

- Governance matters – and governance at all levels is rooted in rules, structures, and relationships formal and informal
- Context matters – the context in which "we" find ourselves as a nation and province shapes local dialogue. Dialogue shapes and exposes values and beliefs. All leadership unfolds in context, Metro is not the north, the Kootenays are not the Gulf Islands. You have be not only understand the overall context, but you have to apply your leadership skills, attributes and qualities within your unique local context. (and…as we all know…that context is even school to school.
- It's not simply about relationships, but it's about how you understand and work collaboratively to align relationships and values to a common vision for all learners (and staff).

# To our work together

# Questions to explore together

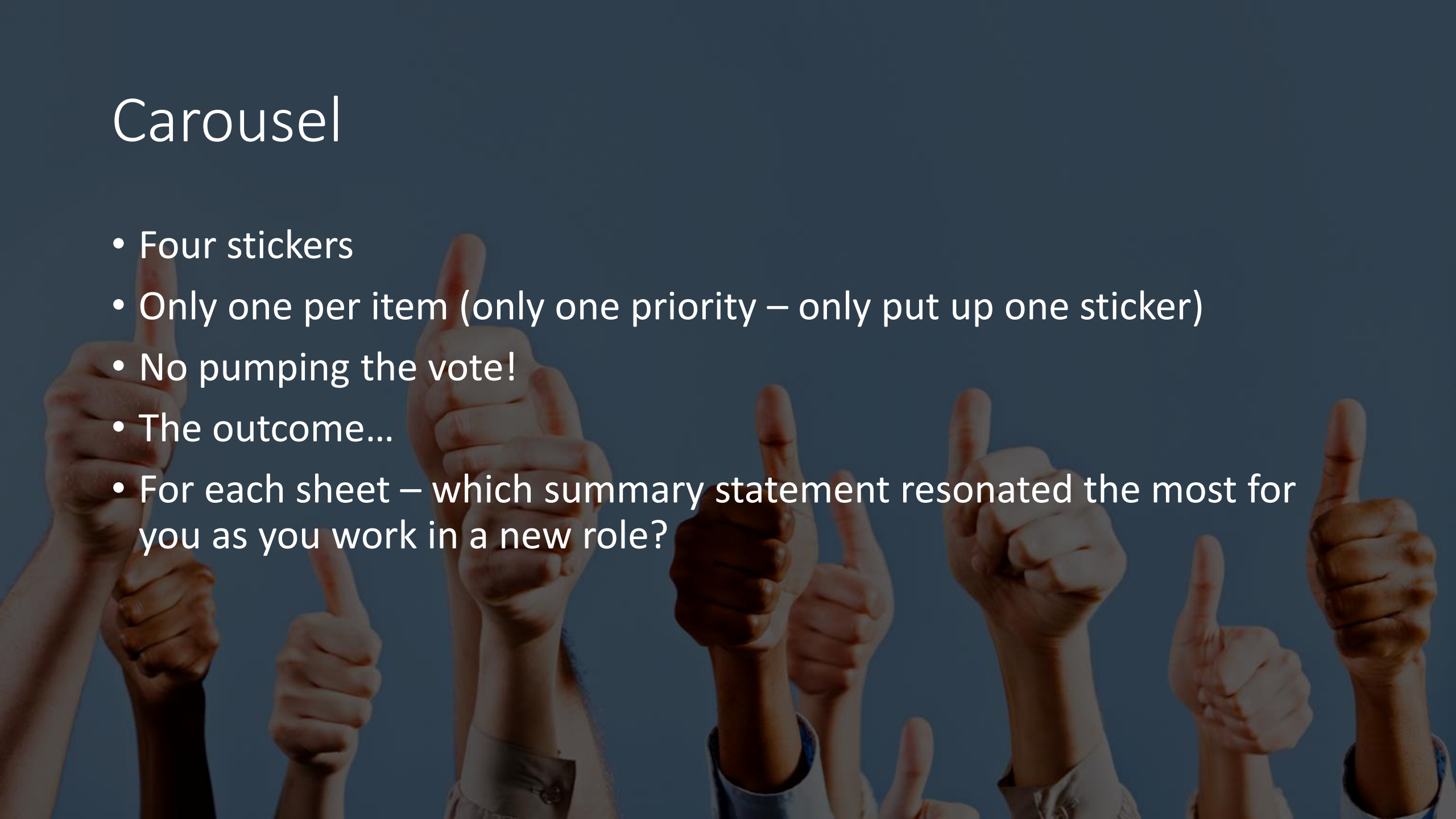
1. How do you work to understand and collaborate with the various governance structures in your district?
2. These narratives of polarization, what leadership challenges are they presenting for you either locally or regionally?
3. What are the top elements/relationships that define the context of your district and why/how do they define that context?
4. In what ways do you build the capacity of principals and vice-principals and district leaders to understand governance and contextual literacy in your district as a path to effective leadership?

# The Full Group Summary

- Each question expert gathers around sheets to summarize their feedback.
    - 1’s together
    - 2’s together
    - 3’s together
    - 4’s together
- Assign a recorder…highlight key points in the summaries you hear…report out.
- Suggestions for summarization and watching over the years

# Carousel

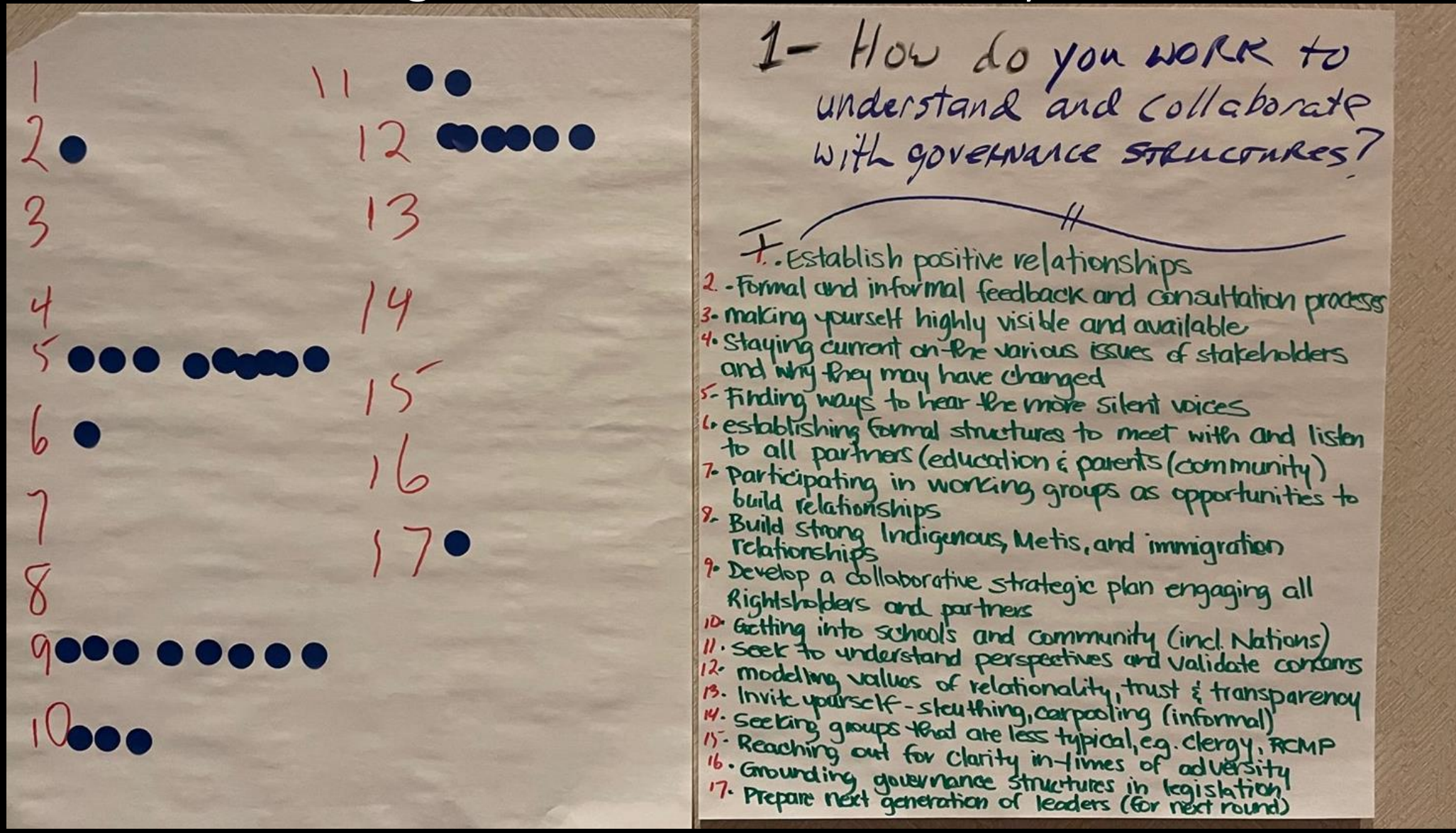
- Four stickers
- Only one per item (only one priority – only put up one sticker)
- No pumping the vote!
- The outcome…
- For each sheet – which summary statement resonated the most for you as you work in a new role?



# Reporting out – What did you say?

- Each chart should represent your priorities and can be an interesting reflection point
- PLEASE – take pictures of the summary sheets and votes – they can inform your own work in your district and your own pro-d plans and support

# Summary Charts: 1.How do you work to understand and collaborate with the various governance structures in your district?

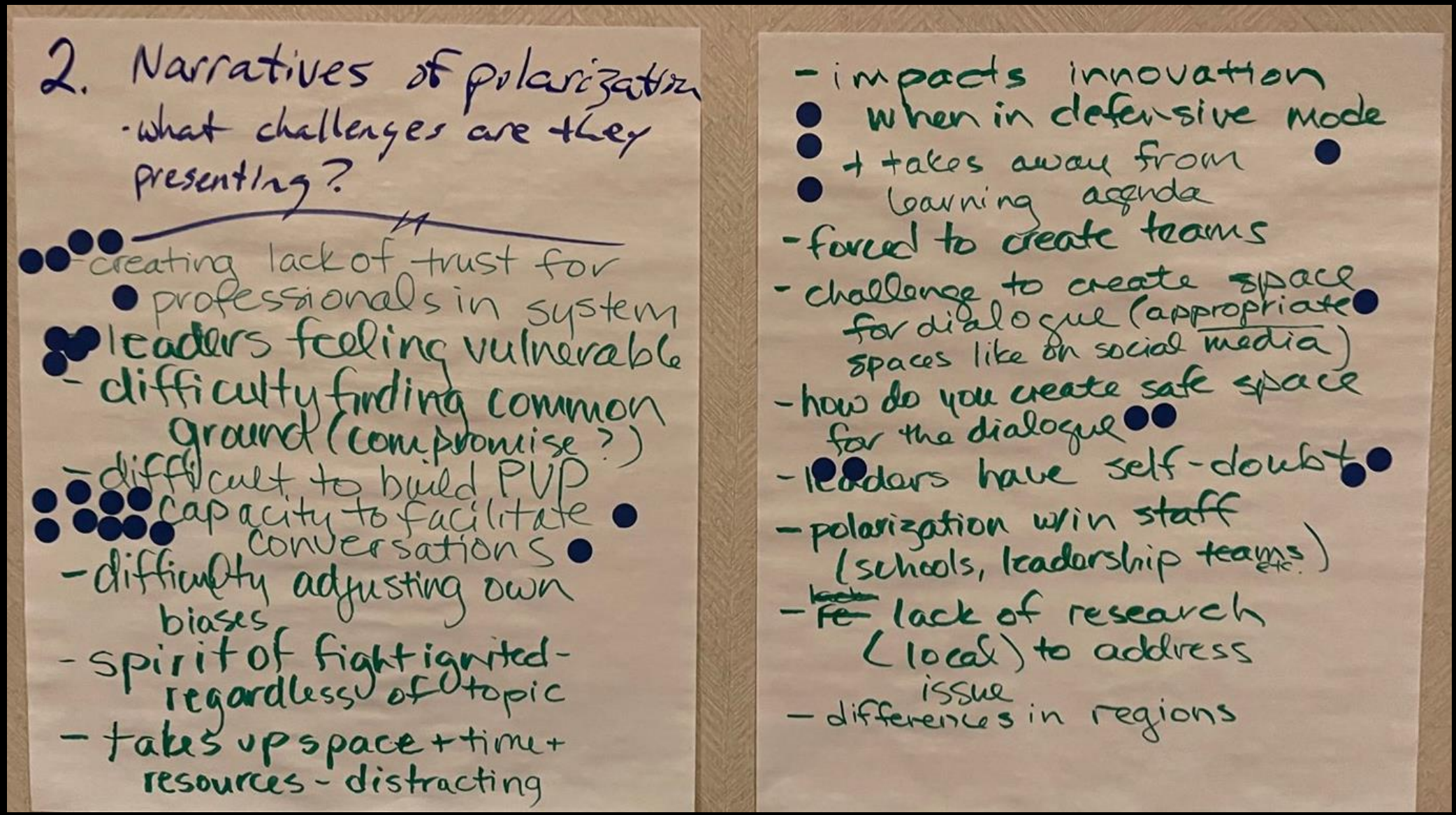



1- How do you WORK to understand and collaborate with governance STRUCTURES?

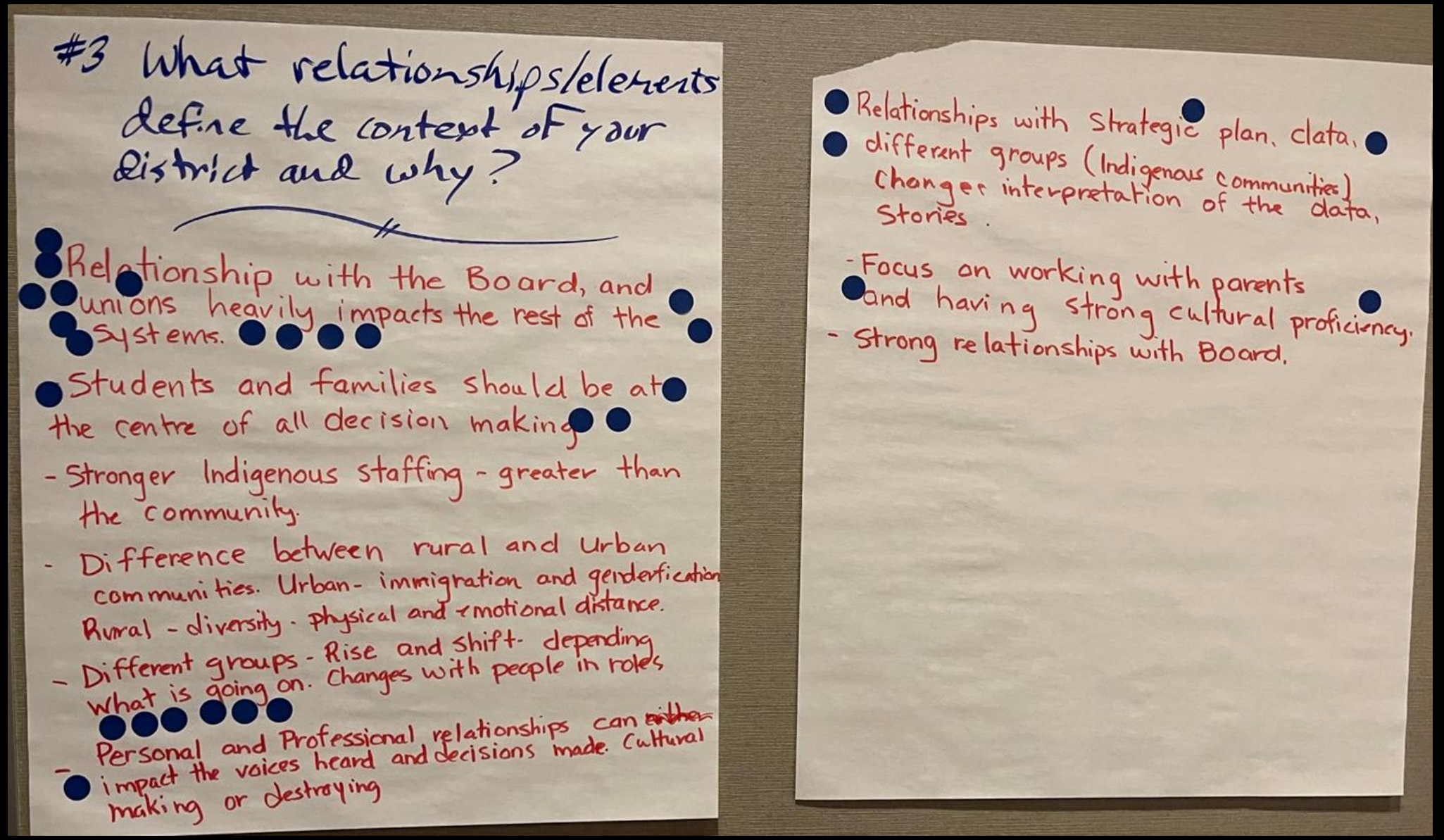
+

1. Establish positive relationships
2. Formal and informal feedback and consultation process
3. making yourself highly visible and available
4. Staying current on the various issues of stakeholders and why they may have changed
5. Finding ways to hear the more silent voices
6. establishing formal structures to meet with and listen to all partners (education & parents (community)
7. Participating in working groups as opportunities to build relationships
8. Build strong Indigenous, Metis, and immigration relationships
9. Develop a collaborative strategic plan engaging all Rightsholders and partners
10. Getting into schools and community (incl. Nations)
11. Seek to understand perspectives and validate concerns
12. modelling values of relationality, trust & transparency
13. Invite yourself - sleuthing, carpooling (informal)
14. Seeking groups that are less typical, e.g. clergy, RCMP
15. Reaching out for clarity in times of adversity
16. Grounding governance structures in legislation
17. Prepare next generation of leaders (for next round)

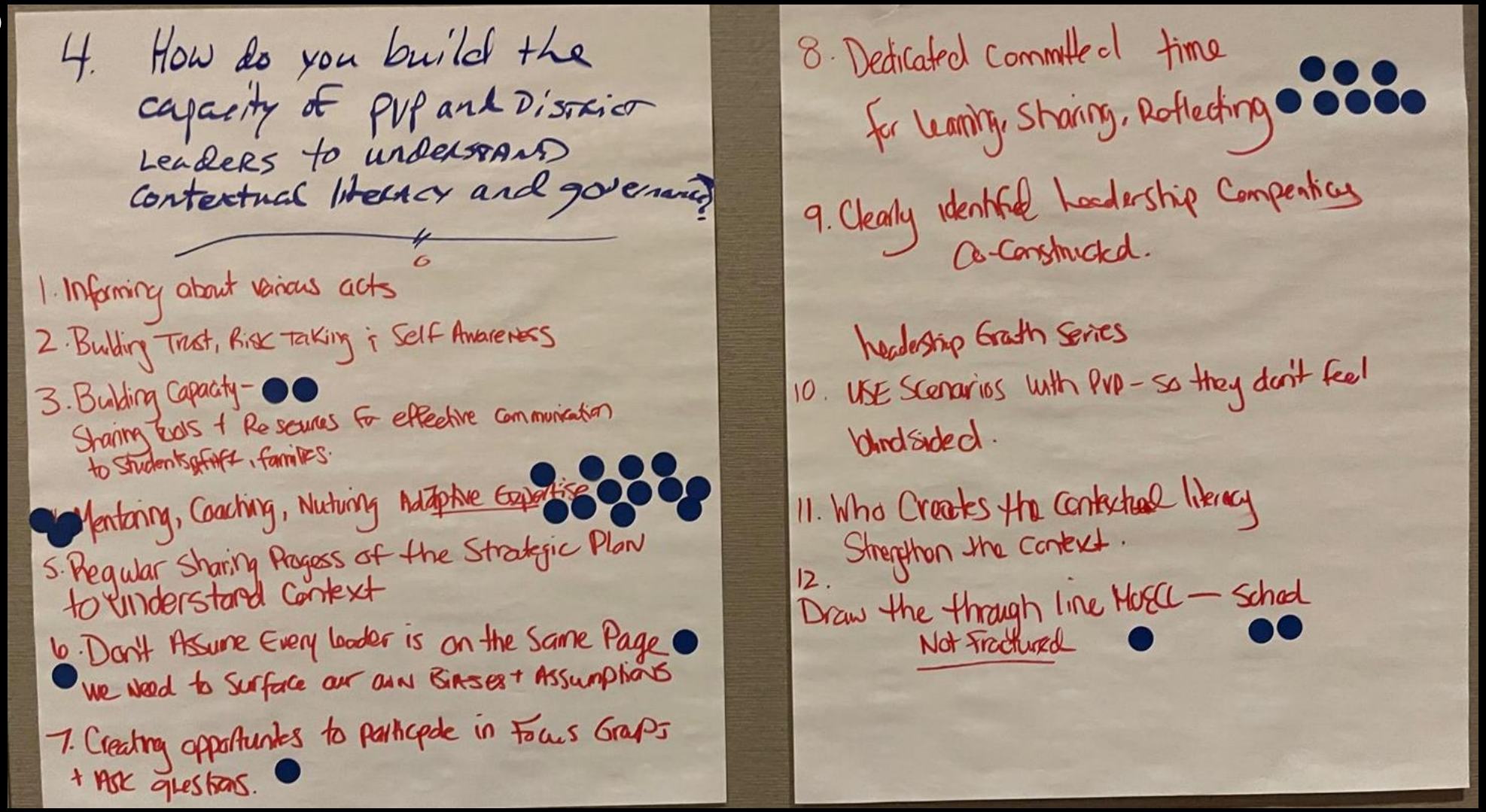
# 2. These narratives of polarization, what leadership challenges are they presenting for you either locally or regionally?



# 3. What are the top elements/relationships that define the context of your district and why/how do they define that context?



# 4. In what ways do you build the capacity of principals and vice-principals and district leaders to understand governance and contextual literacy in your district as a path to effective leadership?



# Next steps…

- What will happen with the evidence?
- BCSSA will use it to reflect on our leadership sessions and work, particularly for new to role
- Our Leadership Competencies Advisory group will see this process as valuable feedback
- The Member Services and Pro-D committee can use this info to inform their work
- This is more evidence, more insight, and we'll use it to refine

# The International Stage

- Governance and Context Matters
- What is our presence and what did we say at Qatar and the UN – on the Global Stage, what trends are emerging?

# The International Stage

- WISE-ALL-IN “Collaborative Leadership for the Transformation of Education” – Columbia, Qatar, the UN
- Current case studies: Qatar, British Columbia, Peru, New Zealand, India
- Peru – transforming relationships with students and focusing on student agency – truly involving them in the process of school and education operations, design and decisions
- India – Life Skills Collaborative – 200,000 voices – awareness, vision, collaboration – 2 areas: Social and Emotional Well Being, Future Readiness (11-18 years)

# The International Stage

- New Zealand – A New Vision for Education – (single school boards) – has led to competition. New laws, Boards combining and collaborating. Leaders who foster equity and who deconstruct current knowledge frameworks.
- Qatar – A focus on community engagement. “Education City” – schools, research facilities, physical health and well-being options all as part of an interconnected ecosystem. A new model pushing the boundaries of conventional education systems. Decentralized decision making.

John Abbott used to say: “if not in schools, then where?”

No pressure, but go forth and conquer

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