



## Community Voice

Getting your message out

# Elevator Speeches and Sound Bites

Some people seem to have a knack for thinking on their feet and providing immediate, clear and compelling responses to every question asked. Others walk away from a conversation and experience a Homer Simpson moment: they utter a “D’oh!”, slap themselves on the forehead, and think about all the things they **should** have said. But it may be something other than natural ability that separates these two groups. It may have more to do with anticipation and preparation. As a school trustee, one of the best ways to **get your message out** is to have at the ready a number of **elevator speeches and sound bites** that can be delivered whenever the opportunity arises—even during a 30-second elevator ride!

At one time or another, most school trustees have probably been asked the same questions. Why are you a school trustee? Why do we have school boards? Whatever happened to the 3 R’s? Why should I pay to educate other people’s kids? You can anticipate the questions, but have you thought much about your responses? If not, you should, and an elevator speech is a good place to start.

An elevator speech is a brief statement that captures important points on a topic. It conveys a simple, relatable and powerful message. An elevator speech is **not** the same as your division’s mission or vision statement—it’s more tangible, and depending on the question, may be somewhat personal.

The speech is short, not a laundry list of related facts. Think of it as the opening statement in a debate in which you are taking a definite position.

Elected school boards make for better schools. Everyone benefits from public education, so everyone should pay. Kids need more than reading, writing and arithmetic to succeed in today’s world. Your goal is to persuade people that **your** position is **their** position.

You want your elevator speech to resonate with your listener. Start with an understandable and jargon-free opening statement that immediately and clearly shows where you stand and what you believe. This is your **sound-bite**, that little nugget of information that will stick with someone, even if they happen to get off at the second rather than the twenty-second floor. From there, use anecdotes or stories to strengthen your message. You are trying to create a “wow” moment for your audience—as in “wow, I did not know that!”

Elevator speeches work well for explaining the fundamentals of public education and school board governance, and you should have them at the ready to respond to the most commonly asked questions. But they’re also a good tool to have at hand when you want to explain a school board decision, or provide information about an emerging issue. As a board, spend some time crafting your **elevator speeches and sound bites** at the same time you identify your key messages, and you’ll have the best chance at **getting your message out**.

