

Keep it in your pocket

A short speech about your schools

You're at the monthly meeting of your local Chamber, Rotary, Kiwanis, garden club or some other community group and the speaker doesn't show up or cancels at the last minute. If you had a few notes outlining key information about your schools (on a 3" x 5" card or single sheet of paper) in your pocket, wallet or purse, you'd be ready to step in at the last minute and present an interesting program. The program chair would breath a sigh of relief. And, you'd have an audience ready to listen to the good news about what's happening in your classrooms.

You don't have to wait for this kind of opportunity to put yourself or others from your school district on the speaking circuit. Many districts have speakers' bureaus comprised of faculty, administrators, other staff and board members who are available to talk with community groups about the district's as well as personal accomplishments, programs or areas of expertise. The speakers' bureaus circulate lists of available speakers and potential topics to community groups and generally find that many of the topics and/or speakers are in demand.

▶ School board members should be ready to talk about:

- ◆ The vision, values, mission, purpose and goals that shape your school district and how they relate to student achievement. Describe what you want your school district to become and how you will focus on student achievement as your top priority.
- ◆ The standards for student achievement in your district which are the targets for what you want your students to learn and to be able to do.
- ◆ The types of assessment being used to determine if you are reaching your goals for student achievement and the results of those measures.
- ◆ Accountability and how the board and staff are taking responsibility for the outcomes of decisions and actions, plus the role of the community in this process.
- ◆ How financial and human resources are being aligned to ensure a quality education program that meets students' needs.
- ◆ Steps the board has taken to assure a climate of safe and orderly classrooms where students can learn and teachers can teach, and one that supports the philosophy that all children can learn at high levels.
- ◆ Collaborative relationships between the schools and various groups from throughout your community in order to bring people together to solve common problems and to celebrate common successes.

(Over)

- ◆ How your board assures continuous improvement by questioning, examining, revising, refining and revisiting issues related to student achievement.
 - ◆ Student achievement – what the district does to measure it and the accomplishments of students.
 - ◆ What it's like to be a school board member – what you like best about the job, what you like least, a significant change you've helped make, the rewards you receive.
 - ◆ What it's like to visit a school in 2002. Verbally describe a classroom, a teacher and the students.
- ▣▣▣▣➤ If your district doesn't have a speakers' bureau, consider starting one, or at least look for opportunities to speak up and speak out as an advocate for the children you represent. Some talking points to have "in your pocket" might include:
- ◆ What state/national tests are given each year to students in which grades during what month of the year.
 - ◆ When and how results are reported.
 - ◆ How your students' scores compare with the state/national averages and scores from preceding years.
 - ◆ How results are being used to improve student achievement.
- ▣▣▣▣➤ Consider using the following sample speech. Fill in the blanks, change the words if you want, add a personal anecdote or two and you're ready to go.

Sample Speech

How many of you have children in the _____ schools? (*Pause to calculate what percent of people in the audience has raised their hands.*)
Looks like about _____ of you.

For those of you who didn't raise your hands, how long has it been since you've been in one of our schools? (If you know the people in the audience, single out three or four and ask them by name, "How long has it been, _____ *name* ?")

If you haven't seen our schools lately, you'd be amazed at the changes that have taken place since you were in school. Just ask those parents sitting near you. They'll tell you about the computers and other technologies our students are using for drill and to access more information than we found in any of the encyclopedias, printed or visual references we used. They'll tell you about the classrooms in our newer schools that are arranged around a common work area and how students work in learning groups and study teams as well as individually.

(More)

Our students are moving through mountains of information from all corners of the world at a pace we could only imagine or read about in science fiction when we were in school.

They live in a new world where the world we grew up in is ancient history. Think about it. Most of the students who graduate this year (2002) were born in 1984.

The only presidents they remember are Clinton and Bush – George Junior, not Senior.

They don't remember schools, or life, without computers and, by the time they entered high school, using the Internet was routine.

The expression "You sound like a broken record" means nothing to them. To them record players and 8-track tapes are antiques. They live in a world of compact disks and MTV.

They've probably never seen TV sets that only receive 13 channels, or watched television in black and white. They've always had cable. They've always had VCRs. And, few of them can imagine operating either the TV or VCR without a remote control.

They're too young to remember the space shuttle blowing up. Tiananmen Square means nothing to them. The Persian Gulf War is as ancient history to them as the Vietnam War, WWII, WWI and the Civil War. They have never feared a nuclear war. But they have watched airplanes being used as weapons to destroy the World Trade Center towers and instantly kill thousands of ordinary people just like them. And that event has changed their lives.

Communication is as essential to them as their music and MTV. While they may spend hours on the telephone using phones they take with them everywhere they go, they've also rediscovered letter writing. But these letters are sent via e-mail or used in chat rooms to instantly communicate with friends next door or around the world.

The difference today between the "haves" and the "have nots" is not only what a youngster's home is like or whether that child receives free or reduced-price lunches, but whether he or she has a computer, Internet access and digital cable.

(Over)

So what do all these changes mean? Are we still teaching reading, writing and arithmetic? You bet we are. We're combining technology with excellent teaching and getting good results. Our students in grades _____ score _____ on state tests. The latest Scholastic Aptitude Tests show high school students are _____ .

Come visit us to see how we are preparing students to enter today's world of work or to continue their education – where change and keeping up will always be the challenge.