DIGITAL BACKGROUND CHECK

A "digital reputation"—the entirety of one's online behavior—is often today's first impression. Every Snap, TikTok, DM, and comment, even if deleted, can shape what others think of us. Colleges, coaches, employers, and even AI bots, are watching us today. For young people, this can have a huge impact (both positively and negatively) upon their future endeavors. Since this is a difficult concept for youth just starting to use digital tools to grasp, this lesson helps them see the possible consequences of posting questionable content online. This very important lesson may take a couple of class meetings to complete.

KEY STANDARDS

ISTE Standards: Digital Citizen (1.2.a, b).
CASEL Competencies: Social Awareness (3.a), Relationship Skills (4.a, b, d), Responsible Decision-making (5.a, d, 5e).
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY: 5th: RF.5.4, W.5.4, W.5.9, SL.5.1, SL.5.2, SL.5.4, L.5.4, L.5.6; 6th: RI.6.1, RI.6.2, RI.6.3, RI.6.4, RI.6.7, W.6.4, SL.6.1, SL.6.2, SL.6.3, SL.6.4, L.6.4, L.6.6.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will….

- ✓ Learn they have, or will have, an online or digital reputation.
- ✓ Understand that all of their online activities contribute to their digital reputation.
- ✓ Know that online information can be searched; copied and shared; seen by a large, invisible audience; and never goes away.

INTRODUCING THE LESSON

Tell students that a "reputation" is "the judged opinion that people in general hold towards something or someone." Then ask: Have you ever heard this phrase before and what do you think it means: "*Your reputation precedes you*"?

Explain that this means people learn things about others before they ever even meet them!

Screen [Video 1] to explain further.

THE LESSON

1. Let students know that in today's lesson, they'll explore how important a "digital reputation" is. Explain that this is "a collection of everything you do online—what you post, what others post about you, and more!"

2. Anything we post online—whether it's a photo, comment, video, or anything else (good and bad!)—can be searched for by others, copied and reshared, viewed by large, often invisible audiences, and it never really goes away (even if you delete it!).

3. To help students understand the real-world consequences of posting regrettable things online, tell them about a few true examples where online behavior had a major impact on young people's lives:

    - A high school athlete lost a scholarship to Marquette University after a screenshot from Snapchat surfaced showing her using offensive language (learn more).

    - Another high school student in Louisiana was removed as student body president and lost college scholarship offers after a video of her dancing inappropriately at a party spread on social media (learn more).

    - Ten students who got into Harvard University lost their spots when the school found out they had shared inappropriate and offensive messages in a private Facebook group (learn more).

4. Tell students that although these are extreme examples, for all of us what we post online can shape how others see us. Whether someone is applying to their dream college, trying to get their first job, making a new friend, or even attempting to get noticed for being an awesome influencer, it's likely their online activities will be taken into account. In other words, every Snap, TikTok, DM, and comment—even if deleted—can shape their digital reputation.

5. To help students understand this, tell them they'll be role-playing. By imagining to be college admissions officers (people who decide which students get accepted into a university), they'll get to decide which of two final candidates should receive a full college scholarship.

    Let them know that their decision will be based not on grades or test scores, but on each candidate's digital background. Just like in real life, many colleges now check applicants' digital activities before making big decisions, especially when a major scholarship is on the line. Emphasize that colleges, just like individuals, have reputations to protect. So they're cautious about admitting students whose online behavior might reflect poorly on the school.

ACTIVITY

Divide students into groups of 3-4. Show (or print and distribute the Student Packet) the digital background data gathered about both candidates. Review and discuss this information together.

Each group should carefully review each candidate's digital background and then complete the analysis worksheet. Instruct students to make their decision based on each candidate's "honesty, maturity, and moral character" (explain this is the same criteria universities like Harvard use). When finished, groups should report which candidate they selected, if either, and explain how they arrived at their decision.

Afterwards, explain that neither candidate will receive the scholarship due to too many concerns about their digital reputation (chances are your students will have come up with this conclusion on their own). But there is more to this lesson in part 2.

ACTIVITY, PART TWO

The next step is to challenge the conclusions and assumptions students may have made about each candidate. For example:

- Did they assume David hacked into his school's computer? (Point out that the article referred to a "Dave" Downing who was on the school's lacrosse team, not a soccer player named "David" Downing. Explain that at big high schools, students sometimes share the same last name. You may also want to explain what the word "allegedly" means!)

- Did they think it was unfair to judge David for liking and commenting on someone else's post? (Explain that today, even our comments and likes can contribute to our digital reputations, especially as new technologies, like artificial intelligence, can quickly scan a person's digital background—including comments, likes, and even deleted posts—to form a "risk profile." This is why digital reputations matter more than ever.)

- Were they concerned that Sarah's name was not included in the Honor Roll on her school's website? (Ask students: *Do you think every school regularly updates their website? Is it possible that the person responsible for the website just hadn't gotten around to updating it yet?*)

- Did they think poorly of Sarah because "Cee-Jay" posted a comment claiming Sarah copied her recipe and her photo? Were they concerned about the bad review Sarah received from an anonymous person on the tutoring website? (Discuss: We don't really know who each of these people are. Ask: *Could "Cee-Jay" be a competing food blogger wanting to make Sarah look bad? Could the anonymous person be a competing tutor?*)

(Activity inspired by Our Space: Being a Responsible Citizen of the Digital World and Common Sense Media's Trillion Dollar Footprint lessons.)

ACTIVITY, continued

Explain that while the decision not to select either candidate based solely on information found online might seem unfair, unfortunately these types of judgments about people are made every single day.

Ask students what they learned in this lesson. Then review:

- It's important not to jump to conclusions when viewing online information, because information on the Internet is not always completely accurate or even true!
- Still, others might make judgments about you based on what they find online.
- Although you may not be able to entirely control what others post about you, you can and should make wise decisions about what you post about yourself.

Important Note: The posts that follow are not meant to be viewed as "good" or "bad." They are a fairly typical representation of the kinds of things youth might post. Remember, the purpose of this lesson is to allow students to imagine what others might think and what sort of impression they might form about a young person based on what they see online.

GOAL

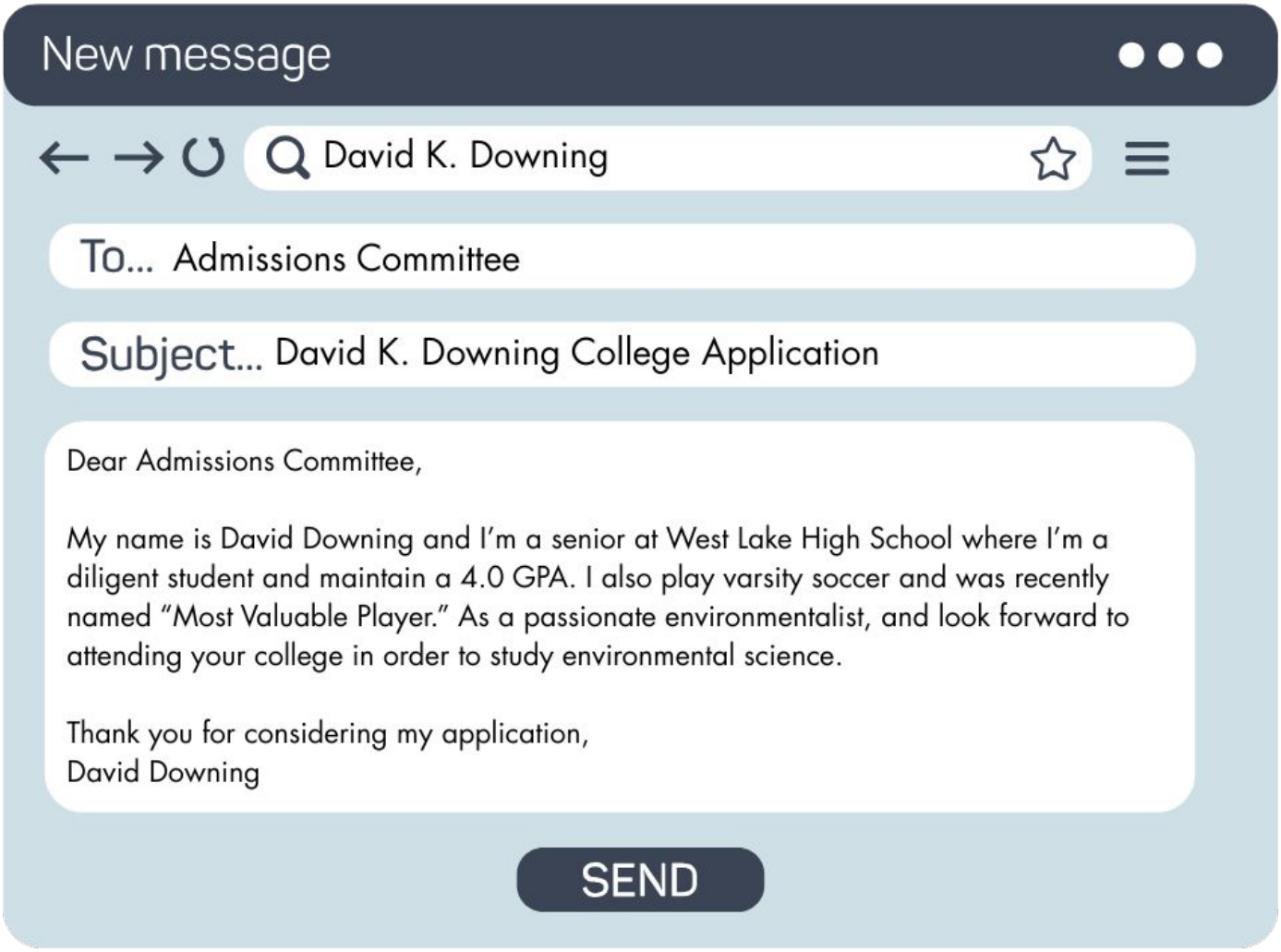
Students understand the importance of a digital reputation.

(Activity inspired by Our Space: Being a Responsible Citizen of the Digital World and Common Sense Media's Trillion Dollar Footprint lessons.)

FOR STUDENT:

DIGITAL BACKGROUND CHECK

Candidate #1: Email to Admissions Office



Candidate #1: Digital Background

A web search found candidate's name mentioned in an online newspaper article.

West Lake News

Home News Sports Community Opinion Obituaries About

4 West Lake High School Students Allegedly Hack Into School Computer

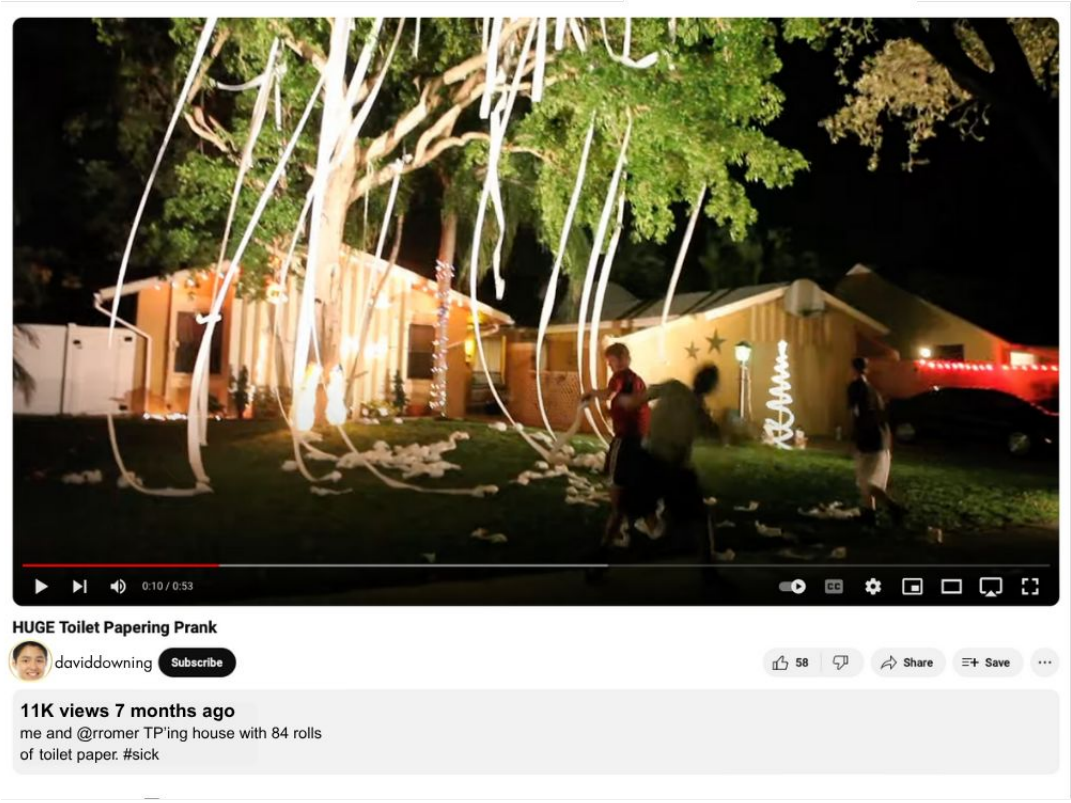
On Wednesday, four West Lake High School seniors, Mike Hutch, Dave Downing, Kevin Albright, and Sam Miller, allegedly "hacked" into the school's main computer system in order to access and download an A.P. Biology test due to be given the next day. According to school spokesperson, Richard Covey, the hack happened around 11 p.m. All four boys, members of the school's lacrosse team, have been placed on suspension pending a full investigation.

Candidate liked and commented on a controversial post in which an activist damaged artwork in an effort to draw attention to environmental issues.

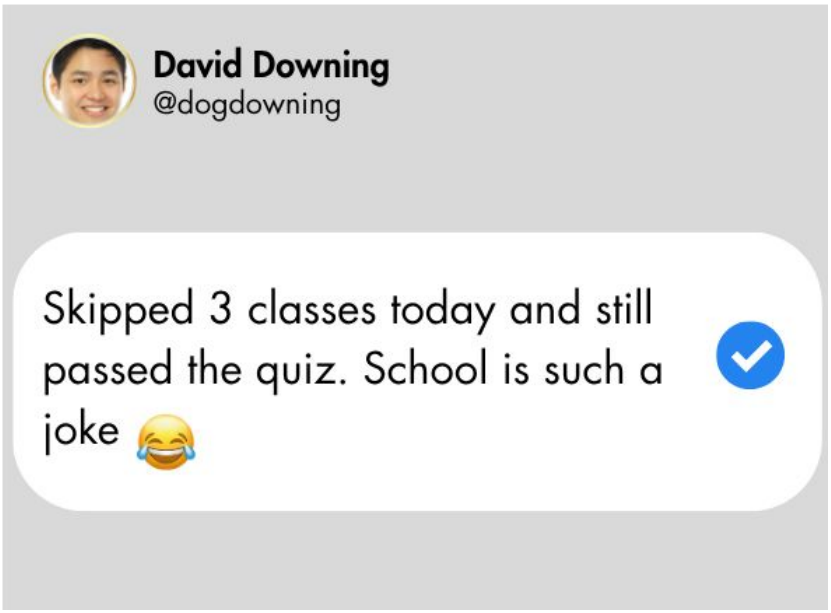
Liked by DavidDowning and 187 others

savetheplanet Threw paint on this today to draw attention to environmental issues #stopglobalwarming #lovetheplanet
DavidDowning Whatever it takes!!!

Candidate posted a video that shows him and a friend toilet papering a house.



Candidate posted this on social media.



In a chat on a popular server, classmates discuss David. Chat was shared by the group on other social media apps.

📚 #science-group-chat

astro_girl101 [4:22 PM]:
ugh I'm not doing all the slides again 😕 David didn't even show up last time

skaterboy88 [4:22 PM]:
we should just tell Ms. R that he didn't help

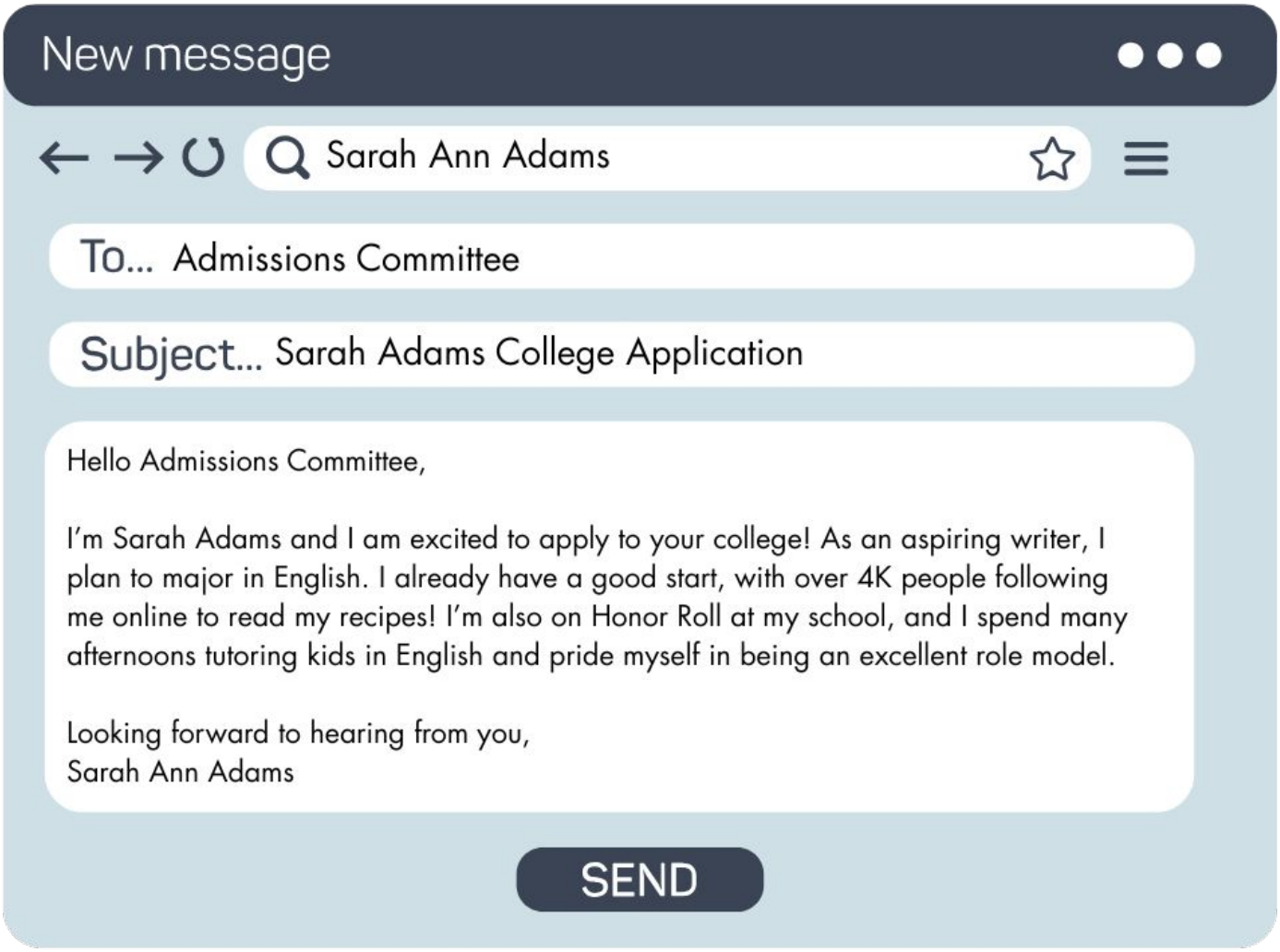
data_dave12 [4:23 PM]:
yo chill lol. he said he had soccer tryouts 😒

astro_girl101 [4:23 PM]:
still. not an excuse. This is worth 20% of our grade 😤

skaterboy88 [4:24 PM]:
ok but let's not make drama I'll do the intro slide. Can someone do conclusion?

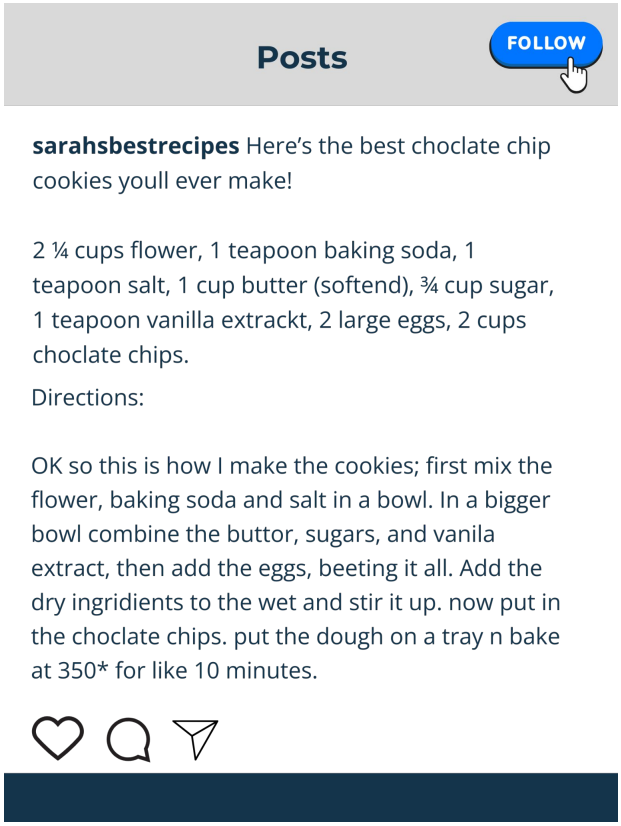
data_dave12 [4:25 PM]:
I got it.

Candidate #2: Email to Admissions Office



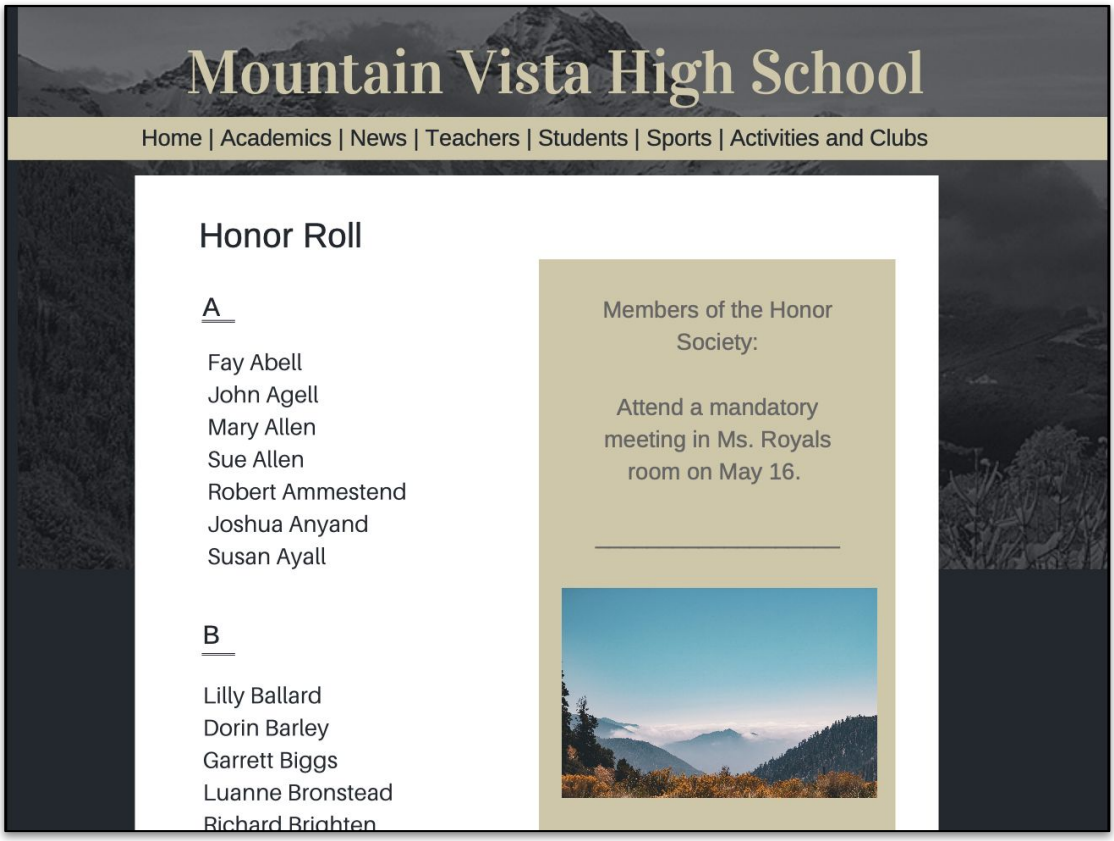
Candidate #2: Digital Background

Candidate posted a recipe on her popular “sarahsbestrecipes” account.

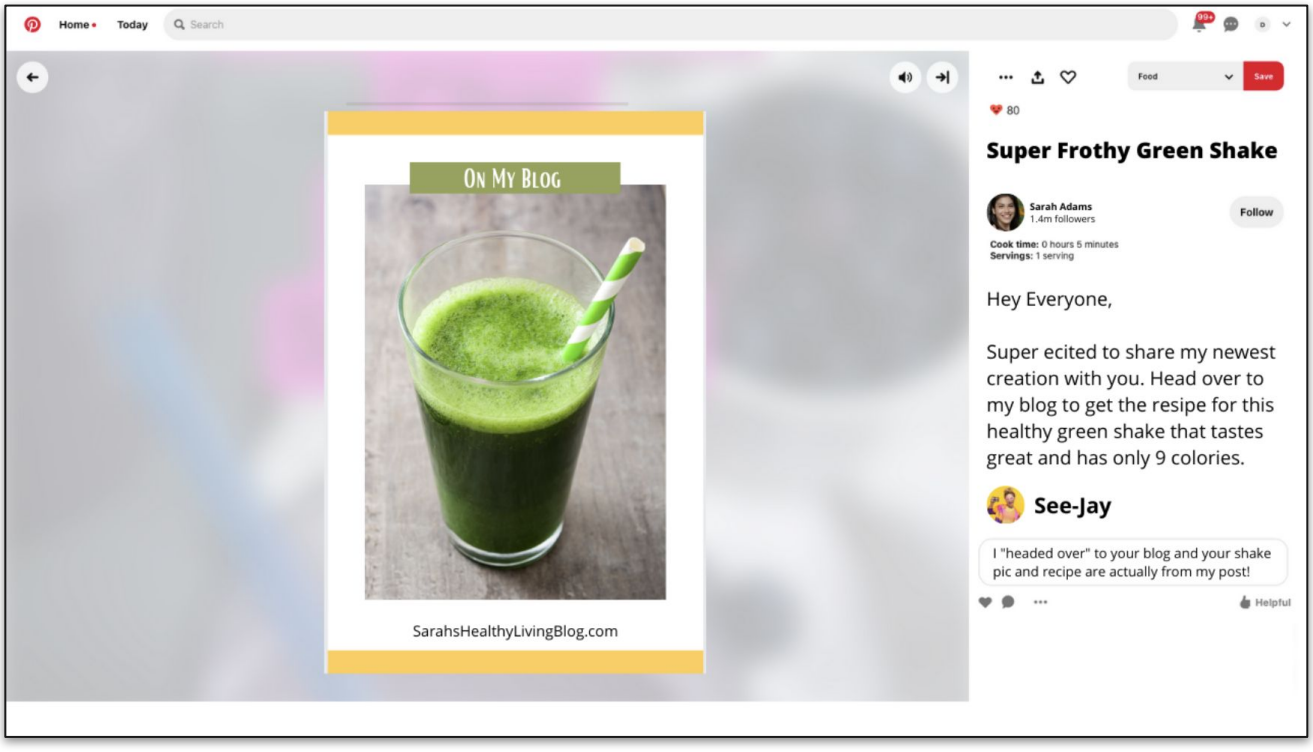


Candidate posted this on a social media account.

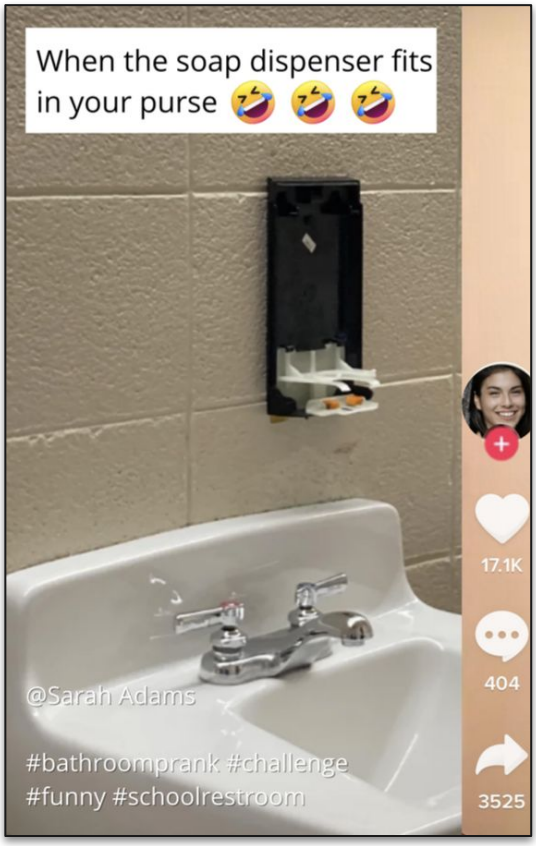
The candidate's school website shows students on the Honor Roll.



Candidate shared an image from one of her recipes. Note comment.



Candidate posted about participating in a viral challenge.



An anonymous review about the candidate on the Tutors.com website.

Tutors.com

Sarah Adams
Availability: 12 hrs./wk. Sat., Sun., Tue., Thurs.
Cost per Lesson: 4 tokens
Subjects: English
Overall Rating (12 ratings): ★★★

Promptness	Teaching Ability	Attitude
★★	★★	★★★★

Reviews

Although very friendly and outgoing, Sarah was consistently late for her tutoring sessions with our daughter, Amy. When she finally did arrive, she was often unprepared even though we had carefully explained the tutoring help Amy needed.

Your Name(s): _____

"DIGITAL BACKGROUND CHECK" ANALYSIS WORKSHEET

1. What inconsistencies did you find between Candidate #1's letter and his digital reputation?

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. What inconsistencies did you find between Candidate #2's letter and her digital reputation?

_____

_____

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_____

3. Which candidate would you like to award the scholarship to (*based on their honesty, maturity, and moral character?*).

_____

4. Explain why:

_____

_____

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