Who's behind this information? Saturday School

*For this assignment, it is encouraged that you work with someone else to brainstorm and discuss the ideas. It can be a parent, sibling, friend, or classmate.*

**The Problem:** The internet makes it possible for anyone to publish online, making a wide variety of sources readily available. This can be a strength of the internet, but it also means that we must learn to investigate who is behind information and whether we trust that source. Otherwise, we risk being duped.

**This lesson** will introduce you to the importance of considering who is behind information. As you read arguments about mandatory Saturday school, you will practice investigating who is behind information and how the source’s motivations could affect what is presented.

**Learning Goal:** The skills you gain by practicing this activity will help you navigate the internet throughout your life, especially relating to big issues that affect the world. How do you know what information to trust, or not?

**Background:** Imagine that our school is thinking about starting a new policy—mandatory Saturday school for everyone. That means that all students would go to school Monday through Saturday; Sunday would be our only day off from school. The school board wants to hear from students about their opinions on the proposed policy. When you share your opinion with the board, you want to make sure that you have sources and evidence to support it.

**Brainstorm:** What kinds of sources could we use to help us answer the question of whether there should be mandatory Saturday school?

*Unhighlight to see some ideas:*

- news articles, research studies, interviews, surveys, etc.
- sources (e.g., school districts that have tried mandatory Saturday school, teachers, parents, students, or other community members)

**Instructions:**
Examine the sources below and answer the Guiding Questions that correspond with each one.
Source A

The Project for More Learning is an organization that advocates for extended learning time. The following Tweets appeared on their Twitter page.

Project for More Learning
@ProjectforMore1
Funding provided by the National School Lunch Provider’s Association 😊 All research and opinions are own 😁
Joined August 2019

Project for More Learning
@ProjectforMore1
We strongly support the growing movement for mandatory Saturday school. Our young people deserve the best public education possible. By committing an additional day of school every week, we move closer to delivering that excellent education.
1:57 PM - 30 Aug 2019

Project for More Learning
@ProjectforMore1 · 14m
Research shows that young people forget a great deal of content every weekend — by making Saturday school mandatory, we can reduce the amount they forget by 50% and ensure that they learn far more each year of school.

Project for More Learning
@ProjectforMore1 · 14m
Join us in supporting nationwide, mandatory Saturday school!
Guiding Questions
Who is behind this information?

Directions: Read the source and answer the questions below.

Source A

1. What argument does this source make about Saturday school?
   
   Argument: What are they trying to convince us to believe or support? What information or evidence are they using to try to persuade us about this?

2. What qualifications or expertise does this source have on the topic of Saturday school? Explain.
   
   qualifications or expertise: What makes them an authority, or gives them some valid perspective or experience on this subject?

3. Why might the source want to make this argument about Saturday school? (Remember that there can be multiple motivations!)
   
   What could they gain if their efforts are successful? Who benefits, and how?

4. Overall, how much do you trust this as a source about whether there should be mandatory Saturday school?
Source B

The Community Sports Alliance is a local organization that coordinates all the community sports that share fields and venues. Its members include local football, basketball, volleyball, soccer, track & field, swimming, and water polo clubs. The following message was posted by the current president of the Alliance on the Alliance’s Facebook group page.

I just heard that the school district is considering making Saturday school mandatory for everyone. As the president of the Community Sports Alliance, I am incredibly worried about this proposal and I’m writing to ask you to join me in opposing it.

As you probably know, the vast majority of our games, matches, and meets—across sports—happen on Saturdays. Yes, we play on weeknights and sometimes on Sundays, but Saturdays are by far the most popular game time and the easiest time to schedule. If Saturday school became mandatory for everyone in the district, I’m not sure our league could survive.

Please consider joining me in opposing mandatory Saturday school.
Source B

1. What argument does this source make about Saturday school?

2. What qualifications or expertise does this source have on the topic of Saturday school? Explain.

3. Why might the source want to make this argument about Saturday school? (Remember that there can be multiple motivations!)

4. Overall, how much do you trust this as a source about whether we should have mandatory Saturday school?
Dr. Turner is a Professor of Education at a local university. She posted the following on her personal blog.

THOUGHTS ON PISA

We must find ways to help our students learn more. PISA (the Program for International Student Assessment) results for 2015 were released last week, and they showed that, once again, American students are lagging behind many countries in the world. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, which runs PISA, the scores of American students stayed about the same as they were the last time the test was administered (in 2012) in science and reading, and the scores got worse in math. Our average scores across all three subject areas are lower than countries including Canada, Estonia, Finland, Germany, China, Ireland, Japan, New Zealand, Korea, Singapore, and Slovenia.

I'm not sure what the best solution to this is—perhaps we should invest in teacher education and support; perhaps we should extend the school day or institute mandatory Saturday school so students have more learning time in class; perhaps we need to radically change how we're teaching. Or perhaps we need to do all of these things.
Source C

1. What argument does this source make about Saturday school?

2. What qualifications or expertise does this source have on the topic of Saturday school? Explain.

3. Why might the source want to make this argument about Saturday school? (Remember that there can be multiple motivations!)

4. Overall, how much do you trust this as a source about whether we should have mandatory Saturday school?
Debrief & Reflect

a. Reminder to students: Although you may not be able to say anything definitive about the sources’ expertise, qualifications, or motivations, it’s possible to formulate hypotheses based on the available information. Important points that should come up in your work for each source include:

i. Source A:
   1. Although the Project for More Learning might sound official, we don’t know anything about the organization.
   2. We can see underneath their profile picture on their account page that they received funding for this campaign from the National School Lunch Provider’s Association. This group’s potential motivation in supporting mandatory Saturday school is profit: Schools that mandate classes on Saturdays must also provide lunch. School lunch providers would have an extra day of business each week.
   3. Although this source might still include credible evidence, this profit motivation must be considered.
      a. When in doubt, follow the money.
      b. Did they cite their sources of evidence so we can check it for ourselves?

ii. Source B:
   1. The director of the sports alliance also has a stake in the Saturday school debate: If mandatory Saturday school was instituted, it would be much harder for his organization to schedule games.
   2. However, this is a local organization that is making a legitimate point about the effects of mandatory Saturday school on sports.
   3. Importantly, the author is in a position of authority to make the claims that he makes—he notes the effect that Saturday school would have on the sports league and avoids making other arguments about Saturday school.

iii. Source C:
   1. A professor of education at a local university is likely to be a trusted authority on issues of schooling. However, we don’t know whether this individual is a particular expert on Saturday school.
   2. She focuses her argument on scores from an international test, which she seems to be in a position to know and report accurately.
3. However, her argument about Saturday school is not made strongly. She suggests that it is a possible way to increase scores, but does not offer any evidence that Saturday school would result in better test scores.
4. She also ignores the social-emotional wellbeing of students who may experience high stress & anxiety from a 6th day of school without enough downtime in between to relax. This could actually harm students’ academic success.

b. Questions for discussion include:
   i. Even though we read three different sources, what was similar about our evaluations of them?
      1. Push students to consider the importance of the underlying sources and their motivations for providing the information or making the arguments they did. The opposing arguments made by sources A and B can ultimately be understood only when you consider who is behind the information.

   ii. None of these sources is perfect, but how would you rank the trustworthiness of the three sources?
      1. Elicit different students’ rankings of the trustworthiness of the sources. Prompt students to consider the source and their potential conflicts of interest. Students may struggle to see the difference between the biases of Source A and Source B. Help students consider that while Source B has a vested interest in the topic, it still presents a community member’s legitimate worry about a consequence of Saturday school. Source A, on the other hand, is written by an organization with less of a stake in the community and may be driven primarily by profits rather than a concern for what is best for students.

   iii. What additional sources might you trust more?
      1. As students share ideas, push them to explain specifically why that source would be more trustworthy.
      2. Students may be tempted to try to think of only “neutral” sources. Help them to think about considering other sources, even if they do have an interest in the issue. When we’re dealing with policies like mandatory Saturday school, lots of people are going to have strong opinions. That does not make the sources they produce useless.

   iv. Why should we care so much about the source?
1. Help students recognize that the source of information matters and information is always influenced by its source. None of these sources was completely untrustworthy, but we do have to understand how their perspectives and arguments are related.

c. Other points to underscore over the course of the discussion include:
   i. Different sources have a wide range of motivations, like making money, creating policy change, entertaining, or just expressing themselves.
   ii. In this scenario, figuring out who is behind the information was relatively straightforward. That’s not always true online. Sources may try to misrepresent themselves or their motivations may be complicated.

2. Review key questions for “Who is behind this information?” You may have asked many of these questions quite naturally over the course of the activity.
   ● Who is behind the information?
     o Where is their funding from?
     o What is their mission or perspective?
     o What might their motivations be for presenting this information?