



THE RISE OF SOCIAL MEDIA STUDENT CHALLENGES **Devious Licks & Teacher Assaults**

By Stephen Cerro M.S., CPSI, ARM, WSI Risk Control Coordinator

Each month TikTok users issue a challenge aimed primarily at students. In **September**, you may have heard of “Devious Licks” or “Licks” as a challenge trend most common in middle and high school with some incidents in higher education, recently. Before the internet and cellphones, such behavior was less likely to trend, and/or the speed of the trend was often sporadic or very slow.

The Urban Dictionary describes a “Lick” as a successful type of theft that results in an acceptable, impressive, and rewarding payday for the protagonist. The reward being simply to be part of TikTok and to be noticed.

The trend began when a video was placed on TikTok (now removed because it “violates community guidelines”) showing a user removing a box of face masks from his backpack indicating that he stole them from his school stating – “A month into school absolutely devious lick. Should’ve brought a mask.”

This video was viewed at least 239,000 times in one week. Another video from another TikTok user showing that he walked off with a hand sanitizer dispenser. He got 7.2 million views.

The list of items stolen includes soap and hand sanitizer dispensers, toilet paper, animals, clocks, face masks, projectors, urinals, microscopes, action figures, paper towel dispensers, plastic spoons, paper clips, ceiling tiles, and more. The results of this challenge have been theft and vandalism. Some items such as bathroom sinks have been knocked off of the wall causing damage to the fixtures but also major damage from the flowing water.

This month, **October**, the new challenge is to slap a teacher and run away before you get caught. We’ve already noticed the trend where teachers have been slapped on their backside and head. Some school employees have heard about this challenge and responded on social media that they will defend themselves and harm those trying to carry out this challenge. School employees need to be reminded to address student behavior in a professional manner and without violence.

Future challenges have already been communicated and include kissing someone else's girlfriend, destroying school signs, and hurting a female. TikTok calls these types of challenges “an insult to educators” and stated that ‘any such content that shows up on their site will be removed.’

What can be done to dissolve these disruptive, negative, and potentially dangerous trends? Of course, there is always the threat of arrest and school discipline and we know that some schools have banned the use of cellphones and sent warning letters to parents to help control the behavior.

We also know that engaging with students throughout the day beginning with the welcoming atmosphere of the school bus and/or as students enter school each day in the morning is very important. It gives them a sense of belonging, of ownership, of care for a place that pays attention to them and treats them well.

These types of social media challenges will likely continue to add difficulties for schools. The best advice is to try to stay ahead of them (have someone responsible for social media threats to their school), remain vigilant, and prepare employees against whatever the latest challenge is reminding them of the Code of Conduct. Communication with the students and parents is key. Parents should be aware that they could be held responsible for vandalism caused by their children. And the students should also understand disciplinary actions meted out by the school should they be found guilty, for damage or theft of property or inappropriate behavior to staff or fellow students.

Social media affecting the school environment is here to stay and unless cultural and political pressure is put on the companies to better regulate hurtful and damaging posts, it will continue to mutate to new forms of negativity. Schools need to be aware of and prepare for social media extremism to protect the health and safety of the school community.