



*"I learned that you can't always trust the information you see because sometimes the information can be fake. I also learned not to share every story that I see online because I could be part of the fake news."*

— 10<sup>th</sup> Grade Student, Media Studies Class, Bremen High School, Midlothian, Ill.

## Initial Checkology® Assessment Results, Fall 2017

The News Literacy Project (NLP) is an innovative educational program that equips middle school and high school students with the tools to be smart, active consumers of news and information and engaged, informed participants in civic life. NLP's Checkology virtual classroom is an immersive resource through which students learn how to navigate today's challenging information landscape by mastering the core skills and concepts of news literacy. The platform equips students with the tools to interpret the news and information that shape their lives so they can make informed decisions about what to believe, share and act on.

As students progress through the platform, journalists from The New York Times, The Washington Post, BuzzFeed News, NBC News and other news outlets are joined by experts on the First Amendment and digital media to guide them through each lesson's core concepts. These e-learning experiences use real-world examples of news and information to test students' emerging skills and move them toward mastery.

Basic access to the platform gives teachers the ability to present the lessons in a one-to-many format. Premium access unlocks a number of features, including individual student logins, self-pacing, blended and experiential learning, personalization, rich formative assessment, remediation, student challenges, points and digital badges as incentives and rewards for engagement and the application of new skills, and a class discussion area.

For the fall 2017 semester, teachers were able to register for Premium access at no charge, and NLP commissioned a robust assessment of Checkology from Anita M. Baker, Ed.D., at Evaluation Services in Lambertville, New Jersey, to help determine student outcomes and to inform continued development of the platform.

### Summary of Key Findings

Results were clearly positive for students who participated in the Checkology virtual classroom and completed assessments. Students achieved outcomes similar to those verified for NLP classroom and digital unit participants.

### Students learned important information about the First Amendment ,news and journalism practices. For example:

- On the pre-platform assessment, only 34% of Checkology students could correctly identify freedoms protected by the First Amendment; about twice as many (67%) could do so on the post-platform assessment.
- After participating in the Checkology virtual classroom, there were large increases in the proportion of students who were aware of the watchdog role of investigative journalism: A total of 69% on the post-platform assessment, compared with 54% on the pre-platform assessment, recognized that investigative journalists often protect the interests of ordinary citizens.
- Those who recognized the importance of journalists doing everything they can to minimize bias increased by 20 percentage points (from 68% on the pre-platform assessment to 88% on the post-platform assessment).



**Students also changed their attitudes about the importance of a free press.** On the pre-platform assessment, 75% of students thought that having a free press *is important/very important*, on the post-platform assessment, 92% of students thought that having a free press *is important/very important* (including 55% who thought it *is very important*) – a 17-percentage-point change.

**Checkology students became more aware of the importance of checking information sources.**

- There was a sizable (19-point) increase in the percentage of responding students who think that it is always important to check whether the information they share on social media is true: from 44% on the pre-platform assessment to 63% on the post-platform assessment.
- There was also a large (24-point) increase in the percentage of responding students who think that algorithms help people find information they are looking for but can also have negative effects: from 37% on the pre-platform assessment to 61% on the post-platform assessment
- On the pre-platform assessment, about 54% of Checkology students were confident in explaining why viral rumors spread; on the post-platform assessment, 70% expressed that confidence. More students also expressed increased confidence regarding ability to explain newsworthiness and to determine bias.

**Students learned to identify trustworthy news sources.**

- Given two actual online news articles to review, most respondents could identify the article that was more credible (65% on the post-platform assessment compared to 58% on the pre-platform assessment).
- Most respondents (81%) could describe strategies for identifying credible (accurate and reliable) information to which they could turn to find out about current events.
- Most Checkology student respondents could distinguish trustworthy news sources. A total of 93% found local news organizations trustworthy, 83% found information from national mainstream news organizations trustworthy, 75% found information from 24-hour television news channels trustworthy, but only 14% found information on social sharing sites trustworthy. Many Checkology student respondents learned to discern advertisements from actual news content.

**Student Feedback**

As shown in the figure at right, 94% of middle school respondents and 83% of high school-level respondents reported that Checkology was *somewhat or extremely useful*.

