

BACK-TO-SCHOOL EDITION

New principal? Same old gift card scam.

Every August, scammers read the 'welcome our new staff' posts, then pose as the principal to new hires who don't know anyone's voice or number yet. A real school leader will never ask you to buy gift cards.



Gift cards are for gifts

No principal, superintendent or PTO president will ask you to buy gift cards, send photos of the backs or keep it quiet. If anyone does, stop. That one request is the whole scam.



Check through a route you already trust

Odd request from a leader? Don't reply to the message. Walk down the hall, call the main office or use the number in the staff directory. Ten seconds of checking beats a \$500 receipt.



Welcome new folks with a heads-up

Mentors and grade-level leads: tell new hires about this scam on day one, before the first fake message arrives. It's the friendliest security training there is.



If the 'principal' wants gift cards, that request belongs in the bowl.



Spot the scam



Dr. M. Whitfield
(Principal)

Direct message from a profile created this week

Social media message

Hi, welcome to our school family. I saw your intro post. I'm stuck in a district meeting and need a quick favor before 3 pm. Please pick up six \$100 gift cards for a staff surprise and send me photos of the backs. I'll pay you back Friday. Keep this between us so the surprise isn't spoiled. Thanks, Dr. Whitfield

Spot the scam: how many red flags can you find?

Red flags I found: ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Look for: surprise, urgency, secrecy, an unusual payment method, a sender or link you can't confirm.

FUN FACT

In 2025, people reported more than 1 million imposter scams to the FTC, with more than \$3.5 billion lost. Pretending to be someone you trust was the most-reported type of fraud.

Source: FTC: FTC Testifies Before Joint Economic Committee on Agency's Efforts to Combat Fraud (March 2026)



Your 60-second move

Save your principal's and front office's real numbers in your phone today, clearly labeled, so you can check a strange request in seconds.



Who do I tell?

Name / ext. _____

Report channel _____

- Five flags: the meeting excuse, the 3 pm deadline, the gift cards, the photo request and the secrecy. Safe move: don't reply. Call the front office or your principal using the staff directory, then report the profile to your technology team and to the platform. Nobody gets in trouble for checking.
- 'Stuck in a meeting' is the excuse for why you can't call to check.
- A tight deadline keeps you from thinking it through.
- Gift cards are a favorite scam payment because they are fast and hard to reverse.
- A photo of the card back hands over the money instantly.
- Secrecy is the opposite of how real school purchases work.

ANSWER



Scan for a 2-minute lesson on spotting fake school messages

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