



NEWS RELEASE

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Cyber Attack Exercise Helps Prepare Nebraska Schools

More than 170 school leaders including superintendents, principals, IT directors, teachers and staff from Nebraska K-12 schools, ESU's and the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) participated in a tabletop exercise to help public and non-public K-12 schools build awareness, preparedness, understanding and resilience towards cyber threats to our schools.

Supported by representatives of the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security (CISA) agency, the Nebraska State Patrol, The Nebraska Information Analysis Center (NIAC), the Omaha FBI Cyber Crimes Team, the Office of the State of Nebraska CIO (OCIO) and the Educational Service Unit Coordinating Council (ESUCC) and ESU's across the state, the exercise was hosted at the NDE office building. The event was led by NDE's Information Systems Officer Chris Wlaschin and broadcast to all ESU's and participants in every corner of the state.

"This exercise brings together educational leaders, cybersecurity professionals, and public safety partners from across Nebraska for an important purpose: ensuring that our schools are prepared to withstand and recover from cyber threats that continue to grow in frequency and sophistication," said Commissioner of Education Dr. Brian Maher.

This first-of-its-kind event for K-12 schools in Nebraska guided participants in two challenging but realistic scenarios over 3 hours involving a widespread phishing attack followed by a ransomware demand to unlock stolen student information. The scenarios called on school and district leaders to collaborate on issues such as cyber preparedness, incident response, communications with the public, and restoration of services.

"As we continue to attract and retain teachers and accelerate student achievement across Nebraska, we must remember that cybersecurity is not merely a technology issue," said State of Nebraska Deputy CIO and Chief Information Security Officer Bryce Bailey. "It is a matter of trust. Technology alone cannot protect our schools. Cybersecurity succeeds when people make informed decisions, remain vigilant, and work together. Every educator, administrator, and partner has a role in safeguarding the information entrusted to us."

The exercise concluded with a call to action for school personnel to review incident response plans, conduct local training, and reach out to NDE and the ESU's for expertise and resources to ensure school personnel are ready to defend against cyber-attacks. In conjunction with this tabletop exercise, school personnel are also being asked to complete a cyber readiness assessment directed by LB937 which passed the state legislature earlier this year to create a cybersecurity program for K-12 schools. This readiness assessment will guide legislative efforts to enhance and support cybersecurity preparedness for all Nebraska K-12 schools going forward.

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