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Preparedness for the Inevitable Cyberattack – Cybersecurity for School Districts

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Practice Area: School Law

You may be aware from national and state headlines that there has been a rash of recent cybersecurity and ransomware attacks, and specifically attacks impacting local governments. These attacks can spread quickly and easily and threaten the integrity of your school security systems. Earlier this month, the Federal School Safety Clearinghouse, a collaboration between the Department of Homeland Security and the U.S. Departments of Education, Justice, and Health and Human Services, launched its website: SchoolSafety.gov. The website provides guidance to educators, administrators, parents, and law enforcement officials on various online threats to students, including cyberbullying, ransomware, and online predation. We encourage our clients to review these resources, including the fact sheet on Cyber Safety Considerations for K-12 Schools and School Districts, and the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency's (CISA) tips on Keeping Children Safe Online and Dealing with Cyberbullies, and take preventative measures to minimize the risk of a cyberattack.

Here are a few quick tips:

- Do not blindly trust that all emails are legitimate
- If an email expresses some urgency for you to click on a link or to open an attachment, verify the request was from the sender and the nature of the urgent request
- Anything out of character, even the smallest nuance of a signature or phrase in an email should be validated and verified via telephone
- Report any suspicious email or activity to your IT Department for further action
- Stay up-to-date on local news and be aware of any scams, breaches or ransomware attacks happening in your area
- Be vigilant and do not trust—always verify information you receive via email
- Hacker/threats have gotten very sophisticated and hyper-targeted, the old misspelled emails and red flags are getting harder to identify. Be exceptionally diligent in your use of your district's technology resources.

Finally, should your district fall prey to a cyberattack, do not hesitate to reach out to legal counsel for prompt action to protect your school district's technology resources and confidential data, and to take appropriate responsive action in light of a potential security breach.

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