



LEADING EDUCATION INNOVATION

A Members-Only Report

# REACTING TO PRIVACY NEWS

## WHAT SCHOOL SYSTEM TECH LEADERS NEED TO KNOW

### ISSUE RECAP

News headlines provide almost daily rundowns of privacy and security incidents happening in and outside of education. The stories are often dramatic, but short on key details, leaving many school systems overwhelmed and unsure about what to do in the face of it all. However, with a critical read of the news, school system technology leaders can leverage the events to support improvements in their own data protection practices, moving from overwhelm into action.

### CoSN'S PERSPECTIVE

It seems that almost every day there is news about a data privacy issue, and usually, that news is not good. The headlines seem to scream at us, alerting us to new ransomware attacks, technology products that may or may not be violating privacy laws, and data security incidents that may or may not be data breaches. We seem to be in a constant cycle of headlines that warrant our attention, but without a framework for separating the noise from the actionable insights.

It's often rather breathless, and it can be terribly exhausting.

We need to assess privacy news and updates, but we need to do it in a way that is objective and actionable. In order to do that, it's helpful to remember that the headlines are not the story. They are simply there to entice us to click and learn more. Even still, the story behind the headlines is not always complete.

How then, might you make better use of your time and resources to put the latest privacy concerns into perspective and take action to implement preventative measures in your school system?

Consider the following:

Sample Headline	What We'd Really Like to Know	Response Options
"Ransomware Shuts Down School District!"	This news can be quite alarming, and rightfully so. However, to be able to take action in the face of such news, we need	Even without information about the root cause, there is still much that school systems can

	<p>to know what really happened. How did the ransomware attack occur? Did an employee click on a link that resulted in a malware download, or was it a more sophisticated mode of attack?</p> <p>Unfortunately, this is the type of actionable information that is often left out of the news stories.</p>	<p>do to leverage the news to improve practices.</p> <p>The headlines can help you bring attention across the school system to the important underlying issues. However, before you spread the news, consider how prepared your school system is to prevent, identify, and respond in the face of a ransomware attack. What preventative measures, including training, endpoint security, firewall configurations, and more can you put in place or improve upon?</p> <p>Develop your plan and get into action around it.</p> <p>Review <a href="#">CoSN's Member Brief on Ransomware</a> for more guidance.</p>
<p>"District (or Company) Experiences Massive Data Breach!"</p>	<p>Sometimes the headline says it all, and there has been unauthorized access to personal information. In other cases, as we read further into the story, we learn that an individual has reported a security issue that <i>could have</i> led to a breach if it were exploited.</p> <p>In either event, the news is understandably alarming. In these situations, it is – again - important to look for information about the root cause. What happened and why? More often than not, there are fundamental</p>	<p>Treat each privacy or security incident report as a learning opportunity and as a launching point for improvements. Understand the root cause and make a plan to improve practices in your school system to shore up your preventative measures.</p> <p>For insights into how you might assess and improve your practices, review resources available through <a href="#">CoSN's</a></p>

	<p>practices that can be put in place to help prevent such an occurrence within your school system.</p>	<p><a href="#">Cybersecurity Initiative</a> and <a href="#">CoSN’s Student Data Privacy Initiative</a>, as well as the additional resources provided below.</p>
<p>“Companies Might be Violating Children’s Privacy!” or “Is EdTech a Threat?” or “Tech Sends Student Data to Third Parties!”</p>	<p>This type of headline is often attached to news stories about research studies. But what does it really mean? In the case of research, the details matter.</p> <p>Get past the headlines and the news story, and review the research report to assess:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What products were assessed? Was the technology designed for and intended for use in school systems, or was it consumer technology, meant for use in the home, that also claims to be educational?</li> <li>- Are the products used in your school system?</li> <li>- If the research relied on a review of the company’s privacy policy, was the product privacy policy that addressed student data practices reviewed, or did the researchers perhaps review the company’s consumer-facing website privacy policy instead?</li> <li>- If the focus is on student data being sent to third parties, what data, what third parties, and for what purposes? Does it seem reasonable (such as student data sent to a third party for the sole purpose of cloud storage) or problematic (such as student data sent to a social media company)?</li> <li>- Is the language in the research report speculative, noting that bad things</li> </ul>	<p>If products that were assessed in the research report are being used in your school system, this is a good opportunity to reassess those products. Conduct a careful review with particular attention paid to the research findings to determine whether the practices are still acceptable for your school system.</p> <p>This is also a good opportunity to reassess your technology vetting process (or take steps to put one into place). How does your school system consider what products are acceptable and appropriate for use in your school system? How do you assess the privacy practices of the products that you allow to access student data?</p> <p>For more guidance, review <a href="#">CoSN’s Student Data Privacy Toolkit</a>.</p>

	<p>“might” or “could” be happening, or is it definitive?</p> <p>This type of critical read of the research report will help you better assess what is relevant to your school system.</p>	
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Taking in the privacy headlines can be nerve-wracking, but they are also an opportunity to improve your school system practices. Be sure to read with a critical eye, and focus on the details. What can you learn? How can you leverage what you’ve learned – or simply the event itself - to reassess your school system practices? How might you leverage the news to get support for implementation of new or improved practices?

Most importantly, don’t panic. Instead, consider the news as a means through which you are empowered to take steps to continuously improve data protection practices in your district.

**CoSN RESOURCES**

- [CoSN’s Student Data Privacy Initiative](#)
- [CoSN’s Cybersecurity Initiative](#)
- [CoSN’s Member Brief on Ransomware](#)
- [CoSN’s Student Data Privacy Toolkit](#)

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

- [Federal Trade Commission: Start with Security](#)
- [Verizon Data Breach Investigations Report](#)
- [IBM Cost of a Data Breach Report](#)

**About CoSN:**

CoSN, the national association of school system technology leaders, believes that technology is an essential component of learning today, and is deeply committed to the use and distribution of technology in school systems. However, all technologies must be properly assessed for design and appropriateness in the modern classroom. Educators and companies alike must recognize and uphold their responsibilities to protect the privacy of student data.

Working together, educators and the private sector serve millions of students by providing them with the rich digital learning experiences and access needed to succeed in college, work and life. That

partnership is critical to ensuring that students will have the tools necessary for success in the 21st century.

Special thanks to sponsors of the CoSN Student Data Privacy Initiative.

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