



School Safety Newsletter

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School District to Spend \$314K on Rebuilding Servers After Malware Attack

David Bisson, January 3, 2018

<https://www.tripwire.com/state-of-security/latest-security-news/school-district-spend-314k-rebuilding-servers-malware-attack/>

A school district in North Carolina intends to spend \$314,000 on rebuilding more than a dozen servers affected by a malware attack.

On 27 December 2017, the board for Rockingham County School District held an emergency meeting and voted 7-1 to approve a 12-month, \$314,000 service contract with Georgia-based technology solutions provider ProLogic ITS. The contract, which is currently pending review, will give 10 Level 3 and 4 engineers at ProLogic the necessary funding to rebuild 20 servers after the school district suffered a malware attack. It will also cover virus mitigation services offered by the provider, including on-site imaging for 12 servers and 3,000 client systems.

Greensboro News & Record reports that the monies, which will come out of the school's unrestricted fund balance of approximately \$5 million, will cover a total of 1,200 onsite repair hours. It's estimated the cleanup won't take longer than a month.

According to WMFY, the malware infection occurred on 11 December 2017 when employees at Bethany Elementary, Western Rockingham Middle School, and the district's Central Office opened an "incorrect invoice" email that appeared to come from Rockingham County School District's antivirus provider. The emailed used that lure to trick the employees to click on a Microsoft Word document containing Emotet, a trojan which injects itself into the networking stack and software modules of an infected machine. From those locations, the malware can steal financial and personal information, perform distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks on other systems, and distribute additional banking trojans.

Tech Scout's Kent Meeker is familiar with Emotet and says the malware is difficult to remove from an infected server. As he told WMFY in a separate article:

So if you click on something that you shouldn't or didn't know about it can immediately load that onto your system, and if you don't have the right virus protection, or malware protection, it will get right through and just kind of live on the machine. It may lay dormant for a while before it activates itself, and starts doing crazy stuff. This seems like something that probably, hopefully should have been caught and now this is the repercussions of that. They are going to have to go in and rebuild all of these machines, all of these servers to get rid of it because once it is embedded in the system, it is really rough getting it out. Now, I think they are just doing everything they can to get rid of it. It is not a small deal, but it is rectifiable. It always is.

Three days after the infection occurred, the school's administrative office received reports of machines not being able to connect to the school's network. This prompted officials on 19 December to order that teachers and staff leave their computers behind during the winter break. The school district then worked to try to clean up the virus over the holidays.

Rockingham County School District's administration has said the malware attack didn't expose any data. Kacey Sensenich, CTO at the district, rearticulated those thoughts for Greensboro News & Record:

There is no concern when it comes to financial data in Rockingham County Schools. That is all secure. None of that was compromised. The worst thing that we've had happen is it was able to grab people's email and their login information and then re-spam out. We asked people to change their password. ...As far as data, personnel records, all those horror stories you have, at this time we have no evidence of that [being compromised] and the security team is helping validate for us.

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School District to Spend \$314K on Rebuilding Servers After Malware Attack (Continued)

The \$314,000 contract will cover the costs of rebuilding 20 of the school district's servers. Even so, Rockingham will need to also pay for the replacement of teacher devices affected by the malware. Superintendent Dr. Rodney Shotwell says that amount could be as much as \$834,000.

News of this attack follows several months after ransomware attackers demanded \$19,000 from a California school district for a decryption key that would unlock its encrypted data.

Hate Groups Make Unprecedented Push to Recruit On College Campuses

Joe Heim, January 12, 2018

https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/hate-groups-make-unprecedented-push-to-recruit-on-college-campuses/2018/01/12/c66cf628-e4f8-11e7-833f-155031558ff4_story.html?utm_term=.4ab5cfe12ccd

White supremacist and neo-Nazi groups in America had a goal for 2017: Leave the virtual confines of online forums and social media platforms and occupy physical space. It was an objective they shared often and freely in interviews and online postings. They wanted to serve notice that their movement was a force to be reckoned with and its adherents were not simply shadowy Internet lurkers but real people — most of them young and male — who were not afraid to show their faces or proclaim their messages.

It was a decision that led to a year of tumult, violence and even death, and nowhere was that decision felt more acutely than on college and university campuses. They became the primary battlegrounds for far-right groups that sought out the schools for organized rallies and speeches, and made them the focus of recruiting efforts. For 2018, the goal of these groups is to expand their reach on campuses, force showdowns over free speech, generate more publicity and win over more adherents.

As the white supremacists continue to flout boundaries of acceptable behavior and engage in activities many students, faculty and staff find menacing, institutions are rethinking, and in some cases rejiggering, policies regarding allowable activities on campus. Schools that have cherished their longtime role as havens for free speech and debate have found themselves drawing lines in response to messages of hate and threats of violence.

Those messages were hard to miss last year. Pamphlets and stickers proclaimed war against diversity and stoked racial division.

“Fighting for White Working Families” “Take back what is rightfully ours.” “Preserve your heritage, take up the fight.”

On campuses large and small, urban and rural, the racist far-right made its presence felt like never before with leaflets and banners warning of threats to white supremacy. Swastikas were scribbled on walls of Jewish campus organizations. Bananas were left in front of the dorm rooms of black students.

The Anti-Defamation League found that in the past 15 months, organizations such as the Traditionalist Worker Party, Identity Evropa, American Renaissance and Vanguard America directed campaigns at more than 200 college campuses in 42 states. The pace of their provocations has only accelerated in recent months. The civil rights group counted 140 reported incidents — displays of organized racist activity — from Sept. 1 through Dec. 18. For the same period the year before, 41 incidents were reported.

All of these groups have been labeled white nationalist hate groups by the Southern Poverty Law Center, which monitors extremist activity. The Traditionalist Worker Party, American Renaissance and Vanguard America were banned from Twitter in late December as part of the social media site's effort to enforce community standards.

The targeting of colleges and universities was not a haphazard choice by the white power groups but rather a calculated strategy.

“It's striking a blow directly at the heart of our foes,” said Matthew Heimbach, founder of the Traditionalist Worker Party, a far-right organization that seeks a whites-only nation state and has been labeled a hate group for its anti-Jewish and homophobic stances and its opposition to racial mixing. “It lets them know that there are people that are radically opposed to them, that aren't afraid of them, that will challenge them. It shakes their thought that they've got the campus environment locked down and lets them know that people who oppose them go to their school or are a part of their local community.”

College campuses, Heimbach said, are ideal for recruiting members and gaining publicity because the presence of the hate groups inevitably creates an outcry on campus and in the community. He said the ranks of his organization have tripled over the past year from 500 to 1,500 members, although The Washington Post could not independently verify that assertion.

In a late-December post on Gab, the social media site popular with many who have been banned from Twitter, Heimbach

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Hate Groups Make Unprecedented Push to Recruit On College Campuses (Continued)

said his organization and Vanguard America are planning a “combined propaganda drive” at Midwestern universities in the coming weeks.

Despite claims by Heimbach and others, Oren Segal, director of the ADL’s Center on Extremism, doesn’t believe their recruiting efforts on campus will win over many adherents. But he worries that the aggressive campaigns indicate the groups are feeling emboldened. “It’s a reminder that these groups feel now is the time to strike,” Segal said. “Whether they are able to recruit thousands or not, they feel the atmosphere is ripe.”

Though the groups had been pushing their on-campus activities throughout 2017, most of their efforts had escaped widespread national notice — then, Charlottesville happened.

On a warm Friday night in August, hundreds of marchers paraded through the University of Virginia campus carrying torches and chanting nationalist and anti-Semitic slogans. They encircled a small group of protesters at a statue of Thomas Jefferson yelling, “White Lives Matter” and “Jews will not replace us!” Within minutes, punches were being thrown and mace sprayed.

The melee didn’t last long, but it set the stage for the following day when the violence was much worse. A counterprotester, Heather Heyer, lost her life when a self-described Nazi allegedly drove his car into a crowd killing Heyer and injuring 35 others.

Charlottesville became a hashtag for hate, and the violence there exposed an underbelly of hardcore racism that many Americans had, perhaps naively, imagined didn’t exist anymore. Asked about the violence that week, President Trump insisted there were “very fine people” on both sides, a remark that was widely criticized as a failure by the occupant of the highest office in the land to properly condemn groups that trafficked in racial hatred. It was also a remark that encouraged white supremacists who believed the president supported their aims.

White supremacist and former Ku Klux Klan leader David Duke tweeted his thanks to the president for his comments. At the rally in Charlottesville a few days earlier he told reporters, “We’re going to fulfill the promises of Donald Trump.” While Charlottesville drew most of the headlines, racial hatred and violence was on display on campuses and college towns throughout the country before and after that seminal event.

Nathan Damigo, a student at California State University at Stanislaus and the founder of Identity Evropa, was seen in a video punching a woman in the face during a showdown with antifascists in Berkeley in April. Hundreds of students at Stanislaus signed a petition saying Damigo’s presence at the school made them feel unsafe. Damigo remains enrolled, according to school officials.

In May, Sean Urbanski, a white University of Maryland student, allegedly stabbed and killed Richard Collins III, a black student at nearby Bowie State University and a second lieutenant in the Army who was visiting friends on the College Park campus. Urbanski was charged with a hate crime, and police announced they were investigating Urbanski’s connection to a Facebook page called Alt-Reich Nation.

At the University of Florida in October, an appearance by white nationalist Richard Spencer drew thousands of protesters. Later that day, three of Spencer’s followers were arrested and charged with attempted homicide after they allegedly argued with a group of people protesting his speech and fired a shot at them.

Spencer has fought to speak at large campuses across the country, but in the wake of Charlottesville, administrators at institutions including Pennsylvania State University, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Michigan State University blocked his efforts, citing the possibility of violence and enormous security costs.

Schools are altering policies and procedures to deal with the increase in racially based incidents and the growing push on campuses by white supremacist and neo-Nazi groups. Following the torchlight march at the University of Virginia, administrators banned open flames on campus without prior approval. In the report it commissioned on how it handled the events of August, the university sounded a warning for schools everywhere.

“Going forward, the University of Virginia and higher education institutions across the nation must be prepared to respond to situations in which violence and intimidation accompany demonstrations and protests,” the report concluded. “It is incumbent upon the university to forge new policies and practices that will prevent it from again becoming a locus of intimidation and violence while recommitting to the principles of free speech at the core of its mission.”

Following the killing of Collins, the University of Maryland created a rapid-response team for hate-based incidents and announced it will hire a hate-bias response coordinator.

“We’re very concerned with the idea that outside groups are targeting colleges and universities for hate based on race and religion and other identity characteristics,” said U-Md.’s chief diversity officer, Roger L. Worthington. “Hate and bias incidents are not new but certainly in the current national climate we’re concerned because people are more emboldened to engage in those types of behaviors.”

School administrators across the country and organizations that monitor white supremacist groups know that many of the tactics they employ are no more than attempts to gain publicity and news coverage. They worry, as many news organizations do, about how much attention they should receive. The ADL’s Segal recognizes the tension between overcovering and undercovering, but says schools and news organizations should opt for the former. “It’s a cliché, but we still believe that sunlight is the best disinfectant,” he said.

Students at Peel High Schools Feel Safer with Police Presence: Canadian Study

Peter, Goffin, January 10, 2018

<https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2018/01/10/students-at-peel-high-schools-feel-safer-with-police-presence-study.html>

CANADA—A program that places police officers in Peel Region high schools made students feel safer and helped them build positive relationships with law enforcement, a study released Wednesday concluded.

But some anti-racism activists argued the study that examined the program in Peel Region, west of Toronto, failed to properly take into account the effect police presence in schools has on students from racialized backgrounds and other vulnerable minority groups.

After conducting nearly 1,300 surveys of students and interviewing school administrators and police, researchers from Carleton University said high schools in Peel — a region made up of Mississauga, Brampton and Caledon — should continue the School Resource Officer program, which has been operating in the area for over 20 years.

“Every single one of these different groups (said) students feel safer at school,” said Carleton business professor Linda Duxbury, one of the study’s lead researchers. “The goal of the Peel program is to make people feel safer in schools so they can learn more . . . every single source of data said it (met that goal).”

The Toronto District School Board ended a similar program of its own in November after a report by board staff found Black students and other minority groups felt harassed, targeted and unsafe when police were in their schools.

The Toronto report focused primarily on the concerns of those vulnerable students, something the Peel study failed to do, said Andrea Vasquez Jimenez, co-chair of the Latinx, Afro-Latin-America, Abya Yala Education Network. “If we are looking at these detrimental issues within our schools and beyond, we really have to . . . look at who it negatively impacts and put more importance on that,” she said.

Duxbury said that because the Peel student surveys were anonymous, researchers were not able to track the race or culture of respondents. Eight students who were interviewed in person for the report all came from racialized backgrounds, she noted. Researchers surveyed students from three public high schools and two Catholic high schools, which were selected specifically because their populations represented a wide variety of racial, cultural and income-related backgrounds, she added. “One dominant finding is that every single group of students benefited and felt safer over time,” Duxbury said.

The Peel study was specifically designed to measure the financial value of the program that placed police in schools, not the views of different racial groups, Duxbury said. Unlike other such programs in Canada, Peel’s assigns an officer to every high school in the region. With an annual cost of \$9 million to Peel police, the program is one of the most expensive of its kind, Duxbury said. “There’s a lot of discussion on the cost of policing, the economics of policing,” Duxbury said. “People were very, very concerned, (saying), ‘Look at how much police are costing, how can we get value for money?’ ”

The study tried to calculate the program’s “social return on investment” — a means of placing an approximate dollar value on non-financial, even intangible results. For example, having officers in schools decreases the number of calls Peel police have to respond to, leading to a savings in the police budget, the study found.

Officers who build a relationship with a student may be more likely to divert that student toward rehabilitation programs outside the justice system if the student gets in trouble, the study also found. This keeps those kids in school and out of jail — outcomes researchers attached approximate dollar values to.

Overall, the study found, Peel police got \$11.13 of value for every \$1 they spent on the program.

The Peel District School Board said there was “tremendous value” in the program. “Through a partnership that is adaptive, responsive and focused on student success and well-being, we look forward to working together with police to support all of our students so that every child and teen feels safe, respected and included,” the board’s director of education, Peter Joshua, said in a statement.

Black Lives Matter Toronto co-founder Sandy Hudson said the safety and well-being of racialized students in particular should have been the focus of the report.

“This (program) is essentially police officers being able to extract information from minors without their parents being present,” Hudson said. “That, to me, should concern all parents and concern all educators who are trying to keep their students safe.”

Duxbury said the study found no evidence that random checks, or carding, was occurring in Peel high schools. Most often, students approach school resource officers with a problem or a question, as opposed to officers seeking out students, she said.

To view the entire study, visit: <https://carleton.ca/peel/>



Mia Ray Langheim

School Intelligence
Officer

School Safety Newsletter

Statewide Terrorism &
Intelligence Center
2200 S. Dirksen Parkway
Springfield, IL 62703
Phone: 217-558-2661

E-Mail:
Schoolsafety@isp.state.il.us