

The Honorable Jessica Rosenworcel, Chairwoman
The Honorable Brendan Carr, Commissioner
The Honorable Geoffrey Starks, Commissioner
The Honorable Nathan Simington, Commissioner
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th St S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20554

September 22, 2022

RE: National School and Educator Groups Call for Response to Cyber Attacks

Dear Chairwoman Rosenworcel and Commissioners,

On behalf of the 19 national organizations listed below, representing the nation's school leaders, public schools, private schools, parents, teachers and educators, and transportation providers, we write to express our deep concern with the constant and growing threat of a cybersecurity or ransomware attack to K-12 schools specifically, and to all non-profit, for profit and governmental organizations generally. These attacks undermine critical IT security infrastructure, cripple the systems of the targets, and disrupt business as normal, often quickly, extensively, and at a significant cost to the victims. In the context of schools, the increasing number of attacks—ever more complicated—has implications for teaching, learning, school budgets, parent communication and the protection of the sensitive data districts maintain on both students and staff.

We believe it is critical that the federal government recognize the significant threat posed by these attacks and investigate all possible avenues to provide support – including training and technology – for current and future victims. Currently, schools nationwide find themselves scraping together the funding from other critical areas, including money intended for academic recovery and the social-emotional needs of students, to address this threat. This is neither fair nor sustainable.

The federal E-Rate program, which provides schools and libraries with deep discounts on broadband and Wi-Fi services and which we strongly support, already provides some support for firewalls. However, given the increasing scope and sophistication of cyberattacks, E-Rate alone cannot defray the costs of the technology and training necessary to secure school and library networks and data.

Therefore, we urge the federal government to initiate a broad intergovernmental conversation about addressing cybersecurity threats to schools and other potential victims. Specifically, we need deliberate and expanded coordination and collaboration across all relevant federal agencies—including the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), the Department of Homeland Security's Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) , and US Education Department (USED), among others—to determine the products and services that are available and effective in responding to and preventing cyberattacks. These threats are bigger than any one sector of government or business and as a result, the response needs to be comprehensive. Adopting this approach will allow school administrators and educators to remain focused on student learning and instruction while cybersecurity experts fashion a multi-level, amply funded approach to combating these attacks. To be clear: schools should not be driving the response to cyberattacks, nor should E-Rate, the only federal funding stream supporting connectivity in schools, be repurposed/redirected for this important effort.

We urge you to act quickly in coordination with your fellow federal agencies and Capitol Hill to help all levels of government and sectors of the economy continue with business as usual; we are confident this collaboration of state, local and federal officials will defend our schools against future attacks and limit further disruptions in student learning.

Sincerely,

AASA, The School Superintendents Association

American Federation of School Administrators
American Federation of Teachers
American School Counselor Association
American Speech-Language-Hearing Association
Association of Business School Officials, International
Association of Educational Service Agencies
National Association for Pupil Transportation
National Association of Elementary School Principals
National Association of Independent Schools
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Catholic Educational Association
National Council of Teachers of Mathematics
National Education Association
National PTA
National Rural Education Advocacy Consortium
National Rural Education Association
National Superintendents Roundtable
Schlechty Center