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Launch of New Research Study to Examine State of Cybersecurity Preparation and Needs in America’s School Districts

Sudden shift to digital learning due to COVID pandemic has increased threat to school districts from ransomware attacks, theft of data and disruption of learning continuity

BOSTON, MA and IRVINE, CA (March 8, 2021) – Responding to the escalating threat of cyber attacks on the network infrastructures within school districts, Project Tomorrow®, a national education nonprofit organization, in collaboration with iboss, is launching a new large scale research effort to report on the state of cybersecurity awareness and preparation in our nation’s schools. The research effort which is part of Project Tomorrow’s highly regarded Speak Up Research Project will include the collection of input and feedback from school district Chief Information Officers, Chief Technology Officers and Directors of Technology nationwide. Online surveys to facilitate that data collection are open today.

“As a result of the pandemic and sudden shift to remote virtual learning, the need for greater awareness on district cybersecurity has changed dramatically in the past year, notes Dr. Julie A. Evans, Chief Executive Officer of Project Tomorrow. “The increased dependency on cloud applications and the Internet for learning continuity mandates that we all better understand what our K-12 schools and districts need to adequately protect student data, school information assets and ensure that learning is not interrupted by cyber attacks. We are pleased to be partnering with iboss on this national call to action to better understand the firsthand views of our K-12 technology leaders.”

During the 2018-19 school year, 32% of district administrators said that they were not concerned at all about cyber or ransomware attacks impacting their district infrastructure. Only 18% indicated a high concern about this type of a disruption on their operations. But the environment today is different with the sudden shift to virtual learning. Per Speak Up results released in October 2020, 44% of teachers now say that they are using an online curriculum daily with their students and 80% of middle school students report using an Internet dependent Chromebook as their primary access point to learning. And in December 2020, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), and the Multi-State Information Sharing and Analysis Center (MS-ISAC) released a joint advisory to the K-12 community with their assessment that malicious cyber actors were targeting K-12 educational institutions, leading to ransomware attacks, the theft of data, and the disruption of distance learning services. The advisory noted that these types of attacks are expected to continue through the 2020/2021 academic year.

“Over the course of the last year, we have seen both the challenges and rewards associated with remote, virtual learning. Now more than ever, stakes are high to ensure all students have the access they need to learn anytime, anywhere – safely,” said Richard Quinones, Senior Vice President, Public Sector at iboss. “As the internet becomes a driving force to prepare our youth for the global economy and workforce, the public education sector must stay vigilant and ensure they have the right tools in place so students can fully benefit from the rich and dynamic resources online learning can offer.”

The goal of the new CIO/CTO Speak Up Survey on Cybersecurity is to bring a heightened level of national awareness to the challenges that K-12 school districts face today in adjusting to the new dependency on Internet connectivity because of the pandemic. Topics being polled include:

- Budgeting and staffing to support cybersecurity
- Obstacles and barriers to understanding and responding to threats
• Internal awareness levels about the importance of cybersecurity
• Data privacy protections in place
• Homework and learning gap plans in place
• Cloud applications – current and planned
• Plans to address emerging technology needs
• Sources of reliable information regarding news, trends and recommendations on cybersecurity

The findings will be published in a national report in late spring. All district technology leaders are invited to contribute their views to this research project here.

About Project Tomorrow
Project Tomorrow’s nonprofit mission is to support the effective implementation of research-based learning experiences for students in K-12 schools. Project Tomorrow is particularly interested in the role of digital tools, content and resources in supporting students’ development of college and career ready skills. The organization’s landmark research is the Speak Up Research Project which annually polls K-12 students, parents, educators and community members about the impact of technology resources on learning experiences both in school and out of school, and represents the largest collection of authentic, unfiltered stakeholder voice on digital learning. Since 2003, almost 6 million K-12 students, parents, teachers, librarians, principals, technology leaders, district administrators and members of the community have shared their views and ideas through the Speak Up Project. Learn more at www.tomorrow.org.

About iboss
iboss is a cloud security company that provides organizations and their employees fast and secure access to the Internet on any device, from any location, in the cloud. The iboss SASE cloud platform provides network security as a service, delivered in the cloud, as a complete SaaS offering. This eliminates the need for traditional network security appliances, such as firewalls and web gateway proxies, which are ineffective at protecting a cloud-first and mobile world. Leveraging a purpose-built cloud architecture backed by 230+ issued and pending patents and more than 100 points of presence globally, iboss processes over 100 billion transactions daily, blocking nearly 4 billion malware threats per day. More than 4,000 global enterprises trust the iboss SASE cloud platform to support their workforce, including a large number of Fortune 50 companies. To learn more, visit https://www.iboss.com/

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i Speak Up National Results for the 2018-19 School Year – www.tomorrow.org/speakup


iii https://k12cybersecure.com/blog/fbi-cisa-ms-isac-warn-schools-on-cyber-threats/