

FBI Issues Alert Warning of Potential for Cyber Attacks on Schools

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As exposure to cyber threats in both the public and private sectors continues to garner increased media attention, the FBI issued a [public service announcement](#) on Sept. 13 stating that the recent, rapid growth and utilization of education technologies (EdTech) and widespread collection of student data exposes schools to significant risks of cyber attack.

This most recent FBI announcement warns that malicious use of data commonly collected through EdTech services - including information like students' geolocation, Web browsing history, IP addresses, and personally identifiable information protected under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act - could result in "social engineering, bullying, tracking, identity theft, or other means of targeting children." The announcement urges schools to continue to expand efforts to protect students and their data and encourages parents to seek additional information regarding how EdTech is utilized with their children and steps they should take to protect sensitive information.

The rise in Internet of Things devices on school campuses, coupled with the increased utilization of EdTech as part of the educational program, will continue to present security challenges for schools. Schools are increasingly targets of ransomware attacks, a fast growing criminal enterprise that involves the use of malicious software to block access to data or to publish it unless the infected organization pays a ransom. The Monroe County School District in Florida [experienced such an attack](#) earlier this month forcing a shutdown of the school district's computer system for an extended period.

The FBI announcement should serve as a timely reminder to schools to regularly review policies, procedures and safety protocols in connection with the increased use of digital tools in the learning environment and risks related to data breaches.

If you have questions regarding institutional responsibilities or best practices to address these issues please feel free to contact any of the attorneys in [Barley Snyder's Education Practice Group](#).