School Districts' Self-Reported IT Security Practices and Resources

Legislative Post Audit Report Abstract, October 2021

School districts maintain sensitive data which makes them attractive targets for cyberattacks. Although school districts maintain sensitive data, Kansas districts are not required to implement any specific IT controls. Many school districts have not implemented several basic It security controls: The majority of survey respondents (147 of 286 school districts - 51% response rate) indicated they lacked proper security awareness training and incident response plans, did not require secure confidential data transmission, and did not perform vulnerability scans at all or frequently enough. Districts reported that staffing issues and lack of knowledge about what IT security controls to implement were significant barriers to improving IT security. Finally, districts reported spending an annual average of about $18 per student on IT security in recent years. In comparison, the average total expenditure per student is about $16,200.

Agency Response

On September 9, 2021 we provided the draft audit report to the Kansas Department of Education. Its response is below. Agency officials generally agreed with the findings.

KSDE Response

Thank you for the opportunity to review the recent performance audit, *School Districts' Self-Reported IT Security Practices and Resources*. Our response is limited to the sole recommendation in the report.

IT security is certainly an important topic, as noted in the report. The report recommends that the Kansas Legislature should consider directing KSDE to establish a set of minimum IT security standards for school districts in the form of either guidance or requirements. Establishment of standards by KSDE will naturally lead to school district reliance on Department staff for guidance in implementation, and auditing of the implementation of standards. This will lead to KSDE providing technical assistance to 286 public school districts and over 90 private school systems that the State Board of Education accredits, each with their own individual IT system and environment.

As noted on Page 3 of the report, the IT team at KSDE was established and has been staffed to only meet the data collection and management needs of the Department, rather than school districts. The level of support necessary for school districts to implement IT security standards would be a significant undertaking and is not possible with the current level of IT staffing at KSDE.

If the Kansas Legislature chooses to implement the LPA recommendation, there will need to be additional IT staff, and the Department would like to see that noted within the LPA recommendation.
Sincerely,

Randy Watson