



Ben Hill County School System

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SUPERINTENDENT

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February 5, 2019

Good Morning Cane Nation,

I wanted to give you an update on the current status of technology regarding the virus infection across our schools. Please let me first THANK YOU all for your patience and support in working with our Vartek TEAM as they have worked so diligently to try and wipe out this virus infection. Here is what Vartek has been able to accomplish across the system to get you up running as of today:

“With infections identified at varying levels in each school, we administratively shut down all Windows PCs on every campus last week. This action was taken to stop the spread of infection, which we believe came into the network via email attachment. Starting last week and working through the weekend, we began systematically wiping PCs of essential personnel to clear the infections and restore computer access gradually. This process includes upgrading each and every PC to the latest version of Windows 10 for increased security protection and deployment of a software product called [Deep Freeze]. Deep Freeze will further guard against district downtime in the future by providing a drastically reduced recovery time if any problem of this nature arises again. We will essentially have the option to perform a simultaneous reboot of all machines where they return to a pre-established clean state. We have also tightened email security to halt the delivery of additional viruses via email attachments. Additionally, password changes are being coordinated with building administrators to further protect faculty, staff, and students.”

“We understand that the impact of this outage has limited PC availability for all users and apologize for any inconveniences that it has caused to the instructional process. However, we are working diligently with principals, department heads, and staff to restore computer access for critical services including transportation, food service, administration, and most importantly instruction.”

Please understand that the shutdown operation was a **precautionary action for all staff, faculty, and student protection. ** The shutdown operation is an essential process to contain the virus infection from spreading any further throughout the school system. As of today we believe we have the virus 99% contained.

However, once the shutdown process occurs, each and every PC must be wiped and have Deep Freeze installed. This is a very time consuming process, and it is going to take some time to get everyone back up and running at full capacity. We will continue to update each school on this process and timelines as we move forward from this point.

The next priorities will be to restore functionality of the state testing PCs to accommodate English Language Learner testing and end-of-grade GA Milestones testing.

As of this time, we know of no student or employee information breaches that have occurred in our system. However, as we have learned more about this virus, it is designed to steal financial login information commonly saved in internet browsers or capture passwords to banking websites. (These items should NOT be stored on your PC at any time)! I have heard rumors and unverified reports of some employees' personal bank accounts being compromised, but nothing in regard to school-related breaches.

These are things to be on the lookout for at home or anywhere district employees use computers that include unsolicited attachments (such as invoices) and unsolicited links to external websites (such as delivery tracking links or Amazon order links). Scammers will often attempt to impersonate executive staff or business office personnel in order to trick email recipients. If you receive any type of suspicious email or your gut tells you something is not just right about an email that you receive, please contact our Vartek TEAM immediately and let them help you determine the condition of the email.

Again, I would like to THANK ALL OF YOU for your time, patience, and support with this matter. Continue to have a GREAT DAY!!!

Sincerely,

J. Shawn Haralson, Ed.D.
Superintendent