TEA Statewide Webinar
Texas K-12 Cybersecurity Initiative

January 2026

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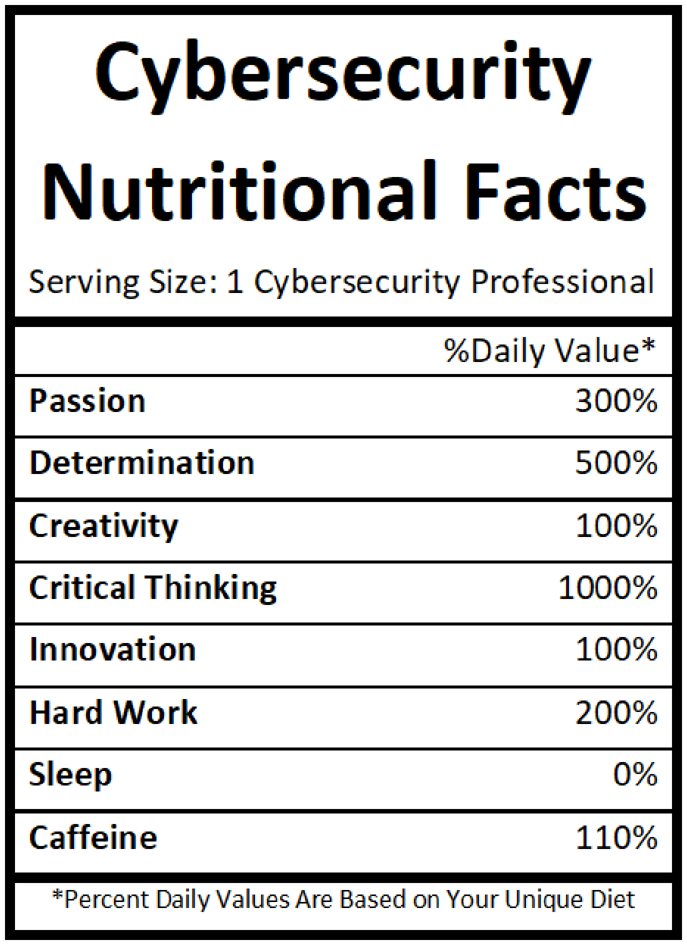
House Keeping

- Webinar is being recorded.
- Recording and slides will be available a few days after the webinar ends at the TEA Cybersecurity website.
- Chat has been turned off.
- Submit questions in Q&A; we’ll address them at the end or follow up by email.
- Duplicate logins are not allowed.
- Chatbots are not allowed, these will be removed if seen.

About Me



Cybersecurity Nutritional Facts

Serving Size: 1 Cybersecurity Professional

	%Daily Value*
Passion	300%
Determination	500%
Creativity	100%
Critical Thinking	1000%
Innovation	100%
Hard Work	200%
Sleep	0%
Caffeine	110%

*Percent Daily Values Are Based on Your Unique Diet

Daniel Ramirez

Chief Information Security Officer for TEA

- Started August 1, 2025

Working in IT for 28+ years

- Texas A&M Kingsville
- University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (Pan Am)
- Region One Education Service Center
- 13 of the 28+ years have been in Information Security

Security Certifications:

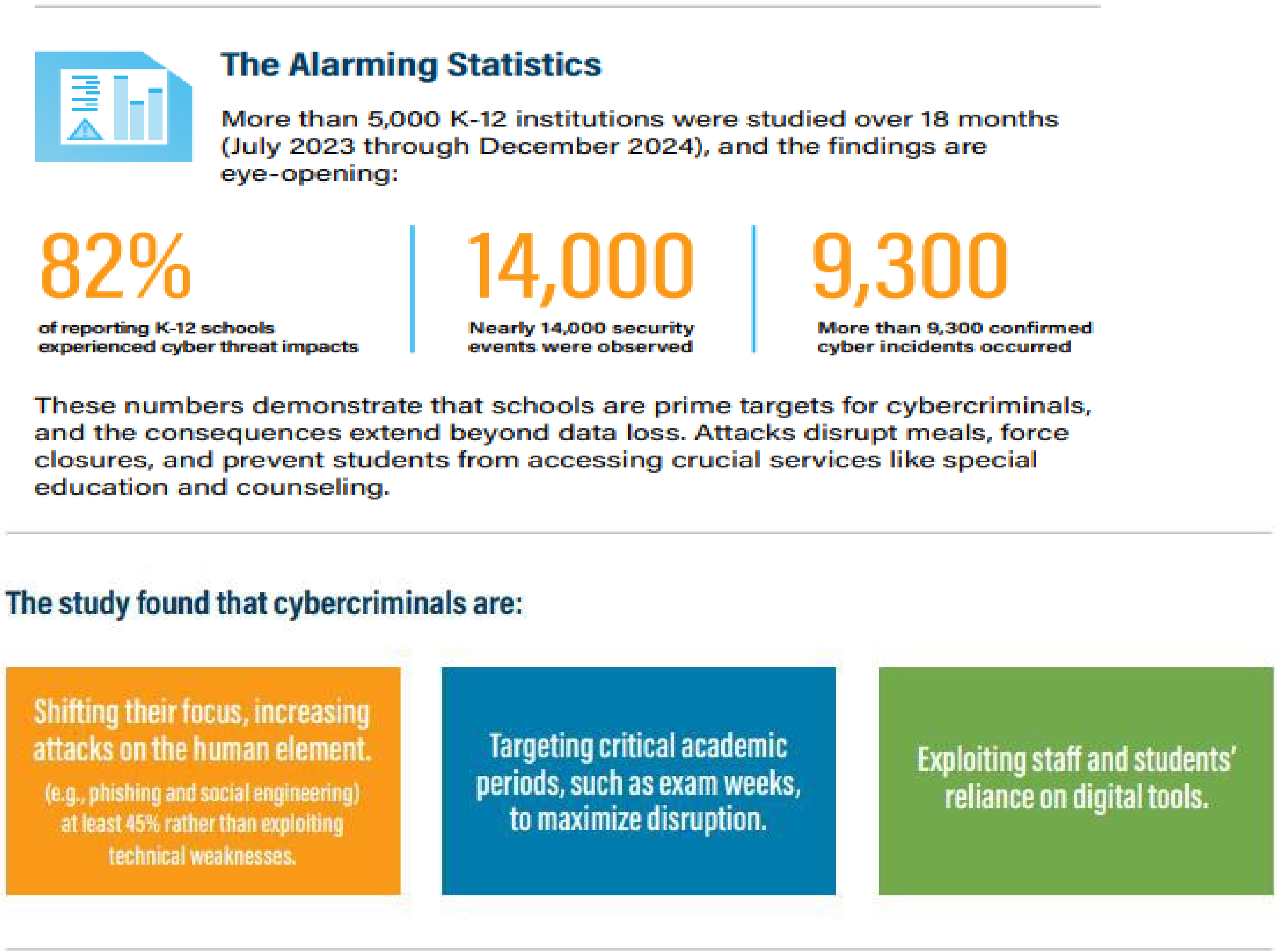
- Certified Information Systems Security Professional (CISSP)

Introductions

- Texas Education Agency K-12 Cybersecurity Initiative Group
    - Julia Schacherl - Executive Director, IT Administration & Compliance
    - Lara Coffer - DCS Contract Manager & K-12 Cybersecurity Project Lead
    - Susan Bain - Cybersecurity Governance, Risk, & Compliance Analyst
    - Desire Odiwo - Cybersecurity Governance, Risk, & Compliance Analyst

K-12 Threats & Incident Costs

K-12 remains top cybersecurity target



The Alarming Statistics

More than 5,000 K-12 institutions were studied over 18 months (July 2023 through December 2024), and the findings are eye-opening:

82%
of reporting K-12 schools experienced cyber threat impacts

14,000
Nearly 14,000 security events were observed

9,300
More than 9,300 confirmed cyber incidents occurred

These numbers demonstrate that schools are prime targets for cybercriminals, and the consequences extend beyond data loss. Attacks disrupt meals, force closures, and prevent students from accessing crucial services like special education and counseling.

The study found that cybercriminals are:

Shifting their focus, increasing attacks on the human element.
(e.g., phishing and social engineering) at least 45% rather than exploiting technical weaknesses.

Targeting critical academic periods, such as exam weeks, to maximize disruption.

Exploiting staff and students' reliance on digital tools.

**Center for Internet Security*

K-12 remains top cybersecurity target Cont.

- *Ransomware attacks in the education sector are up **23% year over year**, according to a report from Comparitech, a cybersecurity and online privacy product review website.*

- ***82% of K-12 schools** in the U.S. experienced a cyber incident between July 2023 and December 2024, according to a March 2025 report from the nonprofit Center for Internet Security.*

- *141 Texas school systems have reported cyber incidents to DIR between July 2023 and December 2024. ~DIR Spectrim*

The High Cost of Security Incidents

- For school systems, threat actors determine if a school has cyber insurance and then demand a ransom based on the coverage amount, $500,000 is the usual starting ask. *~Gartner*
- The recovery effort can be anywhere between $500,000 to $2,000,000 depending on the size of the organization, the damage done, and recovery organization that is hired. *~ Gartner*
- Average cost is approximately $1.5M per incident. *~Gartner*
- Downtime Costs: On average, the education sector lost 12.6 school days in 2023 due to ransomware attacks. *~K12 Dive.*
- Based on the overall ransomware recovery costs reported across 26 educational institutions between 2018 and 2024, Comparitech estimates the average cost of downtime to $548,185 per day.

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Increased Cyber Support for K-12

School System Cyber Support

- TEA K-12 Cybersecurity Initiative
- 20 Education Service Centers
- Regional Security Operations Center (RSOC)
- Texas Cyber Command (TCC) & Texas Department of Information Resources (DIR)
- Community of Cyber Professionals employed in our school systems

Regional Security Operations Center (RSOC)

Funded Texas RSOCs

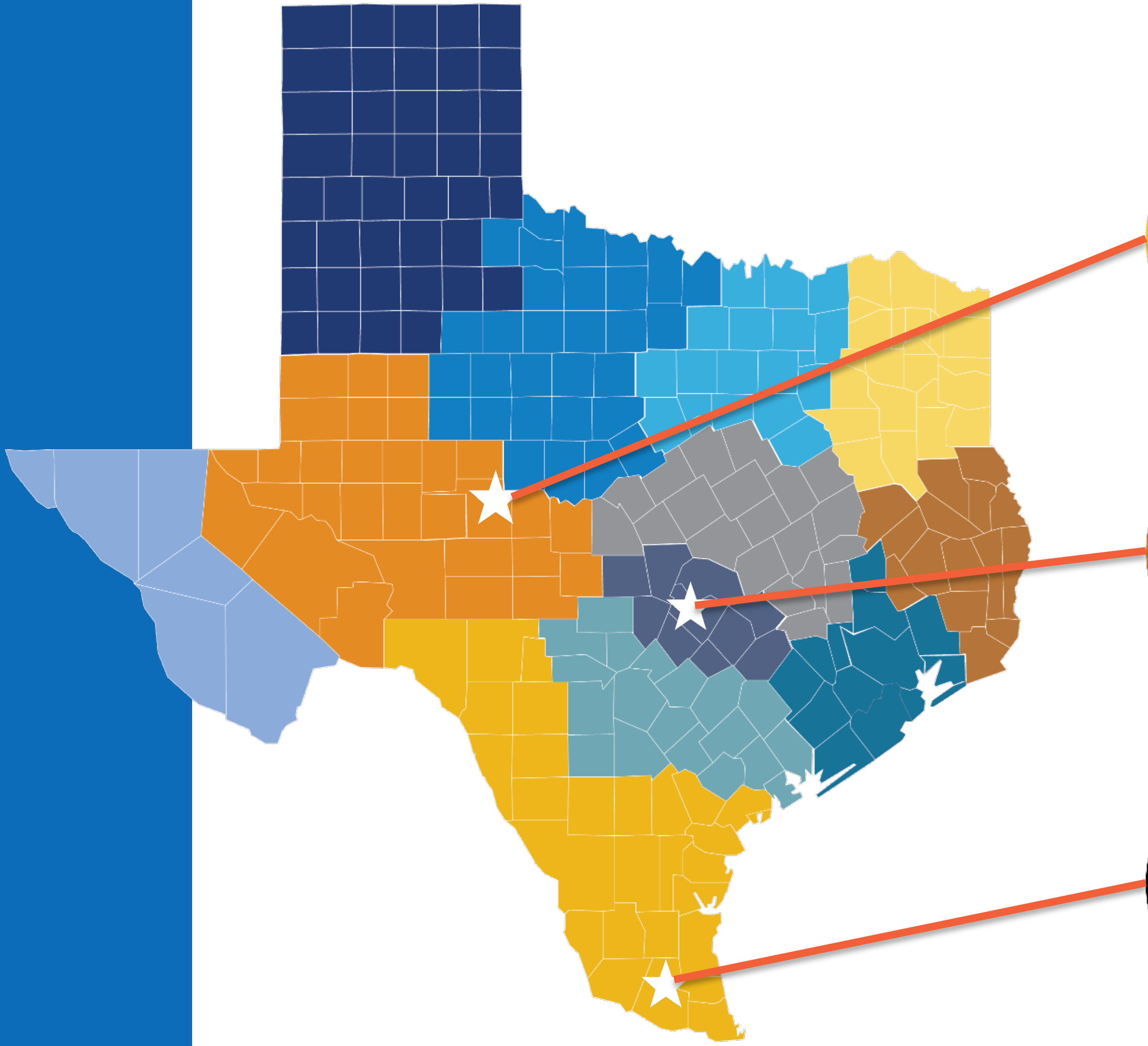

Image courtesy of ASU RSOC

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Economic Region: West Texas
(325) 942-2150
rsoc@angelo.edu

University of Texas at Austin
Austin
Economic Region: Capitol
(512) 475-9242
rsoc@utexas.edu

University of Texas
Rio Grande Valley
Edinburg and Brownsville
Economic Region: South Texas
(956) 665-7762
rsoc@utrgv.edu

No Cost RSOC Services

- Managed Endpoint Detection and Response (EDR)
- Real-time network security monitoring
- Alerts and guidance for defeating security threats
- Remote and on-site cyber incident responders
- Guidance on implementing cyber policies and plans
- Educational and awareness services
- Train university students in a live Security Operations Center (SOC) environment
- Community outreach and cybersecurity training
- Customers include local government entities such as cities, counties, and Texas school systems

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Texas K-12 Cybersecurity Initiative

TEA K-12 Cybersecurity Initiative

- In response to the increasing threat of ransomware and other malicious cyber activity targeting school systems across Texas, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) launched the K-12 Cybersecurity Initiative in 2023. The initiative was made possible through funding approved by the 88th Texas Legislature, which supported TEA's request for dedicated cybersecurity resources to help school systems strengthen their defenses and respond to emerging cyber risks.

- The goal of the initiative is to deliver immediate, practical solutions to help school systems defend against major cyber incidents, such as ransomware attacks. Priority is given to rural school systems, and cybersecurity practitioners are available through regional education service centers to support the implementation of cybersecurity controls aligned with the scope of this initiative.

Continued Funding– K-12 Cybersecurity Initiative

- The 89th Texas Legislature **approved an additional $42 million** in funding for the **FY26/FY27 biennium (September 2025–August 2027)**, ensuring the continuation and expansion of this critical initiative.

- Remaining funds from FY24/FY25 (September 2023 – August 2025) have also been transferred forward to support ongoing efforts - Approximately **$28M.**

- **$70M** total for FY26\FY27.

Fully Funded Services ($0 Costs to School System)

Fully funded services currently available for request:

- **Managed Endpoint Detection and Response (EDR)**
  - Requirement: student enrollment **50,000** or less
  - Allowed licenses up to **30%** enrollment, or 30 license minimum
  - School systems may choose between EDR vendors **CrowdStrike** or **SentinelOne**
- **Texas Cybersecurity Framework (TCF) Assessment**
  - First come, first served for **any** school system
  - School systems may choose between **Small**, **Medium**, or **Large** Assessments
  - May be ordered now and scheduled for any time through August 2027
- **Network Detection and Response (NDR) – Pilot Program Closed for FY23 - FY25**
  - NDR pilot results are being evaluated to determine inclusion for FY26 – FY27
  - NDR vendor is **Vectra**

Ongoing Goals – K-12 Cybersecurity Initiative

- Current goals were carried forward in FY26/27.
  - Implement fully managed **Endpoint Detection and Response (EDR)** on School System servers and applicable staff devices.
  - Implement **Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA**) for staff email systems**.**
  - Ensure **DMARC* Compliance** to enhance protection against phishing and spoofing**.**
  - Restrict **local administrator access** to minimize the risk of unauthorized system changes.
  - Complete a **Texas Cybersecurity Framework (TCF) assessment** to get a baseline of cybersecurity program and action plan for improving maturity.
  - Implement **Network Detection and Response (NDR**).
    - Pilot is closed to new customers while pilot benefits & costs are evaluated.
- TEA funded grant thru Technology Alliance for Statewide Initiatives (TASI) that pays for cybersecurity staff at every Education Service Center (ESC) to assist with these goals.

**Domain-based Message Authentication Reporting & Conformance (DMARC)*

Enrolling and Requesting Services

1. School system completes **New Customer Form,** sends to DIR.
   - ❖ *No signatures required*
2. DIR receives New Customer Form and sends school system the **Interlocal Contract (ILC).**
3. School system reviews, completes, approves, and signs ILC.
   - ❖ *Requires Superintendent signature*
4. School system sends signed ILC to DIR for processing.
5. DIR reviews and approves ILC, then **Shared Technology Services (STS) Portal Access** is granted (to listed technical contacts on New Customer Form).
6. School system requests Managed Security Services (MSS) via STS Portal.
   1. EDR
   2. TCF Assessment

Education Service Center (ESC) Support

- ILC & STS Onboarding Assistance
- EDR Agent Deployment
- Email Domain Security (SPF, DKIM, DMARC Compliance)
  - Configuration, No Cost
- Multi-Factor Authentication on ALL employee email accounts. (Microsoft 365 & Google Workspace)
  - Employee Awareness, Configuration, No Cost
- Restrict Local Admin Privileges
  - Employee Awareness, Configuration, No Cost

Sender Policy Framework (SPF)
Domain Keys Identified Mail (DKIM)
Domain-based Message Authentication Reporting & Conformance (DMARC)

Current Program Participation

- **School systems that have onboarded with DIR**
  - 500+ school systems have signed the DIR interlocal agreement form.
- **End Point Detection Response (EDR)**
  - 362 school systems have signed up for EDR.
  - Installed on 258,000 endpoints.
  - **46,000+** attacks blocked.
  - **16,000+** ransomware threats neutralized.
- **Texas Cybersecurity Framework (TCF) Assessments**
  - 55 LEAs have signed up; 45 completed.
  - Individual results from the assessments are kept confidential.
- **Network Detection Response (NDR) pilot**
  - Nine LEAs have implemented NDR pilot.
  - Pilot is closed to new customers while pilot benefits & costs are evaluated.

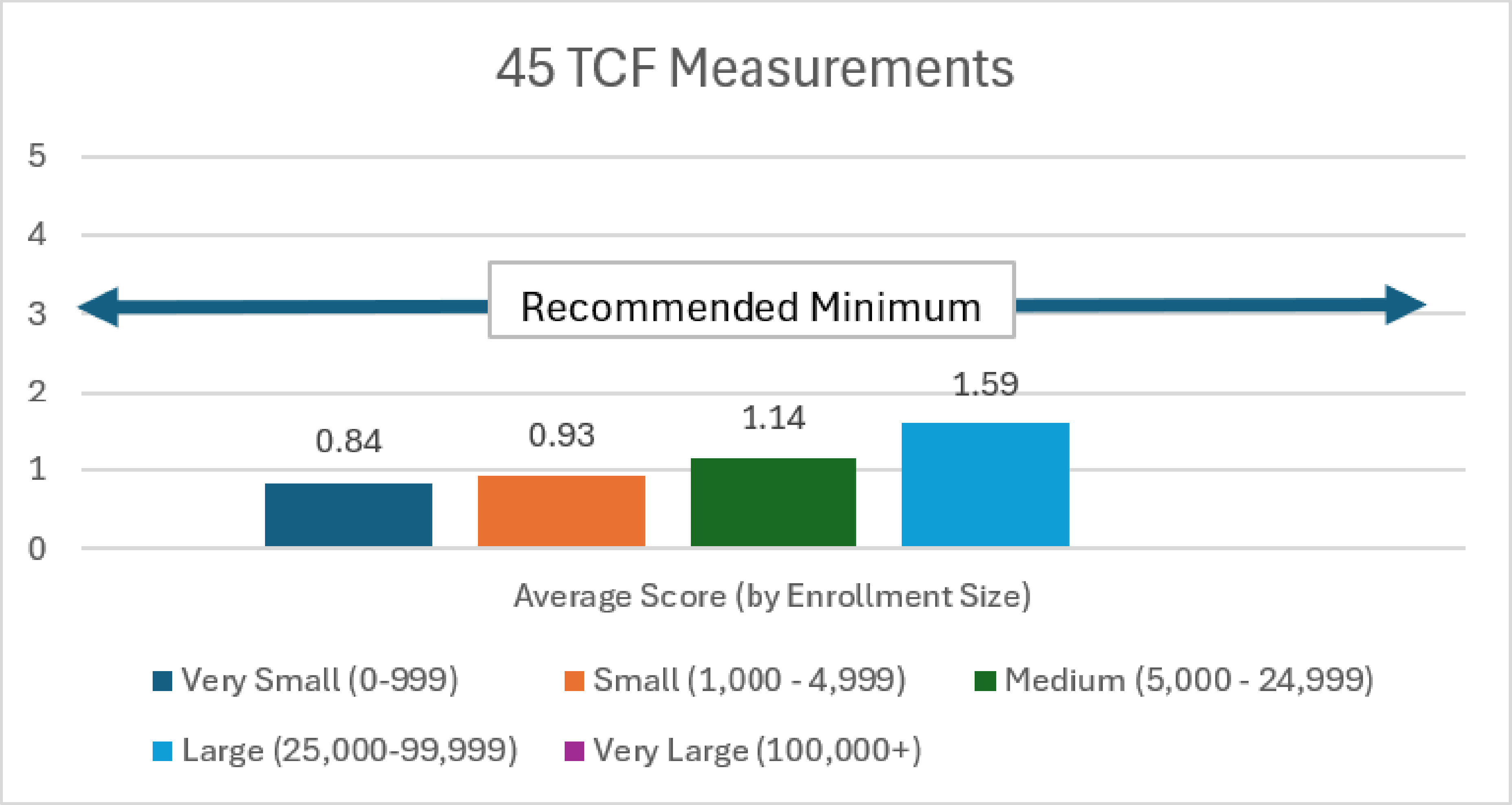
TCF Assessments (Texas Cybersecurity Framework)

- Third-party assessment involving 45 school systems revealed low scores in cybersecurity program maturity.

- On the Texas Cybersecurity Framework’s 5-point scale, the participating school systems averaged 1.08—far below the recommended minimum of 3 - 3.5.

- These alarmingly low scores highlight an urgent need for targeted assistance and resources to strengthen cybersecurity across Texas school systems.

TCF Assessments (By School System Enrollment Size)



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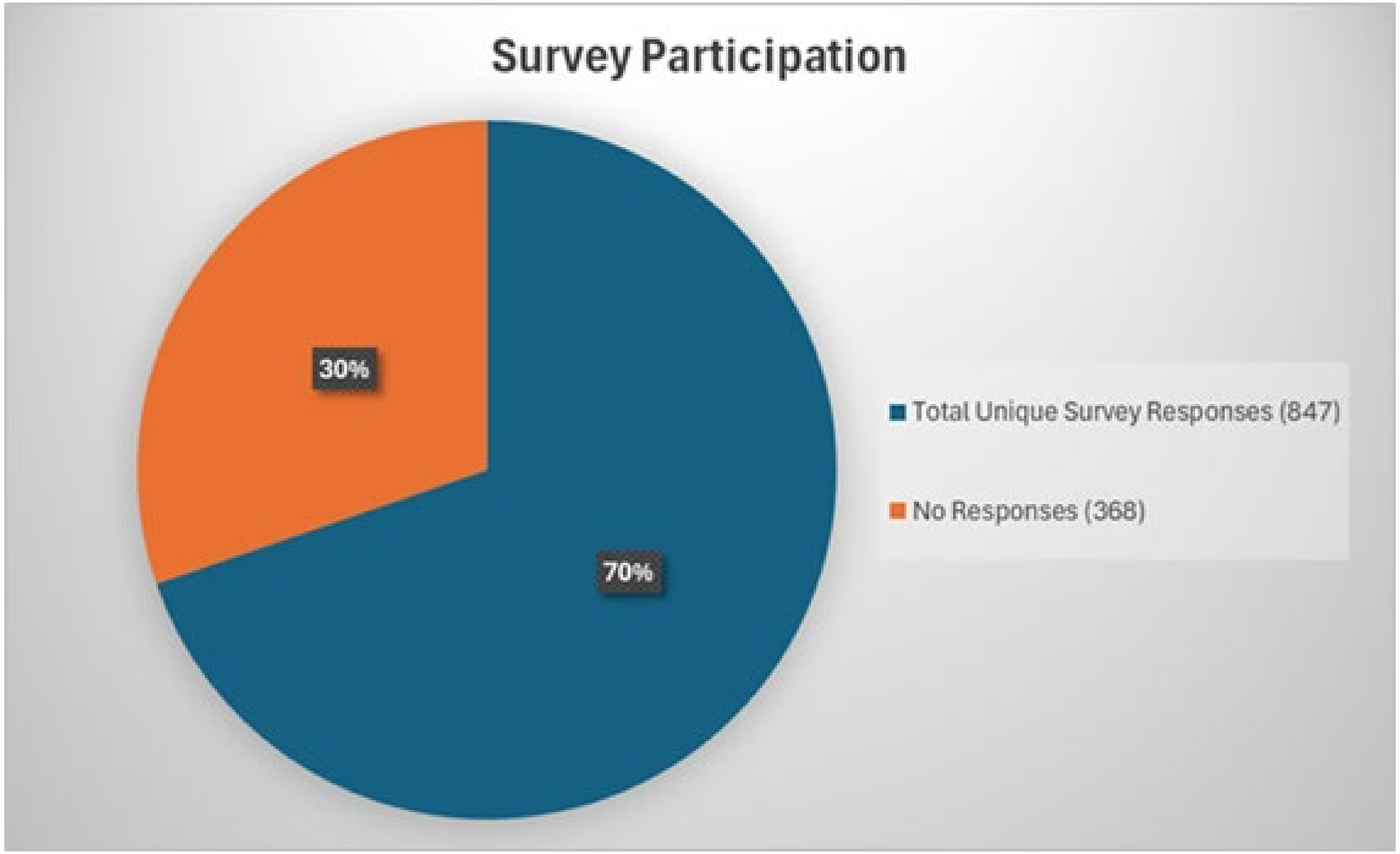
K-12 Cybersecurity Initiative Survey

K-12 Cybersecurity Initiative Survey Pt1.

- September 29, 2025 – October 10, 2025
- The survey was intended to assess the impact of the K-12 Cybersecurity Initiative from Sept 2023 – Aug 2025, identify roadblocks to participation, and gather input on what cybersecurity services and supports would be most helpful in FY26/FY27 (Sept 2025 – Aug 2027).

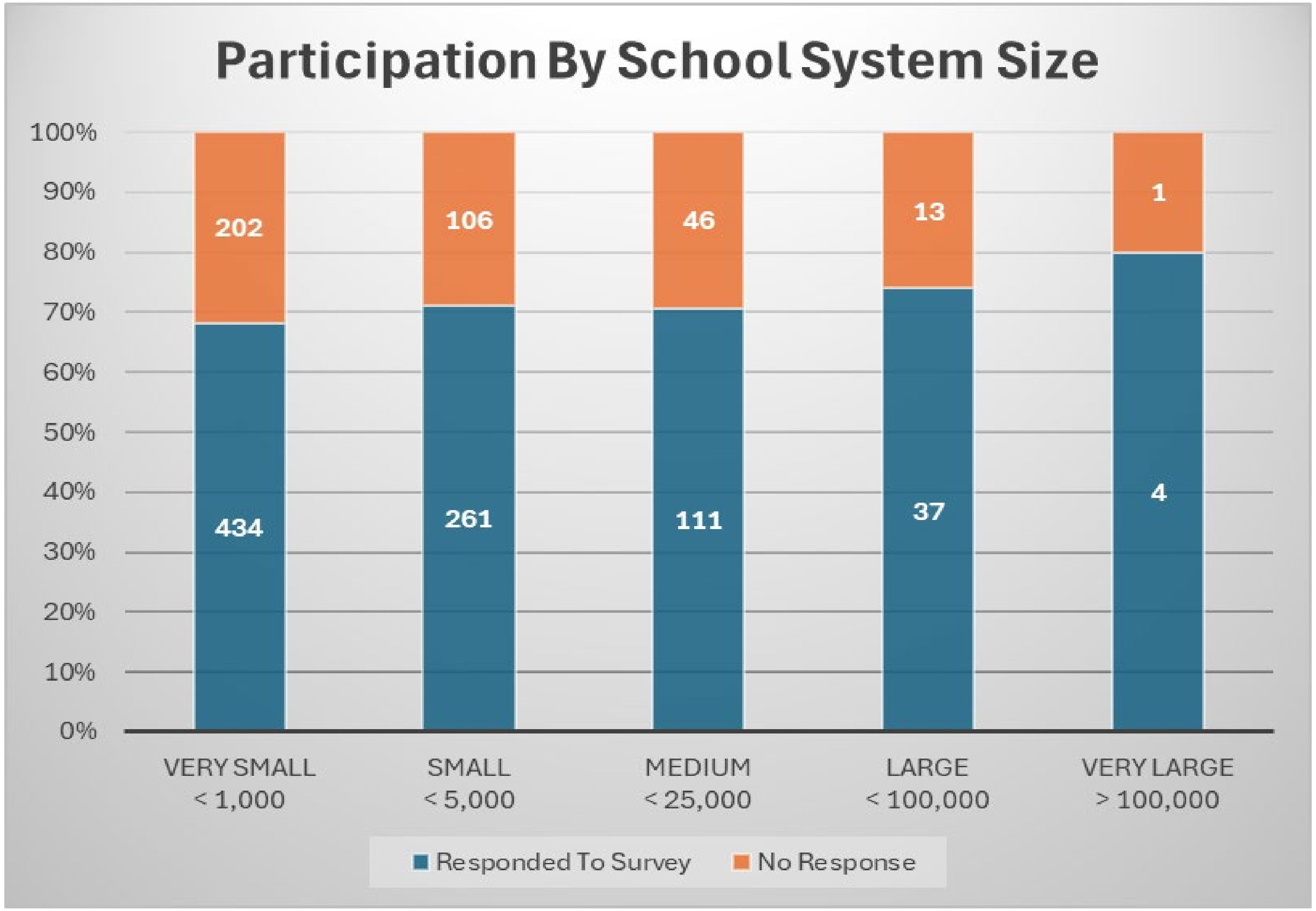
K-12 Cybersecurity Initiative Survey Pt2.

70% Survey Participation



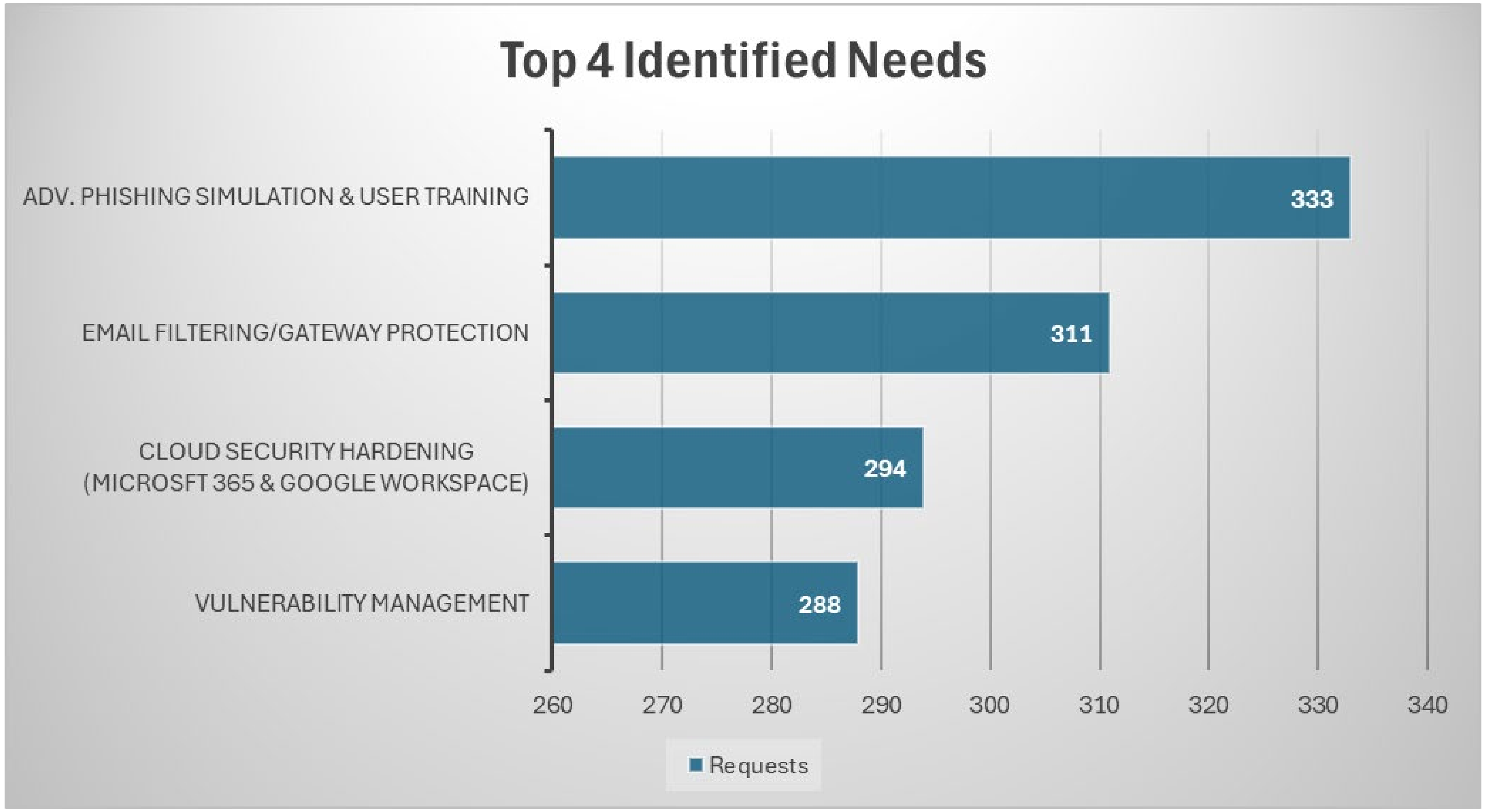
K-12 Cybersecurity Initiative Survey Pt3.

70% Survey Participation



K-12 Cybersecurity Initiative Expansion

- Survey Question: What Cybersecurity issues or services should be prioritized in the next phase of the initiative?



K-12 Cybersecurity Initiative Updates

New Goals – K-12 Cybersecurity Initiative

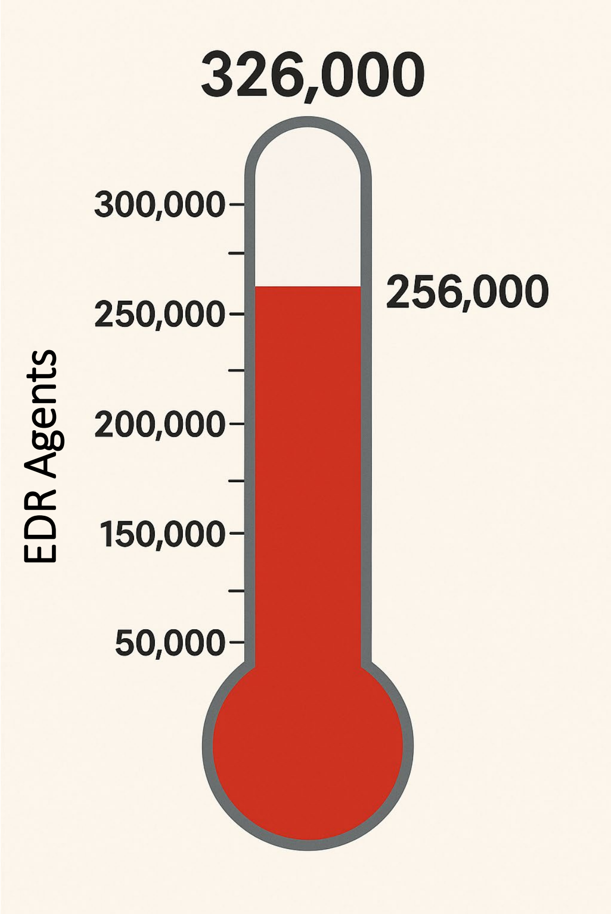
- **Cloud Email Security** – Provided in collaboration with the University of Texas (UT) Regional Security Operations Center (RSOC).

- DIR Certified **Security Awareness Training** and **Phishing Simulations** – Provided in collaboration with the Technology Alliance for Statewide Initiatives (TASI).

- **Microsoft365 & Google Workspace Hardening Guides** – Under development by TASI.

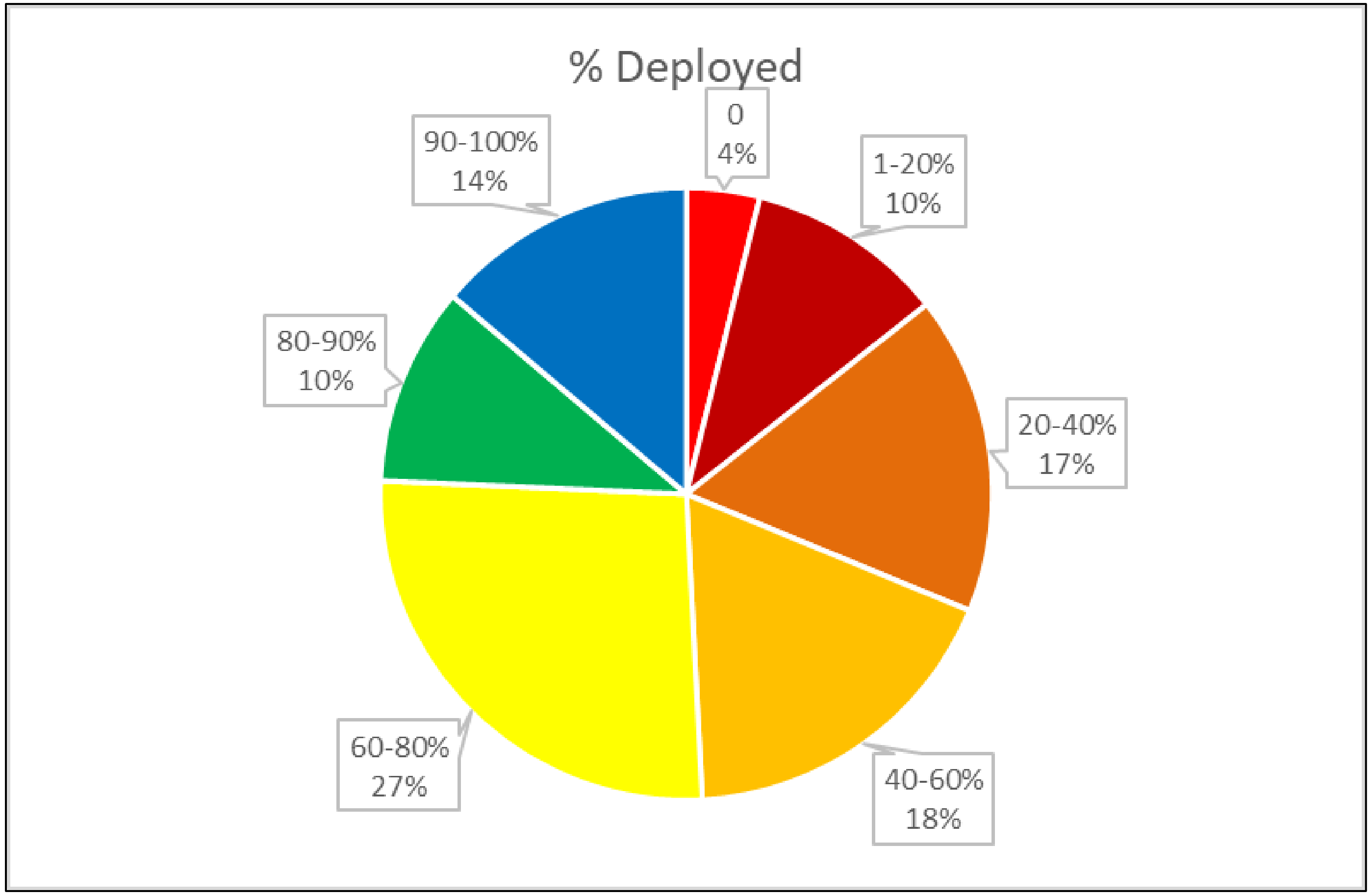
- **Software Deployment Solution** for rollout of EDR agents and other software – Provided in collaboration with TASI.

EDR – First Come, First Served



- $35,000,000 for EDR
  - 65% of K-12 Cyber Initiative Budget
- 326,000 EDR Agents
- 256,000 Agents Deployed
  - 79% of 326,000
- 433,000 Agents Approved
  - 133% of 326,000

Current EDR Approved vs Deployed



% Deployed	Count
0	14
1-20%	38
20-40%	61
40-60%	65
60-80%	96
80-90%	38
90-100%	50
Total	**362**

Approval Re-Alignment (for already approved requests)

- Approved EDR Requests prior to January 1, 2026
  - 60 Days starting February 1, 2026, to complete deployment.
  - On April 3rd, approved count is adjusted to current deployment + 10%.
  - **Example:**
    - ACME ISD is approved for 1,000 agents on June 1, 2025
    - 350 (35%) agents are deployed as of January 20, 2026
    - ACME deployment count reaches 450 on April 2, 2026
    - New approved count is adjusted to 495 (450 + 10%)
    - ACME ISD is 90% Deployed as of April 3, 2026
  - ACME ISD may submit an Add-On request if it determines additional agents are needed later. Approved only if additional agents are still available.
  - Maximum allowed will remain 30% of student enrollment, with a minimum of 30 agents and maximum of 15,000 agents.

Approval Re-Alignment (new EDR requests)

- New EDR Requests (starting February 1st)
  - 90 Days to complete deployment.
  - After 90 days, approved count is adjusted to current deployment + 10%.
  - **Example:**
    - ACME ISD is approved for 1,000 agents on February 1, 2025
    - 350 (35%) agents are deployed as of May 2, 2026
    - New approved count is adjusted to 385 (350 + 10%)
    - ACME ISD is 90% Deployed on May 3, 2026
  - ACME ISD may submit an Add-On request if it determines additional agents are needed later. Approved only if additional agents are still available.
  - Maximum allowed will remain 30% of student enrollment, with a minimum of 30 agents and maximum of 15,000 agents.

Re-Alignment Will:

- Encourage school systems to deploy to 100% of in-scope devices now.
- Forecast actual need and determine if/when additional funds will be needed.
- Allow TEA to determine if EDR may be opened to all school systems, including those above the 50,000 student enrollment max.
- Use up all funds allocated to EDR, currently $35,000,000.
- Once all 326,000 agents are approved and deployed, no more school systems will be approved for EDR service until additional funding is secured.

K-12 Cyber Initiative EDR for In-scope Computers

- School systems need comprehensive EDR coverage
  1. On-premise servers (100%)
  2. IT staff & central office staff computers
  3. Teacher computers
  4. All remaining staff computers
  5. Student lab computers (must remain on campus)

  Start at 1 and move down the list.

New Cloud Email Security Service

- School system will be required to be DMARC compliant prior to or within 30 days of deployment.
- UT-RSOC will assist with deployment configuration, monitoring, and regular tuning as needed.
- UT-RSOC will provide TEA with aggregate reports on threats blocked and share common threats with state threat feeds.

School System Cyber Support Options

- State provides funds in support of:
  - TEA funded cybersecurity services
    - Managed EDR
    - TCF Assessments
    - Cloud Email Security
    - Security Awareness Training & Phishing Simulations
    - NDR
    - School system support and training provided by ESCs
  - RSOC services
    - Incident Response Assistance
    - 24/7 Monitoring
      - Managed EDR
      - Cloud Email Security
    - Tabletop exercises
    - Threat Intelligence Sharing

**This list is not all inclusive.*

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Wrapping Up

Texas Cyber Command

- Passed by 89th Texas Legislature as HB 150
- Governor Abbott appointed retired U.S. Navy Vice Admiral Timothy James “TJ” White to lead the command.
- https://www.txcc.texas.gov/
- https://www.txcc.texas.gov/careers

TXCC
Texas Cyber Command

Reminder – Update your School System Contacts

- Update AskTED
  - Technology Coordinator & Cybersecurity Coordinator
  - *Request assistance from your TED Administrator to update AskTED.*
- Update contact info with your ESC
  - Provide a primary and a backup contact
- Update contact info for STS Portal Access
  - Email terese.shade@dir.texas.gov if you have lost access
- Update contact info with SAIC SOC Team
- Update all the above when Technology or Cybersecurity Coordinators change

K-12 Cybersecurity Initiative Website

- Easy to find -> Type TEA & Cybersecurity into Search engine, it's the first link
- https://tea.texas.gov/academics/learning-support-and-programs/technology-planning/k-12-cybersecurity-initiative
  - Steps for onboarding school systems to DIR STS portal.
  - Updates about the program.
  - Frequently asked questions about the program.
  - Handy link to sign up for the Cybersecurity Coordinator Forum meetings.
  - Previous K-12 Cybersecurity Initiative Webinars posted on this page.
- Program Email: k12cyber@tea.texas.gov

Cybersecurity Coordinator Forum (CCF)

The **TEA Cybersecurity** team hosts a **monthly** meeting for Texas school system **Cybersecurity Coordinators, Technology Coordinators**, Education Service Center (ESC) **Cybersecurity personnel**, and other members of the community that support K-12 Cybersecurity efforts. It provides content designed to assist school systems and ESCs towards maturity in an information security program.

Next CCF: February 25, 2026 @ 11:00 AM CST

Register here:

https://t.ly/Hmimy

Please register with your school system email account.

Questions & Answers

Stay Safe & Secure

Thank you!

Questions?

Email:
k12cyber@tea.texas.gov