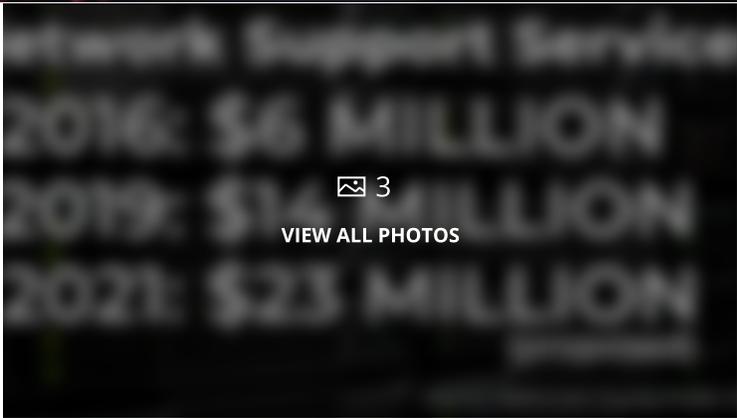
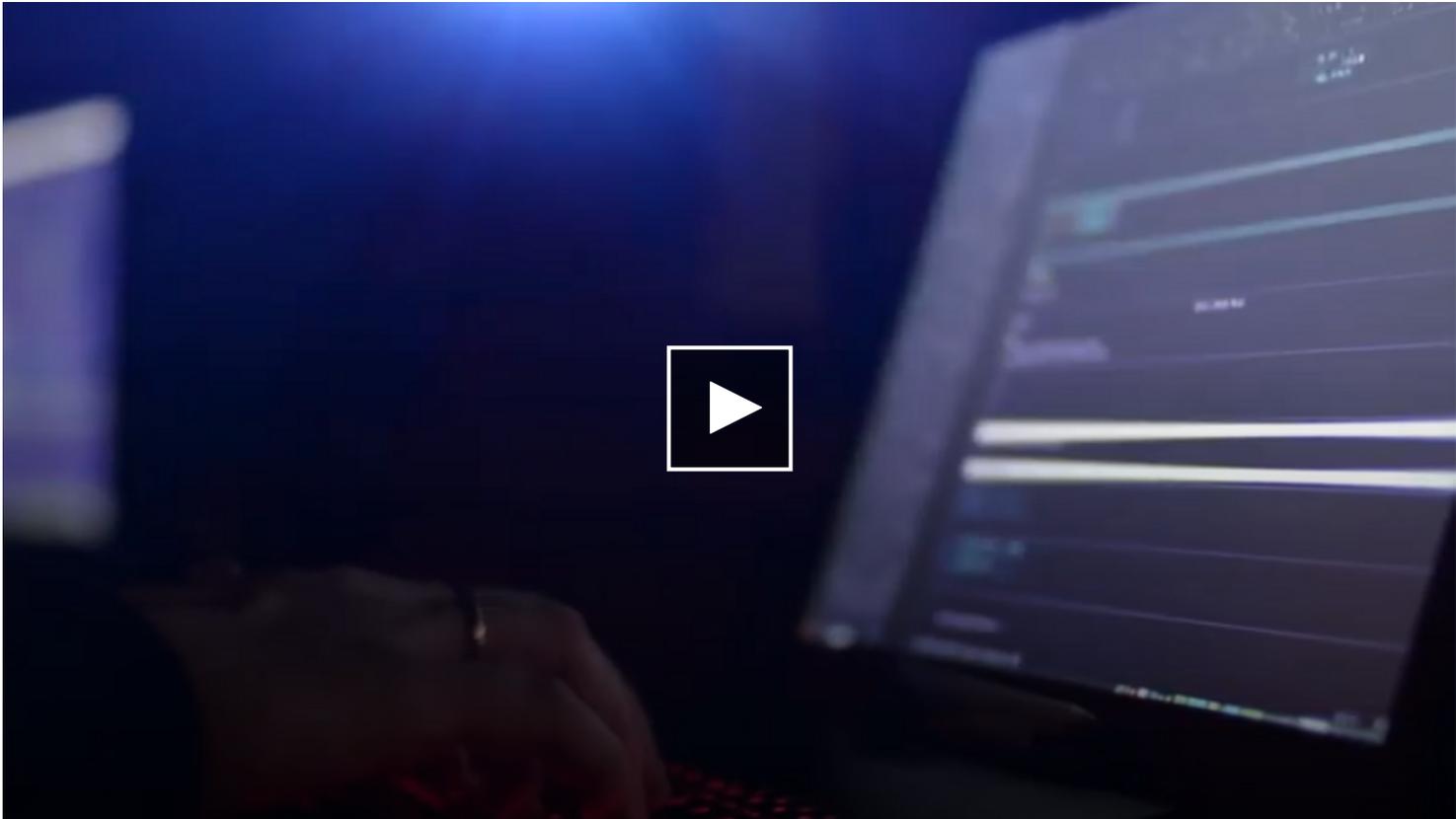


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Baltimore County Schools Hacked, Expert Predicts Months to Fix

by Chris Papst
Wednesday, November 25th 2020



A person working on a laptop. Baltimore County Schools announced that its network was hit with a ransomware attack on November 25, 2020 (WBFF)



have a major impact on virtual learning.

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What happened to Baltimore County Schools is not uncommon. In September, Virginia's largest school system, Fairfax County, was hacked. Earlier this year, Nevada's largest school system, Clark County, was hacked. Now, America's 24th largest school system, Baltimore County, is the latest target.

ALSO READ | [Baltimore County Public Schools closed - ransomware attack on network](#)

Project Baltimore spoke with Brian Dykstra, the CEO of Atlantic Data Forensics in Elkridge, which specializes in defending against ransomware. He says ransomware attacks are on the rise during the COVID pandemic. He tells FOX45 News it's a criminal business and it's thriving.

Dykstra told Project Baltimore the hackers who attacked Baltimore County Schools have likely been in the system for weeks, finding out where everything is and planning when to send out the ransomware to encrypt the district's data. There are several ways the system could have been hacked, but Dykstra says remote learning may have made the school system an easier target.

"They pushed out remote access to everybody really quickly with the goal being get everybody covered as quickly as possible, right?" explained Dykstra. "Did they do it in the most secure way possible? Unfortunately, the answer for a lot of organizations is that they didn't. They did whatever was most expedient but not most secure."

Dykstra says organizations should be spending roughly four to six percent of their budget on IT security. But, in his experience, organizations tend to underfund their IT departments.

"It's really a management problem, right?" said Dykstra. "It's usually because there has been a decision made of not funding IT."

Project Baltimore looked at the Baltimore County Schools budget and found, since 2016, the amount of money BCPS put toward Network Support Services has more than tripled from \$6

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BCPS has more than tripled spending on Network Support Services over the last five years (WBFF)

We don't know the full extent of this attack and what will be affected. The hackers could have emails, payroll, or student records. The best hope, Dykstra says, is the school system has good backups. Dykstra believes this will determine whether the system should just pay the ransom. But either way, he says, there's no quick fix.

ALSO READ | Ransomware attack has cost Baltimore \$18M so far. Can it be recouped?

"My general experience with an organization as big as the public school system," explained Dykstra, "it's going to take them weeks, months to get back to anything that looks like normal."