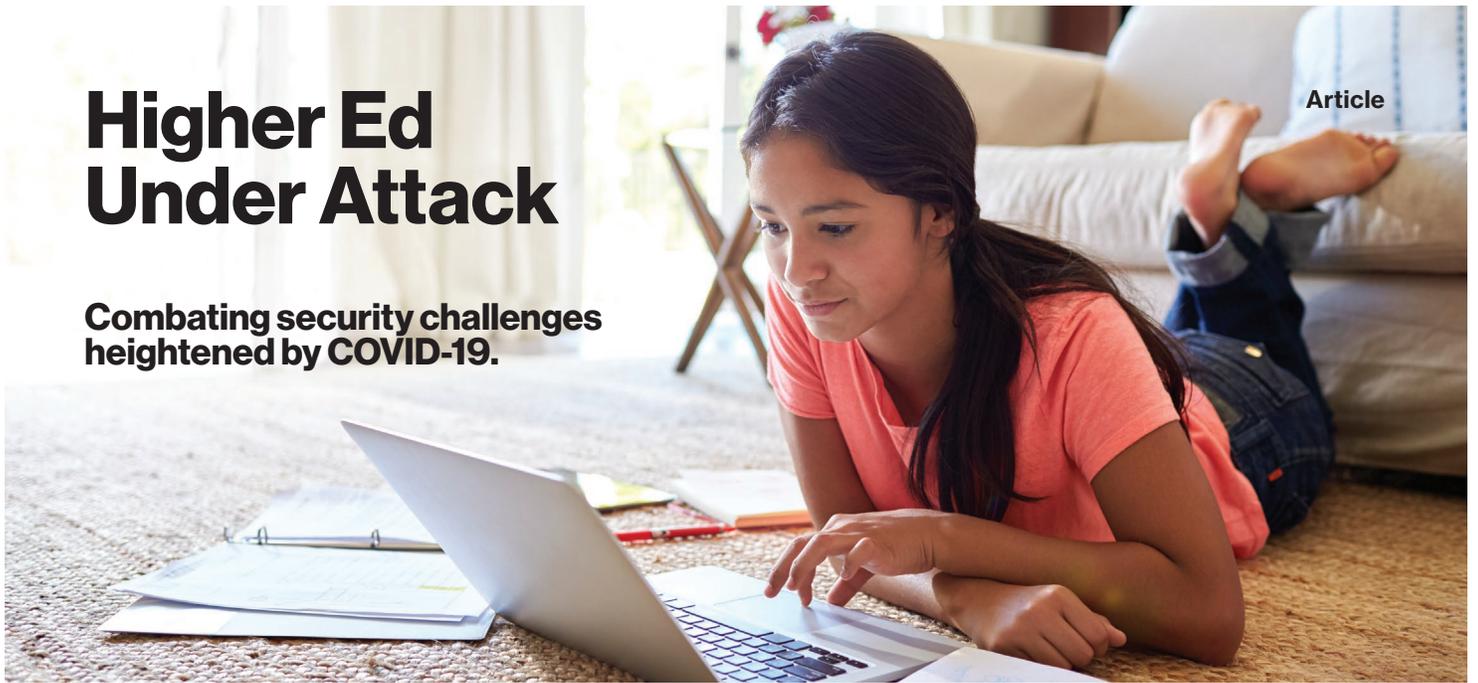


Higher Ed Under Attack

Combating security challenges heightened by COVID-19.

Article



Let's start with the hard facts. US schools have lost 24.5 million records in breaches since 2005,¹ while more than half of UK universities suffered a data breach in 2020.² The rate of ransomware attacks within the education sector has increased dramatically in 2020, growing to 80 percent of reported malware-related incidents compared with 48 percent the prior year.³ And experts say that more (and more sophisticated) cyberextortion is on the way for higher ed.⁴

Why? Financial information, student and faculty data, intellectual property, and research findings make higher-ed institutions a veritable candy store for hackers. Security at these institutions is not usually as strong as in the private sector. Less vigilant users may be more likely to fall for phishing attacks and other scams. And the massive disruption triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic amplified existing challenges—and created new vulnerabilities.

How COVID-19 supercharged security threats.

Growing security concerns had already propelled information security to the top of the EDUCAUSE list of IT issues early in 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic made security all the more critical. IT departments within educational institutions found themselves focusing their attention on meeting the surging demand for remote services from all constituents—students, faculty, and researchers. Meanwhile, they faced a corresponding surge in security risk, thanks in part to these remote users signing in from home, coffee shops, or other less-than-secure locations.

Then there's the talent shortage. Before the pandemic, higher-ed institutions already had difficulty attracting talented IT staff, since security professionals were in high demand. But COVID-19 made it even harder for colleges and universities to compete with private sector organizations for talent, leaving them struggling to address critical security issues.

Drawing upon the pandemic experience to boost security.

COVID-19 also provided valuable, though hard-won, experience. "Education technology leaders can apply lessons they have learned from the pandemic—and the shift to remote learning—to long-term security strategies," said Chris Novak, Director of Verizon's Threat Research Advisory Center during a recent [EdScoop podcast](#). According to Novak, the answer to many higher-ed IT challenges is clear—engaging managed and professional services to improve security and support digital transformation initiatives.

"If you're a school, your focus is education. The school does not exist for the sole purpose of securing it. It exists to educate. That's a big piece of what we see from the managed security and professional services side—organizations reaching out to us and saying how can you help us address this so we can apply our resources toward our core mission?"

— Chris Novak, Director of Verizon's Threat Research Advisory Center

The advantages of managed and professional services

Partnering with an experienced managed and professional services organization offers educational institutions a wide range of benefits. Foremost among them is the ability to strengthen and extend the security of network operations and user security—on premises and in the cloud. The right partner can provide comprehensive security expertise on demand. It frees in-house IT professionals to turn their attention to foundational operations and initiatives, such as providing critical connectivity for students, staff, and teachers. And scalable support provides higher-ed institutions with a cost-effective approach that keeps them flexible, responsive—and ready for the challenges ahead.

Choose a security partner based on experience and expertise.

There are many groups offering managed and professional services. However, as a global leader providing network services worldwide, Verizon offers strategic advantages to colleges and universities, according to Novak. “Verizon’s experience monitoring and protecting our own networks from adversaries across the globe gives us a deep understanding of the types of threats that can impact colleges and universities,” he said, highlighting Verizon’s years of experience in higher education.

Novak acknowledged the daunting challenge of keeping up with the ever-increasing complexity of today’s IT environment. But he highlighted managed and professional services as a strategic and cost-effective way forward for colleges and universities to help:

- Improve agility
- Boost overall cybersecurity
- Reduce the workload for in-house IT
- Support ongoing digital transformation initiatives

What to look for in managed and professional services.

Ideally, an experienced security partner should provide the full spectrum of security offerings—identifying threats, protecting your organization, detecting and responding to threats and helping you recover quickly from any security issues. Here are just a few of the broad array of managed and professional services offered by Verizon:

- **Cybersecurity assessments**
Determine where your school needs to focus its attention—and what security initiatives to pursue.
- **Managed Security Services—Analytics**
Identify threats to your network quickly via Verizon’s advanced threat intelligence and analysis.
- **Managed Security Information and Event Management (Managed SIEM).**
Rely on Verizon for next-level SIEM monitoring and alerting that boosts your security.
- **Rapid Response Retainer**
Get the services you need to help minimize the time to contain and recover from a cyberattack.

Get more insights on security and higher ed.

There’s much more to say about the evolving security challenges that colleges and universities face in the COVID-19 era, of course. Explore [Verizon’s Professional and Managed Services](#) to find out why Verizon is a trusted partner to higher education. Or listen to EdScoop Radio’s recent podcast, “[Managed Services Key to Education Cybersecurity Post-COVID](#),” featuring Verizon’s Chris Novak and Shane Hallen, a strategic sales manager for service providers at Cisco Meraki.

Learn more.

Security is just one of the challenges faced by higher-ed institutions today. For more information on how Verizon can help, [speak to a higher education expert](#).



¹ “US Schools Have Lost 2.4 million records in breaches since 2005,” Jonathan Greig, TechRepublic. July 2, 2020. Source: <https://www.techrepublic.com/article/us-schools-have-lost-24-5-million-records-in-breaches-since-2005/>

² “Over Half of Universities Suffered Data Breach in Past Year,” Phil Muncaster, Infosecurity. July 28, 2020. Source: <https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/over-half-of-universities-suffered/>

³ 2020 Data Breach Investigations Report (DBIR), Verizon. Source: <https://enterprise.verizon.com/resources/reports/dbir/2020/summary-of-findings/>

⁴ “Cyberextortion Threat Evolves,” Lindsay McKenzie, Inside Higher Ed, June 11, 2020.

⁵ 2020 Top 10 IT Issues: The Drive to Digital Transformation Begins, EDUCAUSE, January 27, 2020. <https://www.educause.edu/research-and-publications/research/top-10-it-issues-technologies-and-trends/2020>