

D233 OKs cybersecurity plan to protect H-F's computers

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District 233 school board members voted Feb. 15 on a security system to protect Homewood-Flossmoor High School's computer network and reduce the threats that are increasing.

Steve Richardson, director of information technology, said H-F has been able to stop as many as 20,000 monthly attempts to sabotage the network.

The board approved the \$76,637 purchase of the CrowdStrike cloud-based cybersecurity platform for 24/7 security.

"We're starting to see a high attack rate against schools now," Richardson said. "Last year (we) saw a 50% increase in attacks overall in the cyberattacks environment. The threats are getting higher."


Richardson said his team has great systems and layers of security to protect the H-F network, and staff has been working diligently to prevent problems at H-F. But, staff doesn't work around the clock. He said a school system in Orlando Park got hit on a Sunday night, but CrowdStrike saved the district from a serious disruption.

Richardson, speaking at the board finance committee meeting, was asked for an assessment of the problem.

"I don't want to say critical, but we're getting near that, just because of the threat increase. In the last year, we've had 20,000 attacks against our network per month. Our current systems are being attacked, but it's getting beyond what our normal systems can monitor," he said.

"This is why I'm presenting it now, instead of the normal budget year, because I feel that increase, especially in our neighboring schools, the threats are getting higher and higher. We're seeing targeted attacks, even our own school is experiencing. (Hackers are) using data from our own environment, school community and targeting that, so now it's not a blanket attack but very targeted," he told finance committee members.

Richardson said the one-year contract comes with \$100,000 in insurance to cover costs should there be a disruption. He pointed out that the contract protects teachers' laptops and students' chromebooks, so the network can be protected even offsite of the H-F campus.



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