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Alabama State Department of Education Responds to Ongoing Cyber Attack Investigation

MONTGOMERY, AL – On June 17, Information System (IS) staff at the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) interrupted and stopped an attack on the department's computer system. IS professionals were able to interrupt and stop the attack before the hackers could access all the targeted servers to lock down our computer system.

However, the hackers were able to access some data and disrupt our services before IS staff interrupted and stopped the attack. ALSDE immediately began working with state and federal law enforcement, the Alabama Attorney General, the Alabama Office of Information Technology, and an independent contractor known as an expert in anti-hacking response, to fortify our cyber defenses and to assess which data, if any, were compromised.

That criminal investigation is ongoing. Services have been restored, and additional cybersecurity protocols have been added to the system. When it is determined which data may have been compromised, notification will be made to relevant parties in full compliance with applicable notification laws and best practices.

Like other public schools, agencies, hospitals, and businesses that have been hit by criminal syndicates, it is disappointing and disheartening to learn that hackers were able to break through our security system to access data. In consultation with law enforcement, we have taken the position not to negotiate with foreign actors and extortioners. On principle, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) never recommends paying off hackers. Since our team was able to interrupt the hackers, keeping them from encrypting the server, they were unable to instigate a denial of service. All data have been restored using clean backups.

We have taken multiple additional steps to secure data, but we cannot detail any of the steps we have taken due to the nature of the investigation and the sensitivity of sharing security measures publicly.

While we still do not know the exact content of the information, it is possible that the hackers breached both student and employee data, including some personally identifiable information. We are working with the FBI and other experts to monitor the situation. A dedicated landing page, *alabamaachieves.org/databreach* has been deployed and will be updated as soon as the investigation is complete, and more information is available. Questions and comments can be sent to databreach@alsde.edu

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