Why IT security is a critical part of the school environment

In many education environments today there are hundreds of devices connecting the network at any one time. These vary from teachers' provided laptops and phones to bring-your-own and student devices that may all run on different operating systems, and may or may not have security features installed. This creates a security risk for many education institutions that don't have a plan in place to mitigate it, according to Wavelink.

Manuja Wijesekera, Wavelink pre-sales solutions architect for Fortinet, said, "Education institutions rely on technology delivered through the network for learning. If a device is breached or brings down the network then learning stops. One of the threats, among many affecting schools, is ransomware such as CryptoLocker, which can cause havoc by completely locking the network down."

It is critical for education institutions to have a policy in place for when devices are introduced to the network. To manage this, they need the right technology and governance in place, backed by a security culture for staff and students to make them aware of the risks.

Manuja Wijesekera said, "While many schools might not have the resources in-house for this, they can find a partner that can walk them through this journey. The right partner can guide them in making important decisions about how to manage security at an appropriate level to minimise the risk to the institution. For example, a partner would be able to advise on the appropriate level of technical access levels for staff and students or an effective backup strategy that the school can use.

"It's important to start the journey because the biggest mistake is to not do anything at all.

"Some schools might be starting from nothing, which creates a real reluctance to start at all because it seems too overwhelming to fix everything at once. However, the important thing is just to start the journey ensuring it includes technology, governance, and awareness. Start small and improve over time. Gather metrics along the way that demonstrate the value of security in improving business operations so that the budget will also continue to grow with the program."

Education institutions should look for a partner to conduct a cyberthreat assessment. This will tell them where they are today from a security risk perspective and give them the information they need to get to an acceptable risk level in the next 12-24 months.

Manuja Wijesekera said, "In addition, reach out to other similar organisations to understand what they're doing and even look at government resources such as Stay Smart Online, eSafety, and ThinkUKnow to see how they can help. Not everything is a cost, and there are many free resources to get started with.

"It's also useful to make it personal for teachers and students so they know the effect a security breach can have on them. Put security programs in place that include the whole school community."

-ENDS-

About Wavelink
Wavelink specialises in the supply, marketing and support of a range of leading edge technology solutions for the mobile enterprise. Wavelink distributes a range of products from Spectralink, Fortinet, Spok, Olinqua and Digium. For more information please contact Wavelink on 1300 147 000.