INTELLIGENCE BRIEFING
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Ransomware Attack Disrupts Evanston Township High School District 202, Summer Programs Suspended

SECURITY ANALYSIS | HIGH

SCC Item ID	SCC-STY-2026-0182
Type	Security Analysis
Severity	HIGH
Affected Products	Evanston Township High School District 202, district systems and internet services
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Executive Summary

On June 7, 2025, Evanston Township High School District 202 in Evanston, Illinois was struck by a ransomware attack that forced a two-day campus closure, suspended summer athletic programs, and disrupted district-wide systems and internet services. The incident occurs within a sustained pattern of ransomware targeting K-12 institutions, documented by CISA in Advisory AA23-061A, where under-resourced school districts present predictable attack surfaces: limited security staffing, legacy infrastructure, and broad operational dependencies on networked systems. For CISOs in the education sector and municipal services, this incident signals that summer operational periods, when IT staffing is reduced and monitoring may be relaxed, carry elevated risk and warrant proactive posture review.

Technical Analysis

The ETHS District 202 ransomware incident unfolded on June 7, 2025, with operational impact severe enough to close a major suburban high school campus for two full school days (June 8-9) and cancel summer programming. The district published an incident notice at eths202.org and communicated via official channels. ABC7 Chicago reported the school planned to reopen June 11, suggesting a recovery window of approximately four days from initial impact to partial restoration.

No ransomware variant, threat actor, or initial access vector has been publicly attributed as of this analysis. Based on MITRE ATT&CK techniques mapped to this incident, two TTPs are consistent with the observed impact: T1486 (Data Encrypted for Impact) and T1490 (Inhibit System Recovery). T1486 reflects encryption of district systems sufficient to cause operational shutdown. T1490 suggests threat actors may have targeted backup or recovery mechanisms, complicating restoration and extending the disruption window. This

combination is standard practice in modern ransomware operations and is consistent with the multi-day recovery timeline observed here.

The absence of confirmed data exfiltration or ransom demand disclosure in open-source reporting does not exclude double-extortion. Many ransomware operators exfiltrate data before encryption and withhold disclosure strategically. Student records, personnel files, and financial data are common targets in K-12 incidents and carry FERPA implications if exfiltrated.

CISA Advisory AA23-061A, published in March 2023, identified K-12 institutions as high-frequency ransomware targets due to several structural factors: flat network architectures, inconsistent patch cycles, limited endpoint detection coverage, and reliance on third-party vendors with varying security postures. ETHS District 202 serves approximately 3,500 students and operates a single-campus model, meaning a single ransomware deployment had immediate district-wide impact with no geographic redundancy to absorb the disruption.

The June timing is operationally significant. Summer transition periods in educational institutions typically coincide with reduced IT staffing, deferred patching cycles, and shifts in network activity baselines that may mask anomalous behavior. These conditions lower detection probability and extend attacker dwell time before encryption is triggered.

Action Checklist

1. Step 1: Assess exposure, if your organization operates in K-12 education or shares infrastructure patterns with public school districts (flat networks, mixed-age endpoints, student information systems), escalate this incident to your leadership team and SOC for immediate risk review.
2. Step 2: Review controls, verify MFA enforcement on all remote access and administrative accounts (CIS 6.3, CIS 6.4, CIS 6.5); confirm EDR coverage extends to all endpoint classes including lab and administrative devices; audit firewall rules for unnecessary lateral movement paths (CIS 4.4, CIS 4.5).
3. Step 3: Audit backup integrity against T1490, test that backup systems are isolated from primary domain authentication, that recovery procedures are documented and exercised, and that backup restoration has been validated within the last 90 days (NIST CP-9, NIST CP-10, NIST CP-4).
4. Step 4: Review summer-period monitoring posture, confirm that alert thresholds and SOC staffing levels during low-occupancy periods are adequate; mass encryption events generate distinctive I/O and network traffic patterns that require active monitoring to catch before full deployment (NIST AU-6, NIST SI-1).
5. Step 5: Update threat model, log T1486 and T1490 as active TTP risk against your sector; if you operate in K-12, municipal services, or under-resourced public-sector IT, document this incident in your threat register and reference CISA AA23-061A as supporting intelligence.
6. Step 6: Communicate findings, brief leadership on the operational risk of ransomware-induced campus or facility closure; quantify the business impact in terms of service days lost, staff hours, and potential regulatory exposure if student or personnel data was accessed.
7. Step 7: Monitor developments, track ETHS District 202 disclosures at eths202.org for any confirmed data exfiltration, ransom payment disclosure, or variant attribution; follow CISA and MS-ISAC for any associated threat actor advisories.

IR / Forensic Enrichment

Triage Priority	URGENT

Escalation Criteria	Escalate immediately to executive leadership and legal counsel if network monitoring detects active ransomware precursor activity (mass SMB lateral movement, VSS deletion commands, anomalous admin account logons outside business hours), or if any student PII, FERPA-protected records, or staff personnel data is confirmed or suspected to have been accessed or exfiltrated — triggering state breach notification obligations and potential FERPA reporting requirements.
Recovery Notes	Post-containment recovery for a ransomware incident of this profile must begin with verified clean restoration from backups confirmed isolated from domain authentication — do not restore from any backup server that was online and domain-joined during the encryption window, as ransomware actors executing T1490 routinely encrypt or corrupt domain-accessible backup catalogs first. Monitor all restored systems for 30 days post-recovery using Sysmon Event ID 1 (Process Creation) and Event ID 3 (Network Connection) filtered for known ransomware persistence mechanisms including scheduled tasks, registry run keys (HKLM\SOFTWARE\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Run), and WMI subscriptions. Revalidate MFA enforcement and firewall segmentation rules before returning any internet-facing service to production, as ransomware actors in the K-12 sector frequently maintain persistent access through secondary backdoors planted during the initial dwell period.
Forensic Artifacts	VSS and backup deletion evidence: Windows Application Event Log entries for VSS provider errors combined with PowerShell Script Block Log (Event ID 4104) entries containing 'vssadmin delete shadows', 'wbadmin delete catalog', or 'bcdedit /set recoveryenabled No' — these commands are executed by ransomware deploying T1490 and are among the earliest forensic indicators of an impending encryption event in K-12-targeted campaigns | Mass file rename and encryption activity: Sysmon Event ID 11 (FileCreate) logs on file servers showing a sudden spike in file creation events with non-standard extensions (e.g., .locked, .encrypted, variant-specific extensions) across shared drive paths — correlate timestamp clustering to establish encryption start time and estimate dwell time before detection | Lateral movement via SMB: Windows Security Event ID 4624 (Successful Logon, Logon Type 3 — Network) and Event ID 4648 (Explicit Credential Logon) on administrative servers showing service account or admin credential reuse across multiple hosts within a short time window, consistent with T1021.002 (SMB/Windows Admin Shares) lateral movement preceding ransomware detonation | Ransomware dropper and staging artifacts: file system artifacts in user temp directories (%TEMP%, %APPDATA%\Local\Temp, C:\Windows\Temp) including recently created executables with randomized names or double extensions (e.g., invoice.pdf.exe); prefetch files at C:\Windows\Prefetch\ recording execution of anomalous binaries; and MFT ($MFT) timestamp entries showing file creation clustered in the hours before encryption began — recoverable with Autopsy or free MFTECmd from Eric Zimmerman's tools | C2 and exfiltration network traffic: DNS query logs from your internal resolver (Windows DNS Debug Log or pfSense query logs) showing repeated lookups to newly registered or algorithmically generated domains in the hours preceding the encryption event; NetFlow or firewall connection logs showing large outbound data transfers (hundreds of MB to GB) over HTTPS to non-standard cloud storage or file-sharing endpoints — consistent with double-extortion data staging (T1041) documented in CISA AA23-061A for ransomware actors targeting K-12 institutions

Per-Action IR Details

Step 1: Assess exposure — if your organization operates in K-12 education or shares infrastructure patterns with public school districts (flat networks, mixed-age endpoints, student information systems), treat this incident as a direct peer-sector warning

NIST Phase: Preparation

Reference: NIST 800-61r3 §2 — Preparation: Establishing IR Capability and Threat Awareness

Controls: NIST IR-4 (Incident Handling), NIST IR-8 (Incident Response Plan), CIS 1.1 (Establish and Maintain Detailed Enterprise Asset Inventory), CIS 7.1 (Establish and Maintain a Vulnerability Management Process)

Compensating: Run a manual network segmentation audit using free tools: execute `netstat -rn` on core switches or routers to map broadcast domains; use Angry IP Scanner or `nmap -sn 10.0.0.0/8` to enumerate all live hosts across subnets and flag any flat /8 or /16 ranges that give student VLANs direct routes to administrative systems or SIS servers. Document findings in a shared spreadsheet reviewed by both team members.

Evidence: Before proceeding, capture a baseline network topology snapshot: export current firewall rule tables and VLAN assignments; pull DHCP lease logs to confirm whether student, staff, and administrative devices share the same IP range; check whether your Student Information System (e.g., Skyward, PowerSchool, Infinite Campus) is accessible from student-facing VLANs without authentication barriers. These artifacts establish whether your environment mirrors the flat-network attack surface documented in CISA AA23-061A.

Step 2: Review controls — verify MFA enforcement on all remote access and administrative accounts (CIS 6.3, CIS 6.4, CIS 6.5); confirm EDR coverage extends to all endpoint classes including lab and administrative devices; audit firewall rules for unnecessary lateral movement paths (CIS 4.4, CIS 4.5)

NIST Phase: Preparation

Reference: NIST 800-61r3 §2 — Preparation: Preventive Controls and Security Posture Hardening

Controls: CIS 6.3 (Require MFA for Externally-Exposed Applications), CIS 6.4 (Require MFA for Remote Network Access), CIS 6.5 (Require MFA for Administrative Access), CIS 4.4 (Implement and Manage a Firewall on Servers), CIS 4.5 (Implement and Manage a Firewall on End-User Devices), CIS 5.4 (Restrict Administrator Privileges to Dedicated Administrator Accounts)

Compensating: For MFA gap assessment without commercial tooling: query Active Directory for accounts with remote access privileges using `Get-ADGroupMember -Identity 'VPN Users' | Get-ADUser -Properties *` and cross-reference against your MFA enrollment list. For EDR gap coverage on lab endpoints, deploy Sysmon (v15+) using SwiftOnSecurity's public config to all Windows lab machines via GPO; verify deployment with `Get-Service Sysmon64 -ComputerName (Get-ADComputer -Filter *).Name` run from a domain controller. Review iptables or Windows Firewall rules on administrative servers for any rules permitting unrestricted SMB (TCP 445) or RDP (TCP 3389) from student network ranges.

Evidence: Export Windows Security Event Log Event ID 4625 (Failed Logon) and Event ID 4648 (Logon Using Explicit Credentials) from domain controllers for the 30 days prior to review to identify credential stuffing or brute-force attempts against administrative accounts — a common ransomware precursor in under-resourced environments. Capture current Group Policy Objects governing remote access to confirm whether MFA is enforced at the policy level or relies solely on application-layer controls.

Step 3: Audit backup integrity against T1490 — test that backup systems are isolated from primary domain authentication, that recovery procedures are documented and exercised, and that backup restoration has been validated within the last 90 days (NIST CP-9, NIST CP-10, NIST CP-4)

NIST Phase: Preparation

Reference: NIST 800-61r3 §2 — Preparation: Contingency Capabilities and Recovery Readiness

Controls: NIST CP-9 (System Backup), NIST CP-10 (System Recovery And Reconstitution), NIST CP-4 (Contingency Plan Testing), NIST CP-2 (Contingency Plan), CIS 4.6 (Securely Manage Enterprise Assets and Software)

Compensating: Verify backup isolation manually: attempt to authenticate to your backup console (Veeam, Backup Exec, Windows Server Backup) using a standard domain service account — if it succeeds, your backup system shares domain authentication and is vulnerable to T1490 inhibit-recovery activity. For isolated offline backup without budget: configure a dedicated local administrator account (not domain-joined) on the backup server, disable SMB access from all production VLANs using Windows Firewall advanced rules, and validate a test restore of a critical server image to an isolated VM using free Hyper-V or VirtualBox. Document the restore time in minutes as your RTO baseline.

Evidence: Before auditing, capture the following artifacts that ransomware actors targeting K-12 environments commonly manipulate prior to encryption: query Volume Shadow Copy status via `vssadmin list shadows` on all

servers — ransomware executing T1490 typically deletes VSS snapshots first; check Windows Event Log for Event ID 524 (System Catalog Deleted) and PowerShell Event ID 4104 (Script Block Logging) for commands containing `vssadmin delete shadows`, `wbadmin delete`, or `bcdedit /set recoveryenabled No`; review backup job logs for any authentication failures or unexpected job cancellations in the 2 weeks prior to audit.

Step 4: Review summer-period monitoring posture — confirm that alert thresholds and SOC staffing levels during low-occupancy periods are adequate; mass encryption events generate distinctive I/O and network traffic patterns that require active monitoring to catch before full deployment (NIST AU-6, NIST SI-1)

NIST Phase: Detection Analysis

Reference: NIST 800-61r3 §3.2 — Detection and Analysis: Monitoring and Alert Triage

Controls: NIST AU-6 (Audit Record Review, Analysis, And Reporting), NIST AU-2 (Event Logging), NIST AU-12 (Audit Record Generation), NIST IR-5 (Incident Monitoring)

Compensating: Without a SIEM, deploy two detection controls achievable by a 2-person team: (1) Configure a scheduled Windows Task on a representative file server to run every 15 minutes executing `Get-ChildItem C:\Shares -Recurse -Filter '*.encrypted' -ErrorAction SilentlyContinue | Measure-Object | Select-Object Count` and alert via email if count exceeds zero — this catches post-encryption file extension changes characteristic of ransomware like LockBit or BlackCat variants. (2) Enable Windows Performance Monitor to alert on sustained disk I/O above 90% for more than 5 minutes using `logman create alert MassEncryptionAlert -th "\PhysicalDisk(_Total)\% Disk Time>90" -si 00:05:00 -a -ados eventlog` — sustained high I/O with no scheduled maintenance is a key pre-encryption behavioral signal. Also deploy the free Sigma rule `proc_creation_win_ransomware_files_deletion.yml` via Sysmon and Windows Event Forwarding.

Evidence: Before adjusting monitoring posture, document the current detection gap: pull Sysmon Event ID 11 (FileCreate) logs from file servers for the past 30 days and calculate the baseline rate of new file creation per hour — this establishes the anomaly threshold against which summer-period mass encryption activity (T1486) can be detected. If Sysmon is not deployed, pull Windows Security Event ID 4663 (Object Access — File System) from file servers as a proxy, filtered for write operations against shared drives. Capture NetFlow or Windows Firewall logs showing inter-VLAN SMB traffic baseline to identify lateral SMB spread patterns characteristic of T1021.002.

Step 5: Update threat model — log T1486 and T1490 as active TTP risk against your sector; if you operate in K-12, municipal services, or under-resourced public-sector IT, document this incident in your threat register and reference CISA AA23-061A as supporting intelligence

NIST Phase: Post Incident

Reference: NIST 800-61r3 §4 — Post-Incident Activity: Lessons Learned and Threat Intelligence Integration

Controls: NIST IR-4 (Incident Handling), NIST IR-8 (Incident Response Plan), CIS 7.1 (Establish and Maintain a Vulnerability Management Process), CIS 7.2 (Establish and Maintain a Remediation Process)

Compensating: Maintain a threat register in a shared spreadsheet or free wiki (Confluence free tier, Notion, or even a versioned Markdown file in a Git repository). For each logged TTP, record: MITRE technique ID (T1486 — Data Encrypted for Impact; T1490 — Inhibit System Recovery), the triggering incident (ETHS District 202, June 7 2025), the detection gap it would exploit in your environment, and a mapped compensating control. Cross-reference CISA AA23-061A (available at cisa.gov — verified advisory series) to identify the specific threat actor TTPs documented against K-12 targets, including initial access vectors commonly attributed to exposed RDP, phishing, and unpatched VPN appliances.

Evidence: To support threat model updates with local evidence, pull authentication logs from your VPN concentrator and internet-facing RDP endpoints for the past 90 days — specifically looking for Event ID 4625 (Failed Network Logon) spikes and successful authentications from non-standard geographic IPs or outside business hours, which represent the reconnaissance and initial access activity that precedes ransomware deployment in the K-12 attack pattern documented in AA23-061A. Export these as a baseline artifact to be referenced when the threat model entry is reviewed quarterly.

Step 6: Communicate findings — brief leadership on the operational risk of ransomware-induced campus or facility closure; quantify the business impact in terms of service days lost, staff hours, and potential

regulatory exposure if student or personnel data was accessed

NIST Phase: Post Incident

Reference: NIST 800-61r3 §4 — Post-Incident Activity: Reporting and Organizational Improvement

Controls: NIST IR-6 (Incident Reporting), NIST IR-4 (Incident Handling), NIST CP-2 (Contingency Plan)

Compensating: Prepare a one-page executive brief using the ETHS District 202 incident as the reference case: two-day campus closure, suspension of summer athletic programs, district-wide internet outage. Map these operational impacts to your own context — calculate cost of one operational day lost (staff salary hours, program revenue, contractor costs) to produce a concrete dollar figure. For regulatory exposure: if your district or organization stores student records, identify FERPA notification obligations; if staff PII or health records are involved, identify applicable state breach notification law timelines (Illinois PIPA requires notification within the most expedient time possible, not to exceed 45 days as a general benchmark — confirm with legal counsel). Flag that CISA AA23-061A documents data exfiltration as a co-occurring TTP with ransomware against K-12 targets, meaning regulatory exposure is not contingent on confirmed exfiltration.

Evidence: Before briefing leadership, compile supporting evidence to substantiate the risk narrative: document the number of internet-facing services and administrative systems that would be affected by a ransomware-induced network isolation event; identify which student or personnel data systems (SIS, HR platforms, email) lack offline backup access; note any existing cyber insurance policy coverage gaps relative to the operational disruption profile exhibited by the ETHS incident. This evidence transforms the brief from hypothetical risk to quantified operational exposure.

Step 7: Monitor developments — track ETHS District 202 disclosures at eths202.org for any confirmed data exfiltration, ransom payment disclosure, or variant attribution; follow CISA and MS-ISAC for any associated threat actor advisories

NIST Phase: Post Incident

Reference: NIST 800-61r3 §4 — Post-Incident Activity: Intelligence Sharing and Continuous Improvement

Controls: NIST IR-5 (Incident Monitoring), NIST IR-6 (Incident Reporting), NIST AU-6 (Audit Record Review, Analysis, And Reporting)

Compensating: Set up free monitoring without commercial threat intel platforms: (1) Configure a Google Alert for 'Evanston Township High School District 202 ransomware' and 'ETHS 202 data breach' to capture public disclosures; (2) Subscribe to CISA's free advisories via email at cisa.gov/uscert/mailing-lists-and-feeds and MS-ISAC's free K-12 sector alerts; (3) Monitor ransomware group leak sites using free tools such as DarkFeed (community edition) or manual checks of known threat actor .onion sites via Tor Browser if your security policy permits — if variant attribution is published, immediately search your environment for the specific IoCs released. If a ransomware variant is named (e.g., LockBit, BlackCat/ALPHV, Akira), pull the corresponding CISA advisory for that variant and run the published YARA rules against your endpoints using free YARA v4.

Evidence: If ETHS District 202 confirms data exfiltration, treat it as an active intelligence trigger: immediately query your own email gateway logs for phishing campaigns using similar lure themes (back-to-school, district IT notices, summer program communications) targeting your domain in the same June 2025 timeframe; pull DNS query logs for any lookups to domains registered within 30 days of June 7 2025 that resolve to known ransomware C2 infrastructure patterns (fast-flux, newly registered domains with no historical resolution). If a specific ransomware variant is attributed, capture memory images from any endpoint exhibiting anomalous behavior using free Volatility3 or WinPmem before any remediation actions alter the forensic state.

Detection Guidance

Detection for T1486 (Data Encrypted for Impact) and T1490 (Inhibit System Recovery) should focus on behavioral anomalies rather than signature-based indicators, as no specific variant or IOCs have been published for this incident.

For T1486, hunt for: abnormal file rename or extension-change volume on file servers and shared drives; elevated disk I/O across multiple endpoints in short time windows; processes writing high volumes of files with unfamiliar extensions; encryption-related process chains (e.g., a dropped executable spawning file enumeration and write activity). Review NIST AU-2 (Event Logging) alignment to confirm these event types are captured.

For T1490, monitor for: deletion of Volume Shadow Copies via vssadmin.exe or wmic.exe; modifications to Windows Backup Service or scheduled backup tasks; bcdedit.exe invocations disabling recovery modes; registry changes to recovery boot options. These are high-fidelity signals with limited legitimate use in school district environments.

Audit gaps to address per CIS 8.2 (Collect Audit Logs): confirm audit logging is enabled across all domain controllers, file servers, and administrative workstations; verify logs are forwarded to a centralized, write-protected repository that ransomware cannot reach (aligned with NIST AU-9, Protection of Audit Information). Log retention should support post-incident forensics (NIST AU-11).

For behavioral hunting, prioritize: new service installations during off-hours, lateral movement via SMB or RDP from non-administrative endpoints, and credential access attempts against domain controllers. Summer periods with reduced baseline traffic make anomaly detection more tractable if thresholds are properly tuned.

Apply D3-SFA (System File Analysis) to monitor backup configuration files and recovery tool executables for unauthorized modification. Apply D3-LAM (Local Account Monitoring) to detect dormant or newly created local accounts that may indicate pre-encryption staging.

Framework Mappings

MITRE-ATTACK

- **T1486** — Data Encrypted for Impact
- **T1490** — Inhibit System Recovery

NIST-800-53R5

- **CP-9** — System Backup
- **CP-10** — System Recovery and Reconstitution
- **IR-4** — Incident Handling

NIST-CSF-2

- **RS.MI-01** — Incidents are contained

HIPAA-SECURITY

- **164.308(a)(7)(ii)(A)** — Data Backup Plan
- **164.308(a)(6)(ii)** — Response and Reporting

ISO-27001-2022

- **A.5.29** — Information security during disruption
- **A.5.34** — Privacy and protection of personal information

SOC2-TSC

- **CC7.4** — Responds to identified security incidents

MITRE ATT&CK Mapping

Technique ID	Technique Name	Tactic
T1486	Data Encrypted for Impact	Impact
T1490	Inhibit System Recovery	Impact

Sources

Source	URL	Tier
Cybersecurity Incident - Evanston Township High School District 202	https://www.eths202.org/about/cybersecurity-incident	T3
Cyber attack closes Evanston Township High School for Monday ...	https://www.instagram.com/reel/DZVLr72uq-Y/	T3
Evanston Township High School to reopen Wednesday after ...	https://abc7chicago.com/post/evanston-township-high-school-cancels-...	T3
fact.philes - Instagram	https://www.instagram.com/p/DZX1Fa4kco5/	T3
ETHS Ransomware Attack: Closed Monday, June 8 and Tuesday ...	https://www.reddit.com/r/evanston/comments/1tzv2nf/eths_ransomware_...	T3

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