

MEMORANDUM

TO: District Superintendents
District Chief Information Officers
District Chief Information Security Officers

FROM: Jeff Childers
Chief Information Officer, Information Technology

DATE: October 6, 2026

RE: SAFE K-12 Program Direction and SC-CIC Partnership for 2026–27

The South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) is pleased to share its cybersecurity support model for the 2026–27 school year, informed by a comprehensive review of program structure and district needs. This memo outlines updates to the SAFE K-12 program.

A Strengthened, Partnership-Focused Approach

SCDE is strengthening its cybersecurity support by emphasizing partnership, information sharing, and collaborative decision-making. By engaging with the South Carolina Critical Infrastructure Cybersecurity (SC-CIC) program, SCDE can provide districts with stronger, more flexible resources to support their cybersecurity efforts. This direction reflects SCDE’s agency-wide commitment to serving as a trusted advisor and partner to districts as they protect their student data and strengthen operational resilience.

Leadership

SCDE is pleased to introduce **Ari Teal, Chief Information Security Officer** to the SAFE K-12 team. Ari leads SCDE’s cybersecurity strategy and risk management efforts and serves as a resource to districts navigating their cybersecurity programs.

How SCDE Will Support Districts

SCDE serves as an advisor and resource to districts as you build and maintain your cybersecurity programs. In this role, SCDE can:

- Offer guidance on cybersecurity strategy and framework alignment;

- Advise or assist districts as they navigate cybersecurity tools, resources, and templates; and
- Help connect districts with SC-CIC and other partners for additional support.

Districts retain full discretion and responsibility for selecting, implementing, and maintaining cybersecurity measures, including all procurement decisions. SCDE does not select or endorse specific vendors or products. SCDE is promoting SC CIC's cybersecurity services to strengthen K-12 school defenses and maximize the use of state resources.

SC-CIC Partnership

SCDE has established a partnership with the South Carolina Critical Infrastructure Cybersecurity (SC-CIC) program, a South Carolina Law Enforcement Division (SLED)-sponsored initiative (sccic.sc.gov), to provide supplementary cybersecurity support to South Carolina school districts. SC-CIC offers services including threat intelligence, security assessments, security awareness training, and cybersecurity incident response.

SCDE encourages districts to engage directly with SC-CIC and is available to assist as needed. To learn more or to join, visit sccic.sc.gov.

Next Steps

SCDE will continue to work alongside districts and our partners to strengthen cybersecurity across South Carolina's K-12 community. Additional resources and guidance will be shared in the coming months.

Questions may be directed to safeK12@ed.sc.gov.