

EDUCATION

Ransomware attack behind DMACC's internet being down for 12 days, officials say

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Ransomware caused a nearly two-week internet outage at Des Moines Area Community College, officials confirmed Monday.

The partial network shutdown affected the community college's online instruction and telephone system, resulting in the cancellation of all online courses June 3 and a full closure of the college June 4.

In-person classes resumed on June 9 and online classes are tentatively scheduled to resume Tuesday.

The college identified the cybersecurity incident as a ransomware attack with the help of a "third-party cybersecurity forensic firm," Susan Metheny, DMACC associate director of strategic marketing and communications, said in an email Monday.

"Our investigation is ongoing, but, at this time, we cannot say for certain what information or data, if any, has been impacted as a result," she wrote. "Our primary focus remains on a safe and efficient remediation process and the restoration of our systems."

The college has not paid anything, as far as ransom, DMACC President Rob Denson said in an interview.

"We paid nothing. We're not saying that there's a discussion to or not to at this point but, no, we've not had to pay anything to do what we've done now," Denson said.

The college had extensive backups and there is no evidence any of the school's key systems were accessed, he said.

Experts and other services were covered by the college's insurance, he said.

The cybersecurity issues have been tough on students and staff.

"Well, it's very discouraging and disheartening because of the impact this has on students," Denson said. "Summer term is a shortened term anyway. So, for this to happen, it just is so disruptive."

For the staff, the disruption impacts their classes and any personal plans for after the summer term.

"We had just kind of began to close out our COVID reaction and we didn't even get to take two breaths and we're into this," Denson said. "So I think it's just people are tired from just everything they've been doing for the last 18 months and then to have to jump into this — and this is a full-court press."

Denson had nothing but praise for everyone who's been working 24 hours a day to deal with the incident.

"We've got the right team on this and we will get out of it," he said.

Return to online learning

In a statement posted to its website Sunday, DMACC said all face-to-face classes were meeting as scheduled Monday. Online-only classes are tentatively scheduled to resume Tuesday. A more definitive update on when online classes will

restart was expected to be released Monday, the statement said.

The college has been working with the Federal Bureau of Investigation, a security company, its insurance providers and the school's information technology department to address the situation, Denson said in an earlier interview.

Denson said he could not give any details about the FBI's investigation or the work technology experts are doing to get the incident under control.

Amy Adams, the spokesperson for the FBI's Omaha field office, said in a text message that their office is working with "law enforcement partners" on the matter.

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