

MEMORANDUM

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

FROM: Dan Ralyea
Chief Information Officer, Information Technology

DATE: August 26, 2025

RE: Introduction to SAFE K-12: A Statewide Cybersecurity Support Program

What is SAFE K-12?

South Carolina’s Assurance Framework for Education Cybersecurity (SAFE K-12) is a **statewide cybersecurity support program** led by the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) to help public school districts implement foundational cybersecurity protections, effectively, affordably, and with local control.

The program is grounded in the **CIS Critical Security Controls (v8)** and focuses on Implementation Group 1 (IG1), essential safeguards every district must implement.

What SAFE K-12 Provides

SAFE K-12 empowers every district, regardless of size or technical capacity, to take meaningful steps to protect data and operations.

What SAFE K-12 Provides	What Districts Receive
Statewide Cybersecurity Framework	Standardized cybersecurity foundation using CIS Controls (v8 IG1), with SCDE/DDGG oversight.
Expert Support & Shared Resources	Guidance, templates, training, and assessment tools to support local implementation.
Affordable, Scalable Solutions	Access to high-quality cybersecurity services at discounted state-negotiated pricing.

What SAFE K-12 Provides	What Districts Receive
Ongoing Monitoring & Compliance Support	Assistance with audits, risk assessments, and meeting S.C. Code §59-1-490(G) requirements.

How it Works

Districts retain flexibility in how they engage with the program, while benefiting from core supports. SAFE K-12 offers a menu of vetted services (such as endpoint security, data backup, phishing simulations, and vulnerability management) negotiated by SCDE at discounted rates to reduce costs. Districts can:

- Use their own systems and tools;
- Adopt all tools from the SAFE K-12 vendor catalog;
- Combine both in a tailored hybrid approach.

Regardless of participation in shared services, all districts must meet minimum cybersecurity requirements under S.C. Code §59-1-490(G).

Implementation Phase	Focus	Year
Phase 1: Foundation	Launch assessments, tools, governance, and MOUs	2025–26
Phase 2: Expansion	Broaden implementation, expand services and training	2026–27
Phase 3: Maturity	Sustain IG1 controls, audit and refine practices	2027–28

Cost & Savings

SAFE K-12 uses a tiered pricing model that rewards statewide participation with lower costs. SCDE also anticipates covering one-time costs such as asset discovery and deployment services to help districts onboard effectively.

Example Savings:

Many districts currently pay up to \$15 per endpoint for a specific subset of cybersecurity services. Through SAFE K-12, those same services are available at \$2.95 per endpoint.

- A district with 15,000 students (approx. 45,000 devices) could save **\$542,000 per year**.
- If adopted statewide, **total savings could exceed \$10 million annually**, depending on participation levels.

Budget Planning Formula:

To help districts plan, SCDE recommends a simple budgeting model:

\$45,000 Base Cost + \$15 per student above 3,000 enrollment

For example, a district with 20,000 students would annually plan for approximately \$300,000.

“Pay Now, True-Up Later” Approach:

Because statewide participation will influence final pricing, districts will initially pay an estimated rate. Once all commitments are finalized, SCDE will calculate the final cost and issue credits or reimbursements if actual pricing is lower.

Roles & Responsibilities

Districts	SCDE
Designate a cybersecurity lead	Provide statewide tools, templates, and vendor-negotiated services
Meet CIS IG1 controls (minimum requirement)	Define and oversee cybersecurity standards with DDGG
Report progress and participate in audits	Monitor implementation and support compliance with state law
Budget and plan for implementation	Offset one-time onboarding costs (e.g., asset discovery, deployment)

For more information, visit [SAFE K-12: South Carolina’s Assurance Framework for Education Cybersecurity](#), or contact the SCDE at safeK12@ed.sc.gov.