Technology Department
October 2017

E-rate
We are seeing our e-rate dollars being applied to our service bills. Unfortunately we have the 20% increase this year over last year as the FCC continues its phase out of funding traditional telephone services.

Cyber-Security
Many of you are aware of the Columbia Falls School District hacking last month. This was done by a group calling themselves TheDarkOverlord Solutions. You may have heard about the recent hacking of Netflix and their refusal to pay a ransom demand resulting in the latest "Orange is the New Black" episodes being released to the Internet for anyone to view. This is the same group. They have done many other break-ins on hospitals and institutions in recent months, claiming to release confidential information if their monetary demands are not met. Some institutes have paid, others have not. The FBI have been chasing this group for over a year.

Columbia Falls School District (CFalls) is now in the unhappy position of having to decide. I have attached the ransom letter, in case you have not read it in its entirety.

I know that the information that TheDarkOverlord Solutions claims to have is stuff that we daily input into our Student Information System (SIS) - Infinite Campus. I am very glad that we do not have a system that is housed here in our district running on a local server. Our SIS is cloud based, meaning Infinite Campus has to physically house the server and its data but we can access it via a web browser using the internet. Our email system is handled by Google, again, not in-house, but cloud based. Both of these systems have many hacking preventative measures already in place to protect our information stored in the cloud.

As part of our network security measures, we monitor log files for suspicious and/or malicious login attempts to our network as well as monitoring internal devices trying to send excess data to the outside world. So far, our defenses have not been breached as we remain proactive in keeping our students, staff and other information safe.

Some technology directors in the state including myself are now aware how the breakin was accomplished. To that end, without disclosing details in a public forum, our defenses already protect against the methods used by the hacking team.

As a followup, MTSBA will be sponsoring their annual school law and technology symposium in December which should add some good information, additional things districts should do and suggested policies to consider.