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LEGAL UPDATE

March 27, 2020

To: Superintendents, Member School Districts (K-12)
From: Damara L. Moore, Senior Associate General Counsel *DM*
Subject: Protect Your Remote Meetings from “Zoombombing”
Memo No. 24-2020

With the increased use of Zoom and other video conferencing software due to the need for social distancing, a new concern has arisen: “Zoombombing.”

What is Zoombombing? It is a form of hacking where a participant in a meeting posts offensive and/or off topic material to disrupt the meeting, and it has occurred in on-line classes and public school board meetings.

With the Brown Act’s lightened restrictions on teleconferencing during the COVID-19 pandemic (see our Legal Update 18-2020) comes individuals who seek to exploit this as an opportunity to gain attention and troll the public. At one recent district board meeting, hackers used the chat feature to make racist and anti-Semitic statements, took over the center screen and posted pornography, and threatened board members and their families before the meeting was eventually adjourned. Others have reported racist and misogynistic takeovers of virtual classrooms, creating a hostile learning environment for students.

The problem stems from a feature on Zoom that the host may grant screen share access to other participants to share the screen. Hosts can disable this by changing this in Profile Settings. Other protections include disabling “Join Before Host” so people cannot cause trouble prior to the host’s arrival; enabling “Co-Host” so you can assign others to help moderate; disabling “File Transfer” so there is no digital virus sharing; and disabling “Allow Removed Participants to Rejoin” so barred attendees cannot return.

Employees and district boards using Zoom, which has become a new favorite meeting tool for many educators during the COVID-19 outbreak, need to be careful when planning meetings. Prior to a meeting, the host(s) should double-check that the people who are attending the event are solely the people who are supposed to be there and confirm that the default settings are protected prior to



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the start of the meeting. This is especially important for board meetings open to electronic participation by the public.

Please contact our office with questions regarding this Legal Update or any other legal matter.

The information in this Legal Update is provided as a summary of law and is not intended as legal advice. Application of the law may vary depending on the particular facts and circumstances at issue. We, therefore, recommend that you consult legal counsel to advise you on how the law applies to your specific situation.

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