



CYBERSECURITY



# Canadian Post-secondary Students Cybersecurity Survey Report

# Background

Cybersecurity is the latest challenge facing higher education institutions.

There are several factors involved. First off, educational institutions have a wealth of sensitive data. Consider that schools hold health information, financial information, academic performance records, personal student and faculty records, and more. Further, note that post-secondary schools can also have extremely valuable, proprietary research and development data and intellectual property.

Now layer in the fact that, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, educational institutions were forced to undergo a digital transformation practically overnight. Remote classrooms, research collaborations, student/teacher communications, third-party and vendor management all had to be supported remotely. While this quick transition helped to ensure the physical health and safety of students and staff, it also dramatically increased what we call the “attack surface” – all the different places where bad actors could try to find a way into school networks and systems and databases.

A recent report by IBM Security X-Force shows the percentage of ransomware attacks against the education sector more than doubled globally from 10% in 2020 to 22% 2021.

In September 2022, ISA Cybersecurity conducted a survey through Angus Reid to Canadian post-secondary students across the country to understand about their views on cyber safety and preparedness pre- and post-pandemic.

## Methodology

These are the findings of a survey conducted by Angus Reid Forum on behalf of ISA Cybersecurity from September 15– 20, 2022 among a sample of 353 Canadian post-secondary students. The survey was conducted in English and French. For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 5.2 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

# Key Findings

**1**

## **Students have a high level of concern for cyber safety**

In general, students have a high level of concern when it comes to cyber safety, with three-quarters (76%) saying they are very or somewhat concerned. Nearly all students surveyed (96%) say it is important for students to learn about cyber safety. And one-in-three (31%) are not confident their school keeps their data secure and protected from hackers.

**2**

## **Cybersecurity posture will have an impact on students' decisions to enroll**

Nearly half of students (46%), say it would influence their decision to attend a university/college if the school was known to have experienced a data breach or had a reputation for weak cybersecurity. More than half (55%) of students surveyed are concerned about their school experiencing a data breach and their personal information being exposed.

**3**

## **The majority of students are taking steps to reduce their risks, but half feel they are not prepared for cyber attacks**

Over two-thirds (63%) of students have taken steps to minimize their risk of cyber attacks when using their computer or mobile phone for online learning. But 44% do not feel their school provides enough training resources to help ensure their personal information is safe from cyber threats; yet only 49% say they follow the guidelines that their academic institutions do put out.

**4**

## **Concern with cyber safety increased as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic**

Prior to COVID-19, students surveyed (66%) were 10% less likely to say they were concerned about cyber safety. Additionally, three-in-five say their thoughts about cyber safety have changed since the pandemic.

# Survey Results

## Question 1:

**How concerned are you about your school experiencing a data breach and your personal information being exposed?**

Very concerned

12%

Somewhat concerned

43%

Not very concerned

33%

Not at all concerned

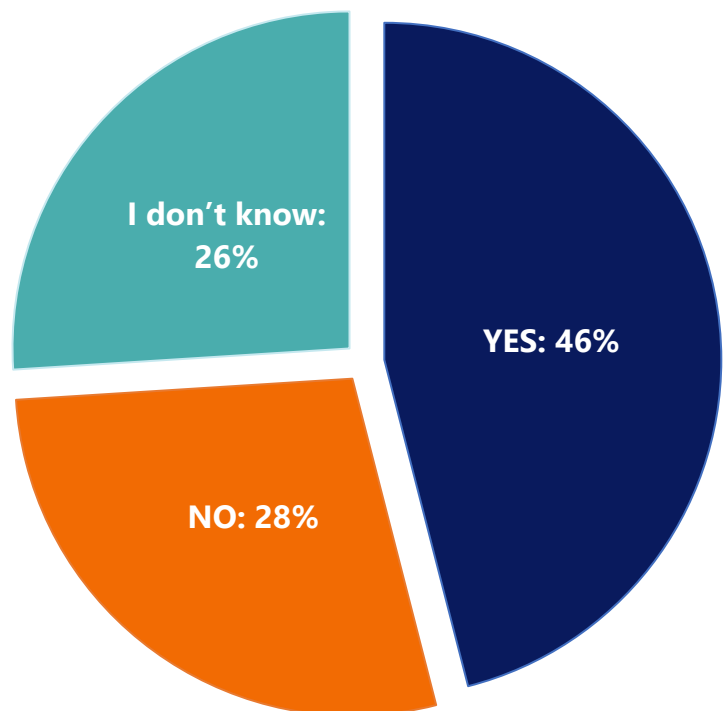
4%

I never thought about it

8%

## Question 2:

**Would it influence your decision to attend a university/college if the school is known to have experienced a data breach or has a reputation for weak cybersecurity?**



**Question 3:**

**How concerned are you about cyber safety (protecting your personal data from online threats or attacks)?**

Very Concerned

20%

Somewhat concerned

56%

Not very concerned

21%

Not at all concerned

3%

**NET**  
**76%**
**NET**  
**24%**
**Question 4:**

**How concerned were you about cyber safety (protecting your personal data from online threats or attacks) prior to the COVID-19 pandemic?**

Very Concerned

16%

Somewhat concerned

50%

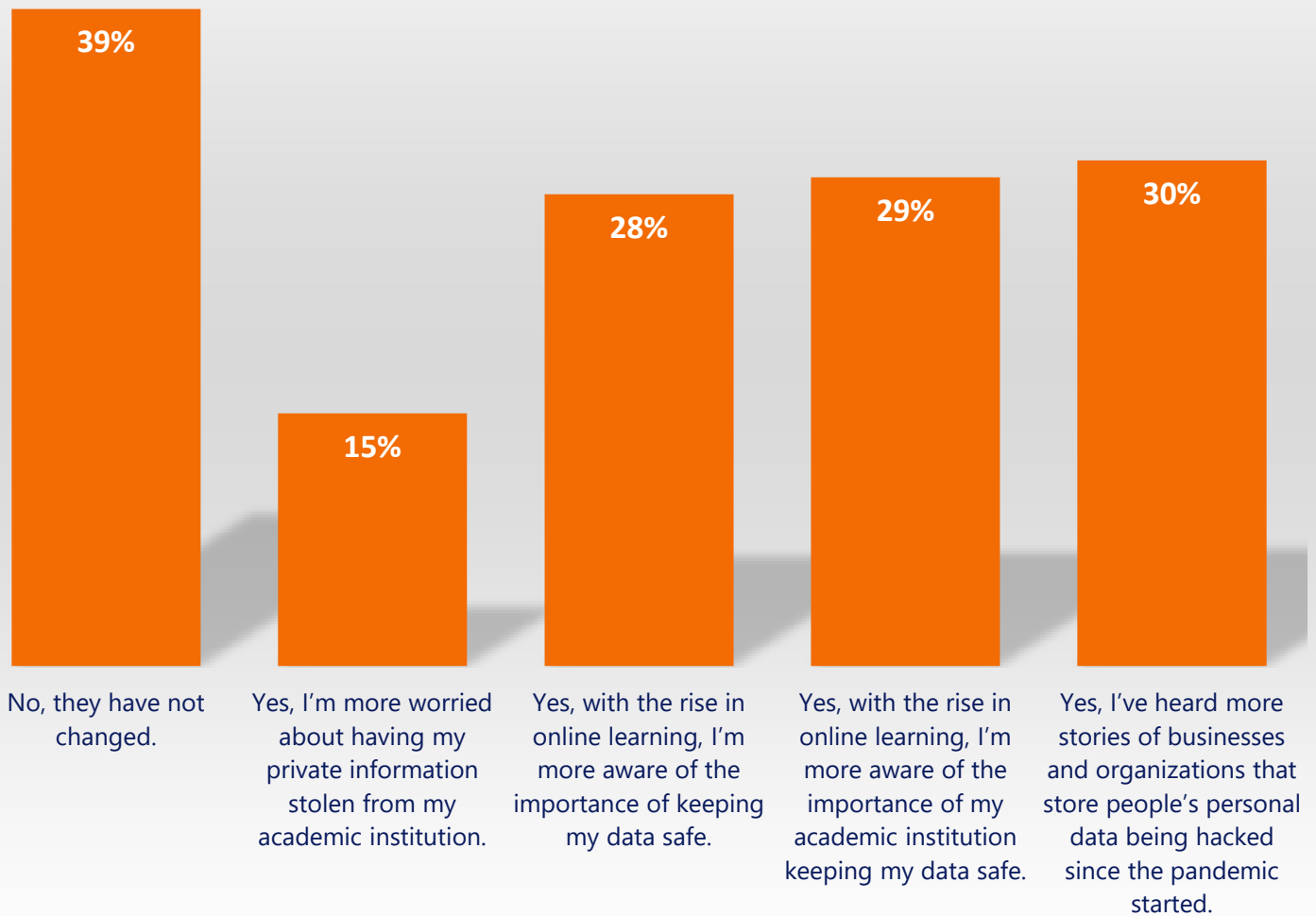
Not very concerned

29%

Not at all concerned

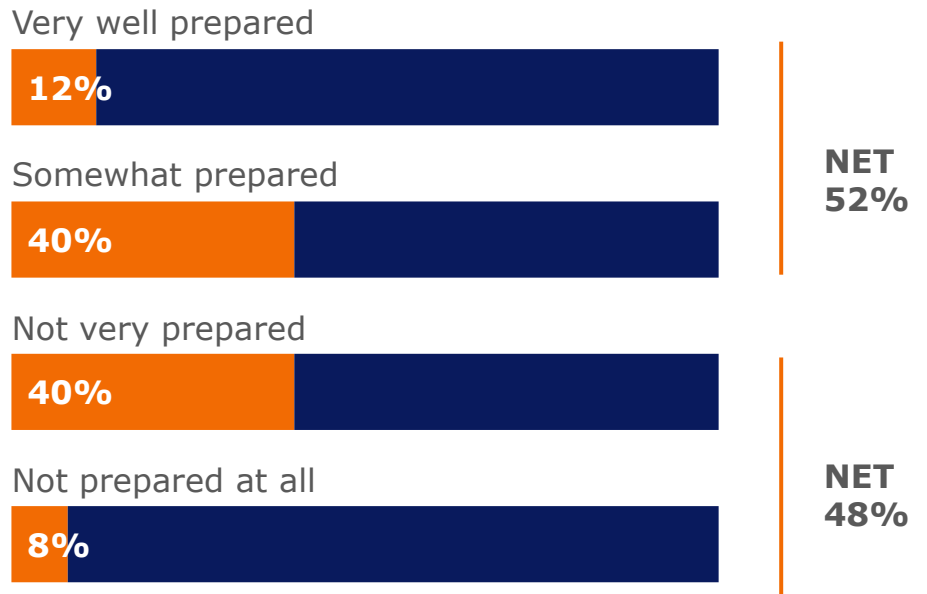
5%

**NET**  
**66%**
**NET**  
**34%**

**Question 5:****Have your thoughts about cyber safety changed since the pandemic?**

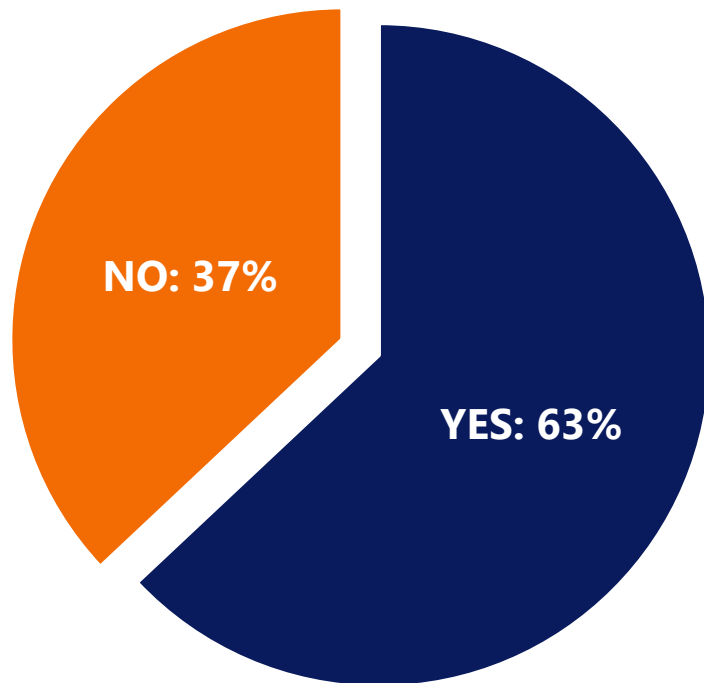
**Question 6:**

**How prepared do you feel you are to protect yourself from a cyber attack?**



**Question 7:**

**How concerned were you about cyber safety (protecting your personal data from online threats or attacks) prior to the COVID-19 pandemic?**



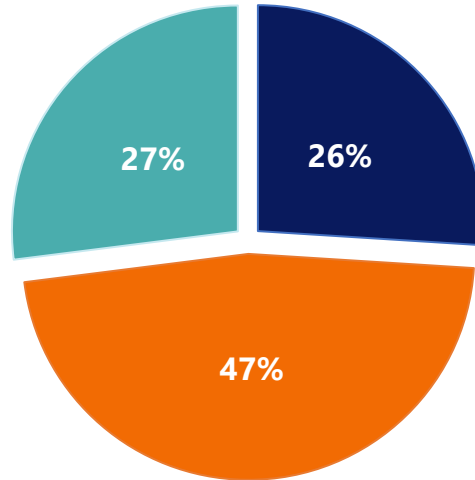
**Question 8:****What steps have you taken to minimize your risk of becoming a cyber threat victim when using your computer or mobile phone for online learning?***Some of the steps listed as "other" include:*

- Changed Passwords
- Have different passwords for each account and keep software updated
  - Learned from workplace training
  - Looked online for security advice
    - More offline backups
  - Not using Public wifi to log in
    - Use a VPN
  - Multi-factor authentication
- Be more careful by checking sites before entering them



**Question 9:**

**What best describes your feelings about sharing private/personal information online with your university/college?**



- I don't think twice about providing private/personal information online.
- I'm not comfortable providing private/personal information, but don't want to have trouble with the school if I don't give them what they are asking for.
- I don't provide any private/personal information unless I'm sure it's absolutely required and will be kept secure.

**Question 10:**

**How important do you think it is for university / college students to learn about cyber safety?**

Very well prepared



Somewhat prepared



Not very prepared



Not prepared at all

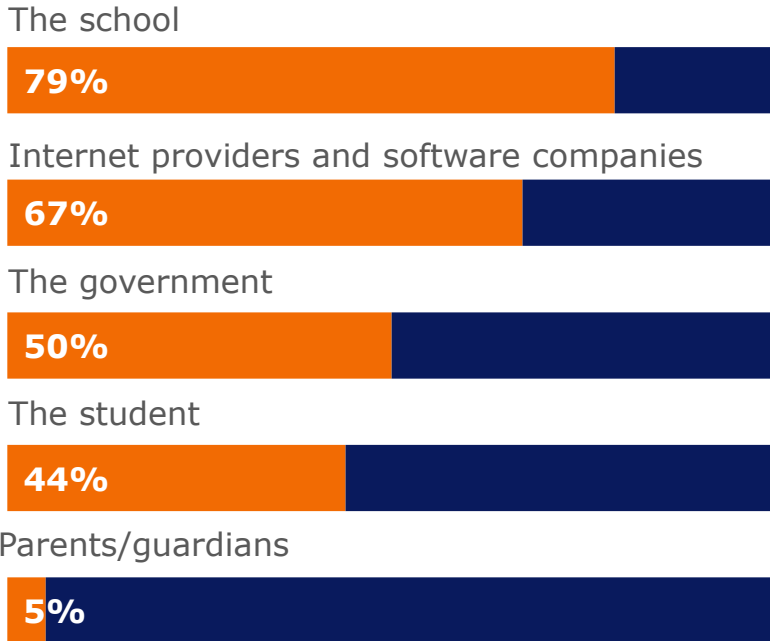


**NET  
96%**

**NET  
4%**

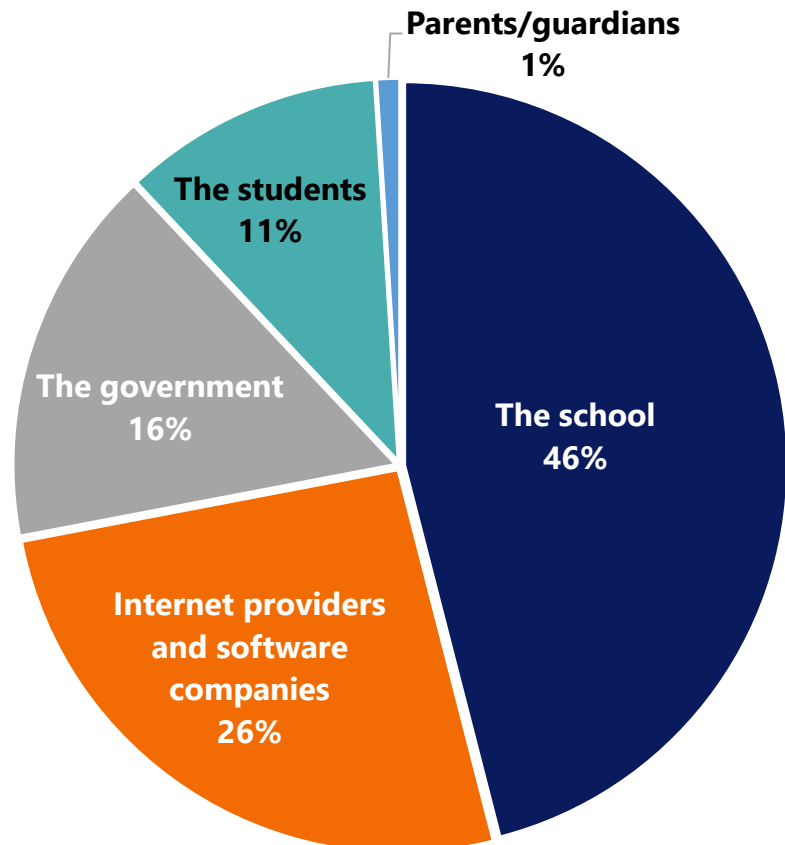
**Question 11:**

**Who do you think should be responsible for protecting university / college students from cyberattacks?**



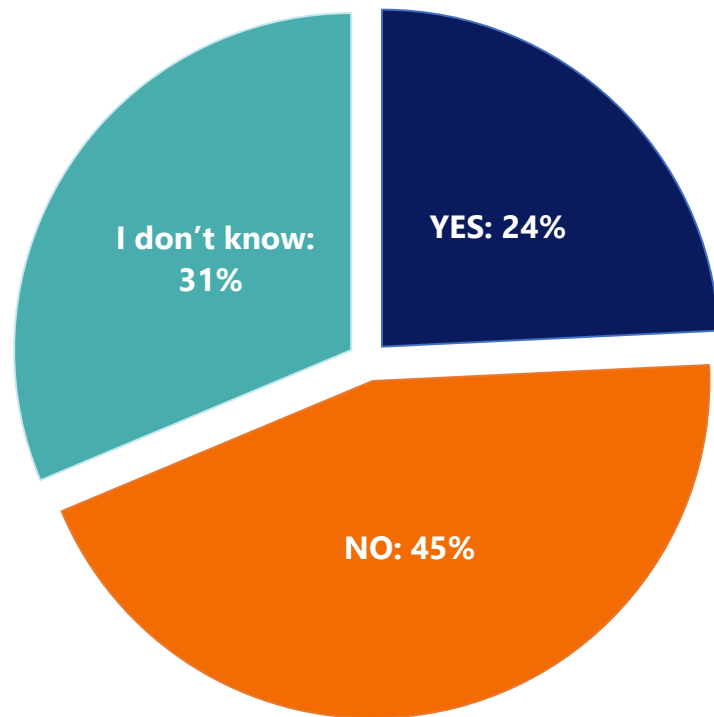
**Question 11B:**

**How concerned were you about cyber safety (protecting your personal data from online threats or attacks) prior to the COVID-19 pandemic?**



**Question 12:**

**Do you feel your university/college provides enough training and resources for staff and students to help ensure your personal information is safe from cyber threats?**



**Question 13:**

**How confident are you that your university / college keeps your data secure and protected from hackers?**

Very confident

8%

Somewhat confident

51%

Not very confident

22%

Not at all confident

9%

I never thought about the security of my school's computer systems

10%

## Respondent Profile (Weighted)

### Age

18-22

38%

23+

62%

### Gender



40%



58%

2% prefer to self-describe

### Region



BC	16%
AB	10%
SK	3%
MB	5%
ON	43%
QC	16%
ATL	6%

### Language

EN

91%

FR

9%

### Education



Diploma

15%



Bachelor's degree

52%

Post graduate study  
(including master's, PhD, or  
professional school degree)

33%

### Student Status

Full  
Time

80%

Part  
Time

20%

# ISA Cybersecurity is here to help!

Staying on top of the latest cybersecurity technology, trends, and threats is difficult for any organization, as they are often more focused on their day-to-day operations. Educational institutions are no different: the pace of change frequently outstrips what schools can react to, much less plan ahead for. Even important fundamental practices like security awareness training, patch management, and incident response planning can fall by the wayside.

ISA Cybersecurity has partnered with several Ontario post-secondary institutions to provide guidance and support to their security programs, so we have a strong background in the sector and a keen understanding of the pain points that schools feel today. We have taken that depth of experience to market and are proud to provide cyber services to many individual schools, school boards and school districts right across Canada. Our risk-based approach addresses real-world risks cost-effectively and balances those risks against other critical imperatives, such as ensuring timely, effective, and efficient educational services.

We can help bring order to chaos.

## About ISA Cybersecurity

ISA Cybersecurity is Canada's leading cybersecurity services and solutions provider, with three decades of experience delivering cybersecurity services and people you can trust.

We bring in real-world implementations of technology that are essential for client success and maximize the return your cybersecurity investment.

[Contact us](#) today to learn more about our [Hosted and Managed Services](#).

## GET IN TOUCH

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