



Protecting students, teachers, and administrators from phishing and malware with Avanan

Within the span of a few months during summer 2017, two major phishing attacks on Washington state school districts resulted in the theft of \$50,000 of computer equipment, and a breach of personally identifiable information from all finance department employees.

When Bethel School District caught wind of the news happening nearby, they realized that they needed a security solution that would block targeted attacks like this.



Admin

Chad Marlow
Director of Operational
Technology, Bethel School
District

Organization Size

2,500 users

Platform

GSuite

Avanan Security

Anti-Phishing



Avanan increases learning in the classroom because teachers aren't taking time to forward me an email, or wondering whether an email or a phishing attempt is suspicious."

—Chad Marlow, Director of Operational Technology, Bethel School District

Background

The Bethel School District covers over 200 square miles in southeast Pierce County, with over 20,000 students enrolled. Committed to the educational and personal development of young people, Bethel School District prepares them for the challenges they'll face as adults. According to their mission statement, a key part of that process is "ensuring students will have the skills and abilities needed to meet the challenges of an information

society and to utilize its rapidly changing technologies."

Putting these technological skills into practice, students and teachers in the district collaborate on projects and share files using Gmail and Google Drive. Facilitating the adoption of different systems, Chad is the director of operation of technology at Bethel Schools. He also oversees the information security of the entire district.

When phishing attacks were

targeting Bethel Schools' inboxes, Chad needed proactive security that in his words he could set and forget with confidence. Equally as important, he needed an anti-phishing algorithm that was tailored to the communication style of education users rather than corporate users (which is most often the case with email security).

Now, Bethel School District uses Avanan to block phishing attacks, secure file sharing, and protect the learning process from bad actors.

“

We really needed a better solution that could be preemptive and proactive to phishing and malware attacks, versus us going in on the backend trying to clean up after the fact.”

The Phishing Problem

Before Chad deployed Avanan at Bethel Schools, two phishing attacks on neighboring districts underscored the need for enhanced security in Gmail and G Suite.

In the first attack, the finance department at Olympia School District received a phishing email from someone impersonating the superintendent, asking for the W-2s of all employees. Unaware that the message was fraudulent, the recipient complied and breached confidential information. In another incident at Renton School District, a hacker spoofed a purchase order to steal \$50,000 worth of computer equipment from the district office after it was delivered.

While Bethel Schools had never experienced security breaches of that level, they had endured some phishing attacks in the past. But after learning of these events, a breach of that nature seemed to be increasingly possible.



I needed something that is easy to use, transparent to the user, proactive, preemptive, and has advanced learning techniques — where if there's an outbreak in the area or other part of the country, the database updates so that we can prevent those attacks without having to do any kinds of manual updates."

The Avanan Solution

After these targeted attacks hit close to home, Chad decided to run Avanan in Protect mode to block phishing campaigns at Bethel. Scanning content prior to delivery, Protect mode remediates malware and phishing attacks before the user can click, offering the highest level of security. "It's a one-click wonder. I just click it and it works," Chad said about the easy deployment process with Avanan.

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had experienced phishing in the past. Now, a breach seemed increasingly possible.

Avanan uses a patented AI engine to scan emails and attachments in real time. Using over 300 unique indicators of phishing to analyze each email, the machine learning also continuously adds hacker methods — like link splitting and text obfuscation — to that list of indicators.

This approach guarantees that the algorithm is updated on the latest

threats and can identify variations of those attacks in the future. Avanan also baselines historical and real time communication using natural language processing, making its protection more specific to Bethel School District. This was a key feature for Chad.

With these detailed forensics, Chad can investigate attacks quickly, quarantine phishing campaigns affecting multiple inboxes, and block similar threats in the future. "I like the dashboard feature. I like being able to see at a glance where the organization is as far as what threats there are: what threats are found, and which ones are remediated. I like being able to drill down and understand what type of threat it was, what action it took."

Avanan has helped Chad and Bethel School District focus on their core goals: increased productivity, learning, transparency, and less disruption in the classroom.



The deployment was extremely simple. You just need a user with super-admin credentials, say 'yes' to a couple of boxes, and it's installed and working."

About Avanan

Avanan is a cloud email security platform that pioneered and patented a new approach to prevent sophisticated attacks. It uses APIs to block phishing, malware, and data leakage in the line of communications traffic. This means Avanan catches threats missed by Microsoft while adding a transparent layer of security for the entire suite that also protects other collaboration tools like Slack. The solution has been recognized as the top-rated cloud email security solution by customers and can replace the need for multiple tools that surround email and file-sharing.

The core solution works as designed. Something easy to use with a nice interface."

