New UTSA Game Aims to Teach Cybersecurity to Elementary Kids

SAN ANTONIO, Texas – Actively working to improve the Nation’s culture of cybersecurity, the Center for Infrastructure Assurance and Security (CIAS) at the University of Texas at San Antonio has developed Cyber Threat Protector, a new tabletop card game that is designed to introduce cybersecurity principles and safety to players – beginning in the third grade.

“High-profile cybersecurity hacks continue to threaten the nation’s and communities’ security, both in the public and private sectors,” said Dr. Greg White, director at the CIAS. “While these cyber threats increase, so does the demand for trained professionals and more aware cyber citizens. In addition to building our future workforce, Cyber Threat Protector is helping young students gain and understanding of the importance of cybersecurity in our everyday lives in a fun way.”

Cyber Threat Protector is a two-player card game designed to teach essential cybersecurity information and strategies to students as young as eight-years-old. Inspired by card games that students are already familiar with, such as its companion game Cyber Threat Defender, Cyber Threat Protector is an engaging game regardless of age or skill level.

“When designing Cyber Threat Protector, our goal was to make the game fun first, and educational second,” said Larry Sjelin, director of game development at the CIAS. “Simple to learn and easy to play, it introduces students to the concepts and strategies needed to build a safe network and protect it from common cyber threats. This is also a great way to keep young players engaged in learning during summer break and for distance learning activities.”

Using a single deck of cards, players work to quickly build their network while simultaneously protecting their network from cyber-attacks. Cyber Threat Protector is designed to complement any STEM curriculum and introduces game play and cyber concepts found in Cyber Threat Defender, a collectible card game used to teach cybersecurity to students in middle and high school.

Educators from San Antonio classrooms, which beta-tested Cyber Threat Protector, have shared their enthusiasm for its versatility and use in the classroom, after school clubs, school enrichment activities and personal use during recess or at home with family.

“There are many STEM and cyber-related games and activities that target middle and high school students, but there’s been a deficit in resources for elementary-aged students. This innovative game meets the demand from teachers nationwide to introduce concepts like cybersecurity to these young students,” added Sjelin.
The production and distribution of the game, at no cost to teachers, is reliant on financial donations and sponsorship support. For more information about Cyber Threat Protector, how you can support students in your area or purchase your own deck, visit CIASGaming.com.

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About the CIAS at UTSA:
By successfully integrating the efforts of academia, government and industry, the UTSA Center for Infrastructure Assurance and Security (CIAS) has become a national leader in the advancement of state and community cybersecurity capabilities and collaboration. These efforts are seen in the CIAS’ focus areas of cyber defense competitions, cybersecurity training and exercises, and educational game development. The CIAS also leads the Information Sharing and Analysis Organization Standards Organization (ISAO SO). Additionally, it is a founding member of the National Cybersecurity Preparedness Consortium, which provides research-based, cybersecurity-related training, exercises and technical assistance to local jurisdictions, counties, states and the private sector. Learn more at CIAS.UTSA.edu.