LXNY — *New York's Free Computing Organization*

Alert — New York City Board of Education Computer Plan

Declared aims of the plan:

1. E-mail, through the Board of Education, for everyone in the school system.
2. 24×7 operation by a single ISP, providing the e-mail plus limited Internet access.
3. Each year every fourth grader will be issued a networked laptop computer to keep throughout their school years. This plan will last nine years.

Members of LXNY were at the meeting of the Board of Education (on April 12, 2000) where the plan was unveiled and approved. The plan was created by the 'Teaching and Learning in Cyberspace Task Force.' This group had nineteen members, all but two of whom are from the school system or very large corporations or institutions.

Through the apparently deliberately indefinite wording of the presentation, it is reasonable to conclude that the plan features:

• Laptops running exclusively a proprietary source-code-secret operating system for which there is only one vendor, a company with a long history of bad products and bad practices that a federal judge officially found to be 'criminal.' Recent news reports reveal continuing practices from this vendor including covert access to systems (via back doors), lack of security and forced advertising.

• Revenue generation for the Board of Education, including business partnering with for-profit companies for the sale of advertising and other business activities. The Internet activities are intended to be not only self-funded, but to generate a profit for the Board monopoly (not for students or schools). The plan has not yet been implemented, but already New York newspapers have printed stories alleging corruption at the Board.

• Computerized homework, exams, and in-classroom activities, with no word of adherence to open standards or interoperability. This may force choices of personal programs on students, e.g., word processing program.

Free Unix-like operating systems are being adopted by school systems all over the world (from Mexico to China) in addition to their long established use in higher education and in research. IBM, the world's dominant computer company, predicts that the GNU/Linux system will be the leading choice and the standard for interoperability within the time period of the Board's plan. It is imperative that our school system not isolate itself with a parochial operating system.

With free software, schools, and particularly students, can study, experiment, customize, and contribute to the programs they use. Authoring parts of a system that is in use worldwide (and in extraterrestrial probes) fosters pride and a spirit of adventure in a cooperative learning environment. Free software grew up with the Internet, and most of the Internet runs on free software. *Free software is a trans-national solution, educationally, technically and morally superior to other systems being considered, and is indisputably far less costly.*

LXNY is working to persuade the Board to revise this plan. Please help LXNY in this endeavor.

Michael E. Smith <mesmith@panix.com>
Jay Sulzberger <secretary@lxny.org>
http://www.lxny.org