LXNY — *New York's Free Computing Organization*

Bulletin — New York City Board of Education Computer RFP

On 24 January 2001, the Board issued Request for Proposal 1B548, setting the framework for Internet access and computer usage. This seeks a single vendor or partnership to run a single, central ISP providing all of the following:

1. Monitored E-mail, through the Board of Education, for everyone in the school system. Other messaging forms possible.

2. Free Internet appliance or laptop computer for every student.

3. Revenue. This operation would generate revenue to pay for the system, including the free machines. Revenue would come from selling advertising + sponsorship.

4. Portal to the Internet. Segregated access is through Portal links controlled by the Board, stratified by age and other unspecified criteria, with access for parents and for children under parental supervision. The common section will have only educational links and usage will be 'closely monitored'. (Search engines will be available only to a privileged few.) The adult, commercial section will have links to commercial 'affiliates/sponsors.' For free or a nominal fee.

5. Central hosting for all web pages for all schools and students, monitored for compliance to Board policy, copyright infringement, etc.

6. Application Service Provider. ASP. Nearly all programs to be run centrally.

Outstanding problems not addressed by the latest plan:

• The role of proprietary source-code-secret software, covert access to systems, lack of security and forced advertising.

• Will the Board of Education be engaged in profit-making activities? Would there be profit-sharing with students or schools?

• 24×7 operation

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.*

Members of LXNY were at the meeting of the Board of Education (on April 12, 2000) where the first plan was unveiled and approved. LXNY is working to persuade the Board to revise this plan. Please help LXNY in this endeavor.

(*MES*)

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