

Is Your School Y2K OK?

Making Your Computers Millennium Ready

What will happen when the year 2000 rolls around? Some experts think the situation is not that serious. "Chances are, few school districts will experience a computer meltdown. . . when classes resume on Monday, January 3, 2000."¹ Others predict doomsday scenarios such as the following for K-12 schools:

"Administrative computer systems scramble student records. Heating and ventilation systems shut down. District-wide computer networks grind to a halt. Security doors won't open. Voice mail systems fall silent. Payroll and accounting systems print nonsense numbers—and the staff doesn't get paid."² Some computer programmers have become survivalists and are stockpiling food and other supplies. Marketers are taking advantage of the millennium madness and selling survival kits, generators, blankets, oil-burning lanterns, and more.³

How did this problem start? "When the first computer programmers went to work in the 1950s and '60s, they took a shortcut. Instead of entering all four numbers in a year, such as 1999, they used only the last two digits: 99. That way, they could save valuable space in the computer's memory. Besides, in the 1950s, the year 2000 seemed a long way off! Computer experts figured that all the programs would be different by now. They were wrong. Many of the original computer programs from the 1950s and '60s are, in fact, still in use today. In addition, many newer programs simply followed the two-digit model for tracking years."⁴ Why are the two digits a problem? When 2000 rolls around, some computers will think it is 1900 instead of 2000. This can

cause many errors in calculating critical information, such as payrolls and leap year dates.⁵

The year 2000 is almost upon us. Whether or not it brings disaster, by now you should already know about the year 2000 problem (referred to as Y2K) and have contingency plans for your school. If not, here are some steps you should take at once:⁶

- Consult with your superintendent, school board, school business manager, president, and/or executive director. Remember, this is more of a business problem than a technology problem.
- Do an inventory of your applications and systems. If they use embedded microchips, have someone assess the impact of the Y2K problem.
- Inquire whether your vendors' and service providers' equipment is Y2K compliant.⁷
- Conduct a risk analysis. Determine which systems and applications are critical to your school's services and deal with them in order of priority. Decide whether to fix the problem or purchase new applications. In many cases, it will actually be more cost-effective to purchase a new system instead of trying to patch up an old one.
- Test your applications to validate the repairs.
- Perhaps most important: Develop back-up and contingency plans. What will you do if the payroll system does not work or enrollment reports are corrupted?
- Keep your school community informed about the steps you are taking. Address the topic at board meetings, in newsletters, and on your Web site. Develop a compliance statement, reviewed by legal counsel.⁸

Out on a Lim With Educational Technology

• Be sure to purchase or accept as donations only Y2K-compliant software, hardware, equipment, and services. Contract only with those companies that have Y2K-compliant systems.⁹

Besides planning for emergencies and checking and updating your systems, you should teach a unit on Y2K to students at all levels. TeacherZone, a Web site for teachers, has lesson plans, projects for kids, and more to help your students understand computer history and current events.¹⁰ Classroom Connect, one of the best Internet resources for education, has planned a unit reviewing the past 1,000 years. Information on this resource is available at their Web site.¹¹ Use the millennium fever to spark enthusiasm about your history lessons!

Interest in the millennium is high. Now is an excellent time for Adventist churches and schools to get involved with their communities. A group of Pennsylvania churches is offering monthly Y2K prayer services that provide a mix of secular and spiritual advice.¹² What a wonderful opportunity to help your community prepare for the worst, to teach them what the Bible says about the end of the world, to pray and prepare together. Let us lead the way, not in panic, but in preparing for the future and the approaching second coming of Jesus. ☞

Janine Lim is the Instructional Technology Consultant at Berrien County Intermediate School District in Berrien Springs, Michigan. She works with Adventist schools as well as other private and public schools.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

Note: Visit the author's Web page at <http://www.andrews.edu/~freedj/> to find a list of these links.

1. Lars Kongshem, "RU Y2K OK?" *Electronic School* 186:3 (March 1999), p. A14.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. A14-A17. For a more in-depth

Continued on page 47

Is Your School Y2K OK?

Continued from page 21

article at <http://www.wired.com:80/wired/archive/7.04/blackout.html> from *Wired* magazine. For more details of the possibilities from an Adventist perspective, read *The Millennium Bug* by Jon Paulien. See <http://www.pacificpress.com/books/2000bug.htm> for information.

3. "Y2K Buzz: Millennium Marketing Madness," *Electronic School* 186:6 (June 1999), p. A6.

4. Michael Klein, "Trouble With 2000," *Time for Kids*, http://www.pathfinder.com/TFK/v5n1_cover.htm, June 20, 1999.

5. For an explanation of the Y2K bug from a programmer's point of view, see <http://www.wired.com:80/wired/archive/7.04/y2k.html>. See other *Wired* magazine reports at <http://www.wired.com/news/news/ytwok/>.

6. Steps quoted from John Bailey, "The Year 2000 Problem: A Titanic in an Information Age?" *Converge Magazine* (January 1999): <http://www.convergemag.com/Publications/CNVGJan99/y2k/y2k.shtm>. Other planning guides are available: CAN2K includes guides for educational institutions: <http://www.can2k.com/>

Educause has resources for higher education: <http://www.educause.edu/issues/y2k.html>

Pennsylvania Y2K has many resources: <http://www.pa2k.org/>

K12 Y2K Site: A list of links: <http://www.iu13.k12.pa.us/tech/iu13y2k.html>

Miami-Dade: A large school's report: <http://www.dade.k12.fl.us/admin/newy2k/Y2KCompliance/>

Squashing the Millennium Bug: a report and guide for K12 schools: <http://www.cgcs.org/y2k12/>

U.S. Dept. of Education: <http://www.ed.gov/offices/OCIO/year/>

U.S. President's Council on Year 2000: <http://www.y2k.gov/>

ZDNet's Y2K Site: Articles and more: <http://www.zdnet.com/enterprise/zdy2k/>

7. Check vendor databases for status. **EDS Vendor Y2K Database:** <http://www.vendor2000.com/>

BIOS Upgrade Info for Motherboards: <http://www.lighthouse-networks.com/FTP/HardWare/bios-upd/all%20bios.htm>

The Mitre Corporation: Includes searchable databases for products and vendors and tools for remediation: <http://www.mitre.org/research/y2k/>

Computer Tech: Identifying Your Bios: <http://computertech.server101.com/awdbios.htm>

8. See the Information Technology Association of America for litigation information: <http://www.ita.org/year2000/>

See also the Y2K Law Center for legal information: <http://www.year2000.com/y2klawcenter.html>.

9. For another perspective on planning, read Lars Kongshem, "RU Y2K OK?" *Electronic School* 186:3 (March 1999), pp. A14-A17.

10. See <http://www.teacherzone.com/y2k.html>.

11. See <http://www.classroom.com/>.

12. "Y2K Buzz," *Electronic School*, p. A6.

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