# Small Schools Need Security Too

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All of our schools should be using their computers in the classroom. Larger schools usually have an elaborate network, with student ID numbers and passwords for each student, to control access. Smaller schools and/or One-Room schools may either have their computers networked together with a peer-to-peer network or they may simply operate as stand-alone computers. No matter what computer set up your school has, security needs to be a main concern.

Taking a few security precautions can solve many of the little headaches that your users may throw your way. Working in a small school, one of the most frequent complaints I receive from teachers is that someone from their classroom has changed the password on the screen saver. This seems to be most annoying when a student, working very hard on a paper that is due in a couple of days, leaves the computer to get more of their research. When they return, the screen saver is activated and the password prevents the student from accessing the work they have just forgotten to save. Unfortunately, the only recourse is to reboot the computer and disable the screen saver. However, this only works until the next person decides to tamper with it.

Students also seem to enjoy changing the background colours and display settings. While changes to the background colours may simply add variety, changing the display settings may affect programs that need specific screen resolutions. When these resolutions are altered the programs will not display properly.

Other times, a student may accidentally delete a program icon or executable from the desktop or hard drive, forcing the teacher to take the time to make a new shortcut or install the program again.

As insignificant or annoying as these problems may be, constantly having to reboot the computer may lead to instabilities in the operating system of the computer. Using a security or access control program can lock out certain features such as the option for changing screen savers and display settings, thus preventing students from altering the settings that you want.

There are more serious files that students can inadvertently modify that would cause major problems for the computer. For example, if a student used Windows Explorer to delete some needed system files, you would need to spend hours trying to diagnose and correct the problem. Sometimes a whole new install of the operating system and programs would need to be done.

These problems are problems that are common to every computer, whether you are dealing with a stand-alone computer or a peer-to-peer network. Therefore, to avoid such time consuming and irritating student or staff errors, a security system is a must.

While setting up the network at my school this past summer, my husband and I were sure that we wanted a security program to prevent students and other users from altering the computer settings. The security system that my husband and I chose to install at my school was a simple three level one.

The first level is for student users and requires no password at start-up. It allows students to access the

basic functions of the computer but locks students out of the system and program files. In addition, it only allows students to delete files in specified folders.

The second level is for teachers. It allows them the ability to install and delete individual programs but not access operating system files. The second level is accessible through a password during login. Teachers have full access with this level to the programs and options that are needed during class time.

The third level is for the administrator. This level completely unlocks all aspects of the operating system allowing for maintenance utilities to be run. The administrator can also define what options or tasks can be accessed at each level.

In the previous years, I spent many hours diagnosing and fixing preventable computer related problems. This year, having an access control system on our small network has enabled me to spend virtually no time fixing user error problems. This in turn frees up my time to be able to run the appropriate diagnostic programs to keep the network and computers running as problem free as possible.

Many operating systems include programs for access control security, such as System Policy Editor that is included with Windows 98. However there are many third-party programs available over the internet that will provide the level of security that is needed for your small network or stand alone computer. These programs range in cost from freeware ($0) to over $100 depending on how much security you want. For the average small school network or computer, programs such as Access Administrator Pro or GS98 will provide the protection that is needed to keep students from altering or deleting settings they should not be accessing.

These programs and more can be found on various websites like the Freedownloads Center Website. (This site also includes various child protection internet tools)