

Abiding by the 'No Touchy' Principle

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"If the network is working, don't change anything!"

Uptime is a sensitive phrase used by network administrators as they work diligently to keep their computer networks functioning. Unfortunately, many Seventh-day Adventist church schools across Canada can not afford to contract a full-time OR part-time network administrator. How are our schools able to keep their computer equipment working? The solution typically involves the generous, yet experimental work of a few individuals with the most experience. Quite often, the teacher on staff with the greatest technology interest will take on the role of network administrator.

Whether you're a teacher or friend of a friend on staff that's been assigned to baby-sit the school network, keep the following tips in mind:

Is the network working? If yes, consider the following:

1. Protect your gateway and fileserver with a password and keep them locked up in a room not accessible by students or other visitors. Write the administrator username and password down on a piece of paper, place in a sealed envelope, and deliver it to the principal for safe keeping.
2. Keep a diligent log of changes made to the network. Most servers update their own log files and are available to the network administrator. Print these off monthly and file them in a safe place. Take note of all changes, especially the minor ones as they're usually the ones that affect the performance of a network.
3. Stick to an old server technology that works. Why upgrade to the latest and greatest when what you have works just fine? It would be a tough sell to the school board unless you have experience installing, testing and operating the upgrade server version.

Some reasons provided by network administrators in their upgrade proposals:

- a. **The new server version offers tighter security.**

Does a school share similar security concerns as a local business? Not likely. Most report card and student information databases are saved on an office workstation that is physically separate from the student network. If this is not the case, read up on the provincial government requirements. Most provinces require these databases to be kept on a separate network. Either way, how many school networks are compromised from individuals outside the school community? If 'hack-proofing' your school network is a priority, perhaps the school should revisit their technology plan. Want an easy solution to students hacking your valuable file server? Turn it off during non-school hours. When at school, each student should be carefully monitored by their teacher as they use school workstations to complete projects or work on assignments. Enforce a tough yet fair computer-use-policy.

- b. **The new server version offers more features.**

Again, if the network administrator has enough time to be experimenting with new features, perhaps this volunteer assignment is becoming too much of a distraction from their teaching objectives? Keep your network simple: Install a gateway (single connection to the Internet for all school workstations to run through) that has a small-medium security firewall built-in on one machine (server). I recommend implementing [vicomsoft](#). Fileshare from this same machine to all users and advise teachers NOT to save their tests, grades and private information on the school fileserver. Teachers can keep these files on CD or email as back-up.

c. **Students will be forced to use 'old technology' if the server isn't upgraded.**

How many operating systems does the average University Graduate have experience working on? Students adapt to whatever OS they're exposed to. Mastering an operating system is NOT a provincial technology goal, so why are you making it one? Educators are aware that preparing students for technology of the future is an impossible task. Let's focus on what the students are able to accomplish with what they have before spending more money on new software and operating systems. Some of the best technology-assisted activities I've seen used 4 year-old software running on 5 year-old operating systems. If your students are engaged in your technology-assisted lesson, don't change a thing.

Are we in a race to impress our students and parents with the latest and greatest software applications? No, absolutely not. We're in the business of education, not entertainment. Build a network that works with minimal cost and time investment. Install applications that are proven to make a difference in the learning experience of your students. Reward your school network administrator for their uptime record and budgeting success by offering in-house perks: Subsidize their personal hardware costs or pay for a technology workshop. Trust your network administrator; however, be very clear on expectations and boundaries before network spending and downtime spiral out of control.