The Orleans Parish School Board's Y2K Project

Past major malfunctions in the New Orleans Public Schools (NOPS) computer system, year 2000 compliance problems, and the need to modernize business practices led to the Orleans Parish School Board's decision in 1996 to begin serious planning for replacement of its obsolete 1970s mainframe computer with a modern management information system.

The project, which originally covered the replacement of obsolete hardware and software, was expanded perhaps as early as 1996 and certainly by June 1998 to include a system-wide high-speed network to bring the internet and other educational resources to the classroom. What became known as the Y2K Project has three major components:

♦ replacement of the central computer system located in administration headquarters

♦ installation of a system-wide network/communications infrastructure

♦ development of software applications for financial, human resources/payroll, and student information applications

Nearly two-thirds of the funding of the three-year project is from the Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB) General Fund and other district funds (federal Title I and state vocational education and technology funds). A little over one-third is from federal "e-rate" funds (explained on page 7).

The entire Y2K project is to be completed over a three-year period (1998-2001). By the end of the first year (July 1999) the new system is scheduled to be fully operational, including financial, human resources, and student information systems. In years two and three of the project, data warehousing and software enhancements are to be added.

Purpose and Methodology

BGR reported in its December 1998 issue of Outlook on the OPSB that successfully managing the transition from an outdated mainframe to a state-of-the-art information system provided the Board the opportunity to demonstrate its ability to handle large, complex restructuring efforts. The board's capacity to manage restructuring at this level is crucial for the success of broader school reform efforts of the type put forward by the New Orleans Education Foundation and the board's "Turnaround

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Team." In addition, this project is a very expensive undertaking that will cost the District some $16 million in the first year alone.

This report is different from other BGR publications in that this report is a "real time" review of an ongoing project as opposed to a prospective analysis or a retrospective assessment. As a "real time" review, its conclusions and commentary must to a degree be speculative. However, every effort was made to provide a complete and accurate picture of the current status of the Y2K project. This report is based on interviews with district staff and project vendors, a review of various school records, and status reports and other materials provided by vendors.

BGR wishes to thank NOPS administrative personnel, the Board Secretary, and project vendors for sharing their time, information, and insights, which made this report possible.

Critical Deadlines

Needed by July 1

The most immediate project deadline is getting new financial management applications operational by the original July 1, 1999 deadline. As we go to press district staff report new "go live" deadlines of July 15 for financial applications and late August for human resources/ payroll. Though failure to get new financial and human resources/payroll applications operational by the July 1 deadline could result in the shutdown of the old system due to the Y2K problem, failure is unlikely. It is more probable that any impact of the Y2K bug would not be felt until January 1, 2000.

The optimistic view is that Oracle, the vendor for the financial and human resources software, will meet the July 1 deadline, but with significant problems that administrative staff will have to work around for a while. This outcome would not be unlike the problems encountered by many organizations during the implementation of new computer systems.

Fortunately, these applications are not dependent upon completion of system-wide network installation for full operation.

The pessimistic view is that Oracle will not get the financial management applications operational by July and many financial operations, including payroll, will have to be handled by alternative means until the new system is up and running.

Needed by early August

The next critical deadline is completion of new student data software and infrastructure installation prior to the start of the new school year, to permit operation of the student information system. Class scheduling, attendance, grade reports, and textbook distribution are essential school-site functions supported by the student information system.

Although completion of the student information system software, including end-user training, is ahead of schedule according to district project staff, the deadline for completion of infrastructure and installation of school-site workstations has been pushed back to the new federal deadline of September 30.

Not having the student information system operational by the start of the new school year could create major problems at all affected school sites. As is frequently recommended by the student software vendor in status reports, the school system must consider adopting a contingency plan for processing student information. According to project staff, a contingency plan (a dial-up modem system for entering student data) is already in place.

How We Got Here

A chronology of major events marking the development of the project is shown as Exhibit 1.

The School Board hired KPMG Peat Marwick (the Consultant) in January 1997 to develop, as stated in the contract, a "Long Range Information Plan" for the

school system. Emphasizing the short time frame for completing the project, the consultants made three major management recommendations in three reports issued in July 1997:

♦ the Board should add new technical staff with expertise in modern computer systems,

♦ the Board should hire a Chief Information Officer (CIO) to oversee implementation and operation of the system, and

♦ the Board should engage a project integration consultant to coordinate development of the project.

Without a permanent superintendent and with little direction from the Board, none of these recommendations has been followed. Moreover, although school district staff plans to apply for e-rate funds were underway in 1996, the Consultant's November 1997 report, "Strategic Plan for Technology," suggests no knowledge of these funds or the district's intent to apply for them. The e-rate component of the project placed even greater demands on school staff, and as a result the project has struggled unnecessarily for almost two years under an inadequate management structure.

Throughout its reports, the Consultant reiterated the need for strong project management with the

"sponsorship" of top administrators and the Board in order for the project to be completed within budget and on time. While a great deal of work has been accomplished by a hardworking and dedicated district staff, lack of additional management and technical personnel contributed to a compressed time frame of only nine months in which to do the actual work of building

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Exhibit 1
The OPSB Y2K Project: Chronology of Events

June 1996	RFP issued for information system planning consultant
January 1997	Contract signed with KPMG Peat Marwick
July 1997	Consultant reports findings and recommendations
	$ **Contains first cost estimate $10.5 million**
March 1998	RFPs issued for software and network/communications
April 1998	Application submitted for $10.2 million in e-rate funds
June 1998	Contracts approved by Board for network/communications services contingent on e-rate funding
	$ **Board adds $10 million to FY1999 operating budget for Y2K project**
July 1998	CNS starts network/communications work on fourteen pilot schools
August 1998	Oracle contract approved for financial and human resources/payroll
September 1998	NCS contract signed for student information database
October 1998	Board adds $4 million to FY1999 operating budget for Y2K
	$ **Board has approved $14 million in district funds for Y2K project**
February 1999	Board adds $5 million to Y2K budget over three years
	$ **Board has approved $19 million in district funds for Y2K project**
February 1999	April 1998 application for $10.2 million in e-rate funds approved
	$ **Total Y2K funding is now $29 million**
March 1999	Interim Superintendent creates Information Technology Department

Source: BGR interviews and review of documents

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infrastructure and developing software. With critical summer deadlines days and weeks away, substantial work remains to be completed. For example:

♦ Installation of network/communications infrastructure was originally to be finished in December 1998. According to project staff this work was 52 percent complete in mid-June and 90 percent complete June 28.

♦ Development of the new student information system software is on track for an August 1 deadline, but its use is dependent on infrastructure whose installation is not complete. The vendors recommend adoption of a contingency plan. As noted above, staff say a contingency plan is already in place.

Completion of financial and human resources/ payroll systems development, even under ideal conditions, may not make the July 1 "go live" deadline. Project staff now report to BGR that the revised "go live" date is July 15 for the new financial system; and the human resources/payroll system will not be fully operational until the end of August.

Project Funding

Project costs have grown from a high estimate of $10.5 million in 1997 to over $29 million now. The $29 million total includes $16.4 million in school board general fund dollars for year one, which ends June 30, 1999. The most recent project budget is shown in Exhibit 2.

Funding for the Y2K Project comes from three sources. The OPSB's general fund pays for:

♦ financial, human resources/payroll, and student information systems;

♦ central computer system hardware and infrastructure (cabling, wiring and electrical); and

♦ computers for administrative offices.

Other district funds (federal Title I and state ocational education and technology funds) pay for computer workstations for school sites.

E-rate funding supports network/communications infrastructure, including servers and hardware that link 128 schools and the administrative offices.

Implementation

As noted above, the entire Y2K project is to be completed over a three-year period. Implementation began in July 1998 with the initiation of network/ communications infrastructure installation, and it will continue beyond "go-live" deadlines as the system is de-bugged and refined. Oracle staff will be on site through September 1999 to tune financial applications; and through December to support operation of the human resources/payroll application. National Computer Systems (NCS), the student data systems vendor, will remain through October.

Project Management

Although the Planning Consultant in July 1997 had emphasized the need to contract with a Project Integration Consultant to coordinate development of the project, bring in new technical staff with expertise in modern computer systems, and hire a Chief Information Officer (CIO) to oversee implementation and operation of the system, none of these actions was taken.

Despite the planning consultant's recommendation to bring in new technical and management personnel, all the positions were filled from within the school system. The OPSB's Budget and Finance Committee assumed the role of overseeing the project, and the Project Director was to report monthly to the Committee on project progress. Such reporting did not occur on a monthly basis, presumably because the Project Director had too many other responsibilities.

In April 1998 and again in September 1998, the OPSB's Audit Advisory Committee emphasized to the Board and to the Acting Superintendent the importance of a project manager and expressed concern that no progress had been made in hiring one.

The Information Technology Department (IT) was established by the Interim Superintendent in March 1999. The School Board officially created the (Y2K) CIO position also in March 1999.

New staff positions approved by the Board in February 1999 will presumably be filled at some point; but the contributions of new personnel would have been greatly magnified had they been on board six months ago, learning the system by working with vendor personnel during the design implementation phases.

The "subject matter expert" (SME) positions, in contrast, are by definition existing school staff. They are non-technical personnel moved from their regular management jobs (finance, human resources, payroll, purchasing, etc.) and assigned to work full-time with project contractors. The SMEs have provided contractors with nuts-and-bolts information about school district business and management operations.

Most of the SMEs will remain with the Information Technology Department following implementation of the new system. Although it had been recommended that their prior management positions be filled early on, some SMEs have been called upon to do both their prior jobs and their project-implementation work, drawing complaints from software vendors.

Project Status

The status of each of the major components of the Y2K project as of May 1999 follows.

The Central Computer System

Although the need to re-cable the administration buildings to support the new information system was noted in the planning consultant's November 1997 report, the eleventh-hour effort to finish infrastructure work delayed completion of the administration buildings.

Exhibit 2
OPSB Y2K Project Budget

OPSB funds

Oracle software
Finance	$4,999,583	
Human resources/payroll	2,218,671	
Inventory	338,000	
Sub-total Oracle	$7,556,254	

National Computer Systems software		
Student information system	2,217,000	
Child nutrition software	178,350	
Maintenance fees/data conversion	427,000	
Project management	500,000	
Hardware/infrastructure	4,268,503[a]	
Training	549,543	
Additional staff (three months)	203,250	
Sub-total OPSB Year One	15,899,900	
OPSB Year Two	2,709,000[b]	
OPSB Year Three	391,000[b]	
Sub-total OPSB funds		**$18,999,900**

E-rate funds

Global Data Systems (routers, switches)	4,870,331	
Time Trend (servers)	2,609,529	
CNS (cabling, wiring)	1,245,094	
BellSouth (telecommunications)	809,240	
Verio Gulf South (internet service)	681,297	
Sub-total e-rate funds		**10,215,492[c]**
Total Project Cost		**$29,215,392**

a For non-e-rate schools and administration space
b Does not include OPSB recurring operating costs for personnel and maintenance
c Does not include future e-rate funding.

Source: Orleans Parish School Board

Installation of the central system was essentially completed in January 1999. Summarized, it consists of two servers for Oracle applications, 20 task servers and one database server for student data, network servers, and high-speed data line connections to each school site. The central system will support management operations in the administrative buildings and will serve as the hub for district-wide operations.

Network/Communications Infrastructure

Two vendors supplied the bulk of project hardware, but Cohesive Network Systems (CNS) is the vendor responsible for installing this hardware and building system-wide network/communications infrastructure.

The school system's RFP for infrastructure gave an optimistic completion date of June 1998, in anticipation of a quick turnaround in e-rate funding. When this quick turnaround did not occur, CNS produced a revised project plan, based on the district's receiving e-rate funds in the summer of 1998, with completion scheduled for December 1998. But the OPSB application was among the last funded, and the award was not received until February 1999. These sorts of delays in new federal funding initiatives are not uncommon and should be anticipated, particularly given the short timeframe for project completion. This miscalculation posed a significant threat to the integrity of the project, which was already working against an extremely aggressive timeline.

Unable to begin full-scale work in June 1998, district and CNS staff adopted an alternative plan that focused on completing infrastructure work in 14 "pilot" schools to at least get the project started. That June, the Board approved the expenditure of $1.8 million in general fund dollars (roughly the amount required for e-rate match) to equip the 14 schools with network/communications infrastructure and hardware (servers and routers). Seven of the 14 pilot schools were also designated as test-site schools

for testing the accuracy of student data converted from the old software program to the new student data software system.

The pilot-school approach adopted by the district was a good alternative to simply waiting for e-rate funds to arrive. Getting pilot schools on-line would allow the contractors to check for proper connections with the central system servers and to test network operations.

Installation of infrastructure, a prerequisite to overall system development, has thus far proven to be the more problematic component of the project. The process has been beset by significant problems:

♦ an eight-month delay in the anticipated availability of e-rate funds, greatly slowing infrastructure deployment;

♦ the unplanned-for need to contract out for electrical upgrades, including wiring for special air conditioning units for proper cooling of computer equipment, because the Maintenance Department lacked the resources to complete the work within the time frame requested by school staff; and

♦ the need to replace inadequate computer network cabling in district administrative buildings to meet requirements for new equipment.

To minimize further delay, district staff requested that the Board approve a $500,000 addendum to NCS's contract for completion of electrical wiring and computer cabling work in administrative buildings. The Board approved the addendum in November 1998.

In an October 1998 status report, Oracle managers referenced district staff's request for in-house training to reduce out-of-state travel. But Oracle emphasized the need for completion of network installation in the administrative building if training were to be conducted in December as scheduled. A December status report documents that the training had to be cancelled and re-scheduled for January because the

network had not been completed in time. District project staff reported to BGR that the delays were the result of "glitches" in Oracle software.

Oracle managers also stated in the October report that unless infrastructure work were completed in all schools by April 1999, they would be unable to meet their schedule for end-user training. As a result, the end-user training schedule is only now in the development stage, and training will likely not take place until sometime in year two of the project.

In February and March status reports, NCS stated that the seven test-site schools did not begin implementation on time because workstations were not in place and software could not be installed as per the project timeline. As recently as April 1999, NCS progress reports continued to express concern about infrastructure, stating that "infrastructure completion is on an extremely aggressive time schedule. We will need to plan for contingencies."

Phase I of CNS's revised three-phase plan, completing infrastructure at 14 high school sites, has been completed with the exception of installing personal computers in 25 percent of the classrooms in each of the schools. The Phase II goal is to complete work in the remaining 114 schools by the extended deadline of September 30, 1999. Phase III includes installing computers in 50 percent of the remaining classrooms and providing for video conferencing in each classroom, the latter contingent upon future e-rate funding.

With the receipt of e-rate funds, work is progressing. As of May 1, according to CNS and district staff, 33 schools have been fully equipped with hardware, network cabling, and high-speed data lines. About 50 other school sites are now under construction. CNS has brought in extra crews and expects to meet the September 30 date for expending (or losing) e-rate funds.

Software Applications Development

Financial, human resources/payroll software

The Oracle Corporation is both the financial and human resources/payroll software and applications design provider. The school system's Consultant agreed with the selection of Oracle as the financial applications vendor, but recommended against using their human resources/payroll application. The consultant expressed concern that taking on this new application would require more school staff resources than were available and recommended outsourcing payroll as an alternative.

Federal e-rate program

The federal Telecommunications Act of 1996, better known as the e-rate program, provides schools and libraries serving poor students with funds for internet access and telecommunication services. The program also funds internal connections which include hardware (servers, routers) and infrastructure (cabling, wiring). Personal computers are excluded from funding.

Each school's eligibility for discounted cost rates, which range from 20 percent to 90 percent, is determined by the percentage of students qualifying for the free and reduced lunch program. Schools that have above 80 percent of students eligible receive discounts on all services. Schools below 80 percent receive discounts on internet and telecommunications services only.

New Orleans was allocated $10.2 million in e-rate funds in February 1999. That amount will provide 114 district schools with all services at about the 90 percent discount rate. Eleven schools will receive discounted internet and telecommunications services only. District funds are being used for the infrastructure work in these eleven schools. District funds were also used for infrastructure installation in administrative buildings, which are not e-rate eligible.

Based on Oracle progress reports, software systems development is on a very tight timeline for meeting the July 1 "go live" date for both financial and human/resources payroll systems. Oracle staff report that the project is on schedule for meeting this deadline. But a comparison of Oracle's earlier "target schedule" with their "high level plan" completed in October indicates a slippage of two to three months in the timeline, time which they are attempting to make up during the final phases of development.

It is difficult to gauge the status of Oracle system development. Timeline information provided to BGR was hard to decipher. A request for a summary report simplifying timeline information and outlining accomplishments to date, problems/issues, and coming milestone events was not met; and neither was a request for April and May weekly Oracle status reports.

Earlier Oracle progress reports, beginning with September 1998, express considerable frustration with the school system's management of the project. Oracle management made repeated requests for office space, office furniture, telephones, and printers for Oracle staff. Oracle management made repeated requests, beginning in early December 1998 and continuing through January 1999, for 14 computer workstations to be used by Oracle consultants for software development. Reports show complaints throughout much of the implementation period

Key Project Contractors

KPMG Peat Marwick	Information System Planning
Oracle	Financial and Human Resources/Payroll Software
CNS (Cohesive Network Systems)	Network/ Communications Installation
NCS (National Computer Systems)	Student Information Database

regarding the unavailability of SMEs, especially qualified ones, and the impact their unavailability could have on meeting the July 1 deadline.

Some SME positions were not back-filled and the SMEs often had to take care of regular job functions, particularly payroll runs, forcing the cancellation of scheduled meetings. As noted in an November 1998 Oracle progress report, "this poses a risk to completing payroll [software design]." In Addition, SMEs were often unavailable to Oracle because of training and meeting scheduling conflicts with other vendors.

District staff, according to the contract with Oracle, were originally to write the data conversion program and complete the conversion process. But after repeated requests by Oracle for conversion data, district staff, with Board approval, added $77,000 to the contract to pay Oracle to complete this process. This change was made in an effort to keep the project on track for the July 1 deadline.

On February 8, 1999 the OPSB approved scope-of-work changes/amendments to the base Oracle contract in order to fill gaps in financial and human resources software identified in October and November 1998. In a February 24, 1999 status report, Oracle asserted that it "can not proceed with the new requirements until the new Scope of Work documents are signed." The report, authored by the Oracle Project Manager, further stated that "if these documents are not signed and returned to me by Friday, February 26, 1999, then Oracle can not begin work on March 1. The result of Oracle beginning work after March 1 will be a delay in the completion date of July 1." These scope-of-work changes were not signed by the Board President until April 7, 1999. Though project staff contend that work was not delayed pending signing of the contract amendments, it seems clear from Oracle's reports that significant work time was lost in this process.

On a more positive note, approximately 15 district SMEs and two database administrators (DBAs) are receiving extensive training from Oracle personnel.

A schedule for training end-users throughout the district is slated for completion in June; but, as noted, training will probably not take place until Year Two of the project, which begins July 1, 1999.

Student data software

National Computer Systems (NCS) is the vendor for SASI, the student information software package selected by the Board to manage attendance, scheduling, grade reporting, and textbook information.

Implementation of student software was slowed early on by several problems:

- the eight-month delay in receipt of e-rate funding;

- lengthy contract negotiations resulting in a two-month delay in initiating the operations analysis phase of SASI software development;

- a delay in the delivery of the student software server until December 1998; and

- a delay in getting pilot schools on-line as scheduled because workstations were not in place.

Even with these delays, NCS and district staff have moved steadily ahead with software development and training, successfully setting up seven test-site schools (from among the 14 pilot schools) and three training sites for end-user training.

The test-site schools are used to test actual student data that have been converted from the mainframe format for use in the new student database. The results of the first data conversion tests were reported by district staff to be successful. However, a February NCS status report notes that conversion faced delays due to problems using NOPS data.

The use of test schools is also a means of assessing the operation of the student data servers and the network. Finally, this approach allows school-site staff to use SASI software and give feedback to NCS staff on modifying the new program to meet the district's needs.

Three sites for training 400 end-users have been established, two at the Athis school site and one at Benjamin Franklin High School. Training sessions began in April and will conclude in July. Preparations are underway for software installation and live data conversion in June, followed by final system testing in July and cut-over to the new system in August.

The NCS project director reported as of April that they were on schedule to meet these deadlines. But unlike getting the Oracle software operational, operationalizing student data software is dependent upon completion of school-site infrastructure, because the source of student data is the individual schools.

The completion date for bringing all schools on line has been moved to September 30, a month after the beginning of the fall term. With only 33 schools finished as of May 1, even the extended deadline seems ambitious, posing potentially significant problems for the district. Schools not yet networked may have to find an alternative means of getting student information entered in the central database. One alternative considered by project staff is a dial-up or modem system. [ED.NOTE: School staff report completion of 115 of 127 school sites as of June 28.]

Commentary

NOPS project staff have accomplished a great deal in a relatively short time, and the new information system is nearing completion. If time were not a factor, the transition to a new system would likely be a smooth one. But time is a critical factor—and has been since the Consultant presented its recommendations in July 1997.

Management Needs and Problems

District staff assigned to the Y2K project are dedicated and hardworking, and the Board contracted with companies that are committed to rolling out the new information system on schedule. If vital financial and human resources/payroll systems are up and

running by the revised July 15 deadline, it will be as a result of their combined hard work.

If cut-over to the new management system in July is beset with major problems, it will be because district staff were allowed to take on too much in too short a timeframe with too few staff.

The board's information system planning consultant, emphasizing the shortage of time and qualified staff, recommended almost two years ago that additional technical and management personnel should be hired to support implementation of the new system. These recommendations were not followed, and the lack of these personnel contributed greatly to the problems presented in this report.

On the front end of the project, a protracted RFP process, lengthy contract negotiations, and the diversion of school staff to obtaining e-rate funds left the school system with only a nine-month window to convert from its older computer system to a modern client-server system. It is quite likely that additional experienced staff and consultants hired from the outset would have helped NOPS staff establish project priorities and complete initial tasks more quickly. Additional consultant resources would have mitigated what is a pressure-filled implementation process and helped to avoid potentially costly delays and debugging problems.

When the Board approved the pursuit of e-rate funding to install network/communications infrastructure as part of the Y2K project, they took a laudable risk. Funding delays of the type encountered in obtaining e-rate support should always be anticipated with a large, new federal initiative; and these expectable funding delays posed considerable risk to timely completion of the time-critical portions of the project.

Especially since no new personnel were added when the extra task was taken on, staff could have concentrated instead on the school system's core business and management functions and pursued the educational technology component as a later phase. Instead, they chose to pursue a much larger goal that has complicated and slowed project development and further compressed an already tight time frame.

The Board would have been wise to have required and engaged the management support called for by their Consultant, particularly given the limited leadership that could be provided by an administration operating under what turned out to be a series of interim superintendents.

Operating in a very limited time frame of nine months at the end of the project allowed little room for missteps. But staff have been spread very thin and pulled in too many directions to schedule and handle all anticipated project tasks in a timely manner, much less to address the unanticipated problems that almost always arise in a project of this scope.

Some of the management problems involved in implementation of the Y2K Project are the following:

◆ The unanticipated need for electrical upgrading at school sites and administrative building, coupled with the inability of school maintenance staff to complete electrical upgrades in a timely fashion, required an addendum to the CNS contract. Negotiations delayed installation of network infrastructure and added an unanticipated $500,000 to the cost of the project, which will have to come from district funds.

◆ Due to incomplete infrastructure, end-user training for Oracle financial applications will not occur until sometime in Year Two of the Project, delaying the move to site-based management.

◆ The inability of school staff to complete data conversion in a timely manner required a supplemental contract with Oracle at a cost to the District of $77,000.

Vendor status reports, as noted, are replete with examples of project management and integration problems:

- ♦ lack of required office space and equipment for vendor staff,

- ♦ training sessions delayed due to incomplete wiring work and lack of workstations,

- ♦ requests for important policy decisions unanswered for lengthy periods,

- ♦ delayed final sign off from the Board on scope-of-work changes to address gaps in software system requirements,

- ♦ unavailability of critical school staff to vendors due to scheduling conflicts, and

- ♦ lack of back-up school personnel to work with vendors.

It appears that the Board may now be moving forward to hire a project management consultant, not acting on their planning consultant's recommendation until almost two years after the fact and seven months into project implementation. BGR questions the need at this late stage of project development for project management services as described in the OPSB's March 1999 RFP, particularly at a cost of $500,000. The RFP's Scope of Work identifies areas of "responsibilities" that the prospective consultant is required to address. Even a few months ago, these types of services were sorely needed. Now, however, many of the specific activities listed in the RFP have been completed.

Ongoing Staffing and Operating Needs

Once operational, the management information system will in the long run rise and fall on the district's ability to retain the database administrators (DBAs) it is now training and its ability to hire additional experienced DBAs in the future.

DBAs experienced in Oracle applications command salaries from a minimum of $60,000 per year to in excess of $100,000 annually. The Board must plan to structure the pay for these critical staff positions accordingly or they will be attracted to other employment opportunities in short order. Scaling back and redefining consultant activities and redirecting funds toward these purposes may be a more cost-effective alternative for spending district revenues.

Recurring Y2K project operating costs will total at least $2.5 million a year. Approximately $2 million annually will be required for proposed new staff, and an estimated additional $500,000 in yearly software and network maintenance costs must be added to the board's FY1999/2000 operating budget.

Conclusion

In summary, the Orleans Parish public school system's management information system project faces several critical deadlines over the next two months.

Until recent date changes made by project staff, July 1 was the deadline for getting financial, human resources, and payroll applications operational. The revised "go live" deadline for financial applications is now July 15, and for human resources/payroll, the end of August.

The date for completion of the system-wide network for the operation of the new student information software is now September 30, after the start of the new school year.

It may be too late for effective project management services, but it is not too early for the School Board to anticipate the approximately $2.5 million that will be needed annually for operation of the new system.

The current School Board deserves credit for finally "getting moving" on meeting the school system's management information needs. What is called the system's "Y2K Project" is much more than that—it has been an overhaul needed for nearly 20 years. ➤

Orleans Parish School Board's Y2K Project

It is perhaps miraculous that the system has been able to function at all with its antiquated hardware and software. The system installed in the 1970s was known to be only a "temporary fix" when it was put in, just as "temporary" portable classrooms were expected to have been.

The desire to give credit where credit is due, however, does not mean that there have not been and may not continue to be problems. BGR's hope is that delineation of recent management problems and omissions can help to remedy such problems in the future. One thing is certain—the Orleans Parish School Board and its Administration will have far more information and information-management tools at its disposal than ever before in its history. Knowledge the Board and Administration can create; wisdom they must supply.

Quickview

◆ With no new staff, the OPSB undertook a $29-million-dollar project to upgrade the district's business management functions and bring educational technology to the classroom.

◆ The cost of the information system and internet projects together has grown from an original "high" estimate of $10 million to over $29 million, including just over $10 million in federal e-rate funds.

◆ The original July 1 deadline for "going live" with new financial and human resources/payroll software has been changed to July 15 for financial and August 31 for human resources/payroll software.

◆ The August deadline for completion of system-wide infrastructure and installation of school-site workstations has been pushed back to September 30.

◆ The project will add annual operating expenditures of at least $2.5 million to the school district's general fund budget.