You and Your Passwords – PART 1

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"Toys? Nah, passwords."

I. Introduction

As the New Year arrives and our many resolutions fall by the wayside one by one, we thought it might be a good idea to discuss passwords for a moment.

With the proliferation of connected devices and Web 2.0 (you know, web places with a login name) sites comes the proliferation of login names, passwords, challenge questions, etc. A partial list, compiled by Mrs. Parsons of just those common sites used in our District includes:

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Network login
email
Iep/ais direct
School world teacher log in
School world district log in
School tool
School dude
Curriculum connector
Google Apps
BARS
MAP/NWEA
Mylearningplan.com
NYSTART
"info" products
"Other" Data Warehouse
NYSED Business Portal
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Because we can't watch out for everyone, and keeping a written list of passwords for everyone is not only tedious but really dumb from a security standpoint, the onus for keeping these passwords private and secure falls to you.

It's really important – we are dealing with confidential information here, as has been presented to everyone several times now.

II. And You Thought You were Clever:

Why great care and consideration should be
taken when selecting the proper password

There are lots of things you shouldn't do regarding passwords, and lots of words you shouldn't use for passwords. For starters, look at some of the information below (and despair).

Here, according to the website *whatsmypass.com*, are some of the top worst passwords of ALL TIME (well, at least since they have been watching). They list the top 500, but some of the names are, well, dirty, so they (and a lot of others) have been left out below:

1234, 123456, 12345678, 654321, 4321, 11111, 987654, 123123, 11111111, access, password, qwerty, asdf, asdfgh, baseball, football, master, letmein, pass …...

And so on and so forth, along with a LOT of proper (and improper) first names. Recognize any?

How about these clever snippets, also borrowed from the site above:

ncc1701 The ship number for the Starship Enterprise (the original, for the geeks in the audience).
thx1138 The name of George Lucas's first movie, a 1971 remake of an earlier student project.
qazwsx one combination that follows a simple pattern when typed on a typical keyboard.
666666 Six sixes.
7777777 Seven sevens, etc. (you get the point).
ou812 The title of a 1988 Van Halen album.
8675309 The number mentioned in the 1982 Tommy Tutone song. FYI, the song caused an epidemic of people dialing 867- 5309 and asking for "Jenny". Really.

And the top 25 worst passwords for 2011, compiled by SpashData.com and culled from data stolen and posted online by hackers, in order:

password, 123456, 12345678, qwerty, abc123, monkey, 1234567, letmein, trustno1, dragon, baseball, 111111, iloveyou, master, sunshine, Ashley, bailey, passw0rd, shadow, 123123, 654321, superman, qazwsx, Michael, Football

Can you see what is wrong with the passwords above? Sequential patterns of keys, common words or names, lack of special symbols, and short lengths to start. All are easily guessed or discovered by hand, or by programs designed to try varied combinations.

If you recognize any of these, or if your passwords follow any of these patterns, you really need to change your password!

What can you do?

Part 2 of this document will detail what makes a good, secure password, and some ways that you can use more than one password, and remember them all (without a post-it or a written list, yes, we know they are out there…..)