In an Age of Hacking, Bronx Science Battens Down the Hatches
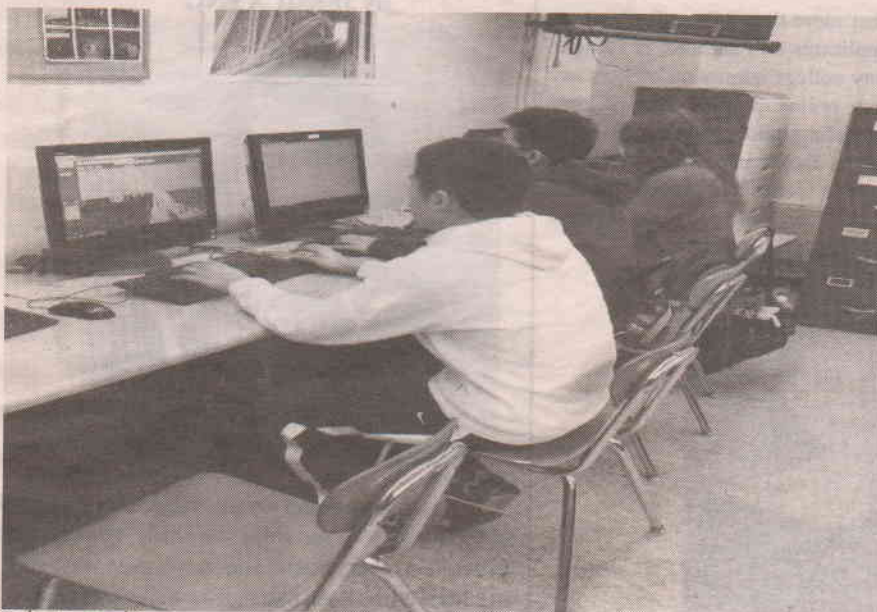

Students working in a computer lab.

By LAUREN DE LA OSSA and WILEEN ZENG

The *New York Times*, Target, Neiman-Marcus: hardly a big institution exists these days that has been immune to hacking. Now, Bronx Science is investigating an apparent breach in the school's computer security system after members of the Electronics Club and the Robotics Teams were caught allegedly using an administrative account without authorization.

At least one culprit has had his privileges suspended and lost partial access to his student account, while about a half dozen students are facing disciplinary action, including suspension hearings and dean's detentions.

According to Mr. Eng, the Coordinator of Student Affairs, "The Electronics Club is suspended indefinitely, until someone else decides to start it again."

The two robotics teams, one co-ed and the other for girls only, are not suspended because only two of approximately 100 members are under investigation and the teams are in the midst of competition season, sources close to the investigation said.

Dr. Jean Donahue, the principal, declined to discuss details of the disciplinary action. However, she did express disappointment that students had abused the privilege of having access to so much technology at school.

"The great access that students have [to computers] requires a certain expectation" of responsibility, Dr. Donahue said in regard to school computer policies.

Teachers and school staff have been alerted about the problem and warned not to use personal information, including credit card numbers, on school computers.

The breach in security came to light in early January after a microserver or mini-computer known as a "raspberry pi" (a credit-card sized computer that can be programmed) was discovered in a computer lab used by AP Computer Science classes.

"It was like something out of a spy movie," stated a student familiar with the incident. No servers or files were corrupted, sources reported.

Electronics club members claim that the breach was not done with malicious intent, but that they were attempting to find vulnerable points in the computer system to help the school.

In light of the incident, the school is taking extra precautions against future breaches. In emails, students and teachers have been cautioned to never share passwords and to report any suspicious activity, such as installing software. Teachers have been advised to keep a close eye on students using computers in classrooms.