

A spare TV station

Others note that besides the Board of Ed's three payroll systems - down from seven in 1994 - the agency left behind its own TV station, WNYE, which is separate from the city-owned Crosswalks channel.

"We don't need two television stations," said one Bloomberg insider, who hinted that WNYE may be put on the block. "Some people would argue we don't need one."

There are other, obvious, duplications. The new Department of Education's data warehouse is at 2 Metrotech Center in Brooklyn, across the street from the city's larger, state-of-the-art data center at 11 Metrotech.

Now that schools are a mayoral agency, administration aides are studying ways to organize all files under one roof.

A top assistant to the city's Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications chief, Gino Menchini, is due to take over the schools' data center today.

"They have been operating on their own without a lot of direction," said Menchini, who said consultants charging as much as \$1,500 per day are "literally running" much of the schools' data operations.

The impetus for change can be traced to Bloomberg, who made his fortune in information systems and believes in the power of technology.

Coming soon, for instance, will be the city's 311 help line, where callers will - at least theoretically - be able to navigate city services and get questions answered by live operators.

More important, aides say, Bloomberg understands technology like few politicians. He keeps detailed time lines of technology projects in his City Hall cubicle and is known for firing off voice mails and E-mails at all hours.

Aides say his specialty is forwarding voice mails he has received on his phone to underlings, often with explicit instructions added in his own voice.

"He uses it as a parallel to E-mail," said La Padula of the mayor's voice-mailing, which apparently begins before 6 a.m.

"He can hold his own [with technology experts]," added Menchini. "The mayor's bottom-line perspective on technology is that we are going to put the money up; it's an investment and we are going to see a return on that investment."