

Hosted VoIP Gets an Education

The days of the bulletin board are long over. Your students, faculty, and staff are expecting you to provide new ways for them to communicate with each other. With hosted Voice over IP (VoIP), you can quickly and easily meet this demand.

A hosted VoIP service gives your organization an innovative phone system in the cloud. Hosted VoIP combines a full range of advanced features with the benefits of an outsourced service – all at a fraction of the cost of a premises-based PBX.

Why should you look at hosted VoIP when upgrading or replacing your phone system? Here are a few of the key reasons:

Little or no capital expenditure: Unlike a premises-based phone system, hosted VoIP doesn't involve purchasing servers, software, phones, and other infrastructure. Instead, hosted VoIP runs on the service provider's network, connecting over the Internet. It provides a predictable monthly expense which includes maintenance and upgrades of the system. While you have the option of purchasing phones upfront with hosted VoIP, you can also usually rent the phones from the provider instead. This avoids the additional paperwork and approvals associated with a purchase or lease.

Ease of management: IT support resources in a school environment are often stretched to the breaking point. Hosted VoIP makes management and support of the phone system easier, since maintenance and upgrades are included in the monthly charge. The provider upgrades the service on a regular basis, ensuring that your phone system is "future-proof." Finally, one person can easily manage configurations and users across a campus or district.

Ideal for multiple locations: Hosted VoIP is ideal when there are multiple buildings or schools within a district being served. Call handling can be centralized, allowing one or two people to handle incoming calls for all locations. Users can extension dial between locations, and all calls between hosted VoIP locations are free. Voicemail is centralized, allowing you to forward voicemail to other users or send broadcast voicemails to a distribution list.

Priority 1 E-Rate funding: Under the E-Rate program for K-12 schools and libraries, hosted VoIP can receive discounts of 20-90% of the cost for eligible services. It receives Priority 1 funding, which means that it will be funded ahead of Priority 2 services (such as a premises-based phone system). This program allows many schools to defray the budgetary burden of purchasing a new phone system.

In addition to these benefits, some hosted VoIP providers offer features geared toward a school environment. For example, a 911 call alert service can send out emails, text messages, and phone calls to alert key personnel when 911 is dialed and indicate the location from which the call was placed. Another feature is "quiet time," which selectively sends calls for teachers direct to voicemail during classroom sessions.

With hosted VoIP on your side, it's easier to create a culture of high-tech collaboration for your school while making the best possible use of your resources.