Survey finds many school phone systems are outdated and unreliable

ENA partnered with District Administration to explore the topic of school and district communications technology by deploying a survey to school administrators in the DA audience. Nearly 200 respondents participated, providing insightful findings on the types of phone systems districts are currently using, the most significant problems they are experiencing, and how confident they are in the reliability of their phone systems.

Types of phone systems, and frustrations

To better understand the current phone technology landscape in K-12, participants were asked what type of communication platform their school district uses. The majority of respondents (43%) indicated voice over IP (VoIP), while some 23% said they use an analog or traditional landline system. Another 16% said they use a combination of VoIP and analog, while 18% said they didn’t know.

When asked to identify when their current phone system was installed, the majority of respondents (45%) said within the last 5 years, while 21% said 5-10 years ago, 9% said 10-15 years ago, 7% said 15-20 years ago, and 3% said it was installed more than 20 years ago. Another 14% said they didn’t know.

Types of questions around outages, resolution response, and reliability – 99.999% uptime – is.

Respondents were also asked to identify their most significant frustrations with their current phone system. For the 39% currently using an analog, traditional system, or a combination, the most commonly selected frustration was “Outdated voicemail or other features/technology,” at 48%, followed by “Difficult for new users to learn the system” (20%), “Our users periodically can’t make outbound calls” (14%), “Callers can’t get through to us in times of high demand” (8%) and “Inconsistent/poor audio quality” (8%), “Dropped calls” (5%).

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Outages and reliability in emergencies

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Reliability of cell phone signal

When asked how confident they were in the reliability of their phone system in the event of an emergency, 52% said they were “Extremely confident,” but 41% said they were “Somewhat confident,” and another 7% said they were “Not confident.”

“Our phone system’s reliability is the most important component in building an effective and comprehensive communication and emergency response plan,” McKerley says. “Any outage is a safety hazard, but a majority of respondents indicating their outages last 30-60+ minutes demonstrates two things: not all phone systems, including VoIP, are engineered or supported the same, and how important selecting a service provider with proven reliability – 99.999% uptime – is.”

Similarly, respondents were asked to describe the reliability of cell phone signal from inside their school or district buildings. 10% selected the statement “Perfect; no problems getting reliable signal for calls, from anywhere inside our buildings,” while 49% said “Good; there are just a few places with poor or no signal inside our buildings.” Some 27% selected “Poor; there are many places with poor or no signal inside our buildings,” and 14% said “Very poor; it is very difficult to get cell phone connectivity from inside our buildings.”

Outages and reliability in emergencies

When asked how long it usually takes for a problem or outage to be resolved, the highest number of respondents (31%) said “Over 1 hour,” while 24% said “30-60 minutes,” 20% said “15-30 minutes” and 26% said “Less than 15 minutes.”

When you have experienced an outage or other problem, about how long does it usually take for the problem to be resolved and the phones to be working again?

- 26% Less than 15 minutes
- 20% 15-30 minutes
- 24% 30-60 minutes
- 31% Over 1 hour

ENA provides fully managed, cloud-based VoIP phone systems for schools. These next-generation communication systems offer a low total cost of ownership, deliver 99.999% uptime reliability, and can include advanced features such as instant location identification with 911 calls to enhance emergency response and preparedness.

To learn more, go to ENA.com.

“What these survey findings also demonstrate that while cell phones can play a role in emergency response, they should not be the sole communication method relied upon during an emergency,” McKerley says. “In order to be fully prepared, districts need to be engaging with vendors who understand the mission-critical status of school phone systems, have multiple layers of redundancy built into their VoIP platform, and have excellent resolution response and customer support.”

“Data taken from the survey of DA subscribers, “School Phone Systems,” conducted in December 2019, with 191 respondents participating.”