



SHORETEL PHONE SYSTEMS MAKES THE GRADE AT DAVID DOUGLAS SCHOOL DISTRICT

Recent education studies have proven what many parents and teachers already know: when parents get involved in their children's education, children do better in school. Such involvement largely depends on direct communication between parents and teachers about students' progress.

Looking to improve communications, primarily with the parents of its more than 9,400 students, David Douglas School District in Portland, Oregon established a goal of outfitting every classroom and every teacher with a phone. At the time, teachers shared a few phones in the office for making outbound calls. For inbound calls, which often came when teachers were in class, office staff took handwritten messages. This consumed much of the office staff's time, forced teachers to leave their classrooms to make calls, and inevitably created delays in connecting with parents.

Though it sounds simple enough to install a phone in every room, the fast-growing district with 16 locations faced some significant costs and challenges. Without phone wiring and jacks beyond a few areas in each school, David Douglas would have to invest substantial time and money to build the infrastructure needed to put a phone in every room.

On top of that, the district's existing Centrex phone network consisted of several different types of systems, which all brought their own problems. Some lacked adequate vendor support, while others were slow, archaic and hard to maintain. Simple changes like adding new users or schools often demanded bringing in costly outside vendors.

SHORETEL DELIVERS HIGH-QUALITY, RELIABLE ACCESS FOR ALL STAFF

Wanting to standardize with one system and bring all 800 staff members onto the system, Keith Seher, MIS manager at David Douglas, called on Structured Communication Systems, a Portland-based ShoreTel channel partner. Though interested in IP telephony, Seher had concerns that the sound quality would not measure up to that of a traditional PBX system. However, when Structured presented the ShoreTel IP telephony system, Seher was impressed with the system's quality.

Beyond that, the ShoreTel system offered exceptional flexibility to handle the district's changing needs, as well as many advanced features to save staff time and enhance communication. In short, it provided the district the opportunity to expand its phone system significantly – without increasing costs.

David Douglas called on Structured to set the model to roll out 15 of the sites from the existing core PBX and other systems. Structured provided training to three support staff members for the implementation. Sherrill Pratt, system administrator, assisted by technical analyst Shay Smith, provided the specialized user training for each of the location office staffs.

"Structured has superb engineers," Seher said. "They provided expertise in both the data network and IP telephony, so that was a great advantage to working with them."

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Assessment and
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Today, David Douglas uses ShoreTel Systems at all 16 locations. The district has ShoreGear 60/12, 120/24 and T1 voice switches, which provide both gateway and call management functionality. ShoreGear voice switches run an embedded, real-time operating system, each ensuring dial tone with 99.999 percent reliability. With T1 switches in several locations, all system users share the T1 connections, allowing the district to bypass the costs and hassle of installing T1 at all locations.

EXISTING NUMBERS, ANALOG PHONES EASE TRANSITION

David Douglas' unique phone system setup combines IP telephony and traditional POTS lines. The system uses VoIP between switches, however, the connection from the switch to the phone is still analog. This enables the district to use its existing analog phones, thereby keeping costs down. Additionally, the district kept its existing POTS numbers for inbound calling, which meant staff and parents did not have to learn any new school numbers, resulting in a smooth transition. The POTS lines also now serve for backup outbound calling if a location is disconnected from the core network.

With ShoreTel, all 800 users now have voice mail, which relieves office staff from having to handwrite messages for teachers and staff. Staff members have their own unique numbers and phones, so calls and messages come directly to them.

UNIQUE FEATURES ENHANCE SECURITY, LINE AVAILABILITY

The ShoreTel system also adds a new level of security for David Douglas. If an emergency occurs in the classroom, the teacher can dial 911 directly from his or her room to get help quickly. Since calls going out on the T1 lines would have a general address, when someone dials 911 out, the system intercepts that call and directs it to one of the POTS lines that provides a specific address.

Similarly, David Douglas can control call routing by "weighting" certain call pathways. For example, the district directs the system to put all outbound calls on T1 lines. Each school's pre-existing POTS lines are now dedicated almost exclusively for office in-bound calls through "weighting," to better serve parents. Employees either give out their direct number, or a universal number with their extension for use by their outside associates and families, as well as for arranging direct parent-teacher communications. These calls use the shared T1 lines and keep school office lines free for other specific parent needs.

Other features further enhance the district's ability to serve teachers and parents. Auto attendant plays pre-recorded messages to callers after regular school hours and during holidays. With ShoreTel's "Find Me" feature, users can direct their calls to a cell phone or other location by giving specific callers a number to enter if there's no answer. This way, staff does not have to advertise their cell or home numbers on their voice mail, but can still automatically direct calls to another location.

David Douglas is also currently testing a new Hunt Group work group feature for routing calls in the event the network goes down. Before, when

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the network was unavailable, calls would ring only on one designated backup phone, possibly at an unattended location. When fully implemented, the district will maintain normal office operations at each location with office phones either ringing simultaneously or sequentially, which ensures no call is missed.

SIMPLE ADMINISTRATION RELIEVES STAFF

From an administrator’s standpoint, Seher especially appreciates the ease of using the system. In minutes, he can add, move or change users at the ShoreTel central server. For bigger initiatives, such as setting up new schools or rooms, the modular, rack-mounted system lets him configure a new location in less than a day.

“This is the first year we have served 800 users at the start of the school year,” Seher said. “Without an intuitive system like ShoreTel that is conducive to making these types of changes, we could not keep up. Now, we have all these additional features and functions, and we are supporting quadruple the population of users with the same staff.”

Beyond the system itself, Seher appreciates the support he receives from ShoreTel. “When you call with an issue, support staff are knowledgeable engineers, not a help desk,” Seher said. “They either resolve the problem at that time on a remote session or know how to capture the intricate details for researching and resolving the issue for us.”

RESULTS: FOUR TIMES THE USERS FOR \$40,000 LESS

David Douglas accomplished its objective of placing a phone in every classroom, and rolled out voicemail. Though the district grew its user base from 200 to 800 users, it reduced its overall phone costs by \$40,000 per year by using existing data network wiring and analog phones, and minimizing the need for T1 sites. Plus, the district can manage the expanded system with the same staff, and even make system changes more quickly and easily.

The district chose to apply its cost savings toward a maintenance program with ShoreTel, a valuable added benefit that it did not have with its previous PBX system.

Most importantly, the system has eased communication among teachers, parents and staff. “The phone system is much more efficient for parents because they can call teachers directly, instead of having to leave a message at the office,” said Courtney Wilton, director of Administrative Services. “We also improved communication internally and enhanced security with a phone in every classroom.”

“Having our own phones and voicemail has really changed the face of how we do business,” explained Derek Edens, Assessment and Technology coordinator. “Because parents can reach us directly, it opens the lines of communication much faster and allows us to be more efficient.”