

Top School District Revamps Communications with RingCentral



THE CHALLENGE

As one of the largest public-school systems in the US, this K-12 school district needed a reliable software-based solution that would enable staff members to maintain their privacy while managing outbound and inbound calls regardless of location or device platform such as iOS, Android, Chrome or Windows.

OUR SOLUTION

The school district worked with Converged Technology Professionals to develop and implement a hybrid solution using RingCentral Cloud Office in conjunction with their existing on-premise phone system, known as a Private Branch Exchange System (PBX)

DISTRICT DEMOGRAPHICS

- 167 schools with 256 total sites within the district
- Over 15,000 combined principals, administrators & staff
- Approximately 7,000 teachers working with 100k+ students

ENSURING AVAILABILITY AND COMMUNICATIONS FOR PARENTS & STAFF DURING A PANDEMIC OUTBREAK

Like many educational institutions around the country, this large school district was faced with a dilemma when the COVID-19 pandemic forced students, teachers, and administrators to work remotely.

As the largest school district in its state, school administrators had an immense challenge in front of them since both schools and district offices were closed from the pandemic. The district was bracing for a substantial increase in call volume from parents and the public, and they had to be available to address their questions and concerns.

“Private branch exchange (PBX) systems were not designed at mass scale to have you working from home. These premise-based architectures just do not have the flexibility school districts need during situations like the COVID pandemic.”

*Joe Rittenhouse, President of Business Development
Converged Technology Professionals.*

The district was using the Mitel MiVoice Connect for their phone system and reached out to their Mitel platinum support partner, Converged Technology Professionals, to discuss the best way to enable the system to handle the extreme spikes in call volumes due to this unprecedented event.

Converged worked with the district’s IT team to vet a variety of potential options which included:

- Expanding the existing Mitel system’s hardware environment
- Migrating to Mitel Flex
- Utilizing Microsoft Teams
- Utilizing Google Voice

None of the presented possibilities were viable solutions due to cost, implementation time or were unrealistic as long-term strategies. The solution had to be able to accommodate their present challenges plus future needs for when students could return to traditional classrooms.

As conversations continued, Converged suggested a closer look at a hybrid deployment that utilized RingCentral Cloud Office for their remote-worker environments. As a RingCentral Diamond partner, Converged knew the cloud-based platform could accommodate many of the features and benefits the district needed.

To have a successful deployment for a cloud-based platform, the following requirements had to be met:

- Must be able to maintain existing on-net interoffice 7-digit dialing between internal staff and more than 7,000 new RingCentral user accounts
- Must include the ability for teachers, students, and parents to communicate as needed in a remote environment without disruption
- Must provide robust software-based communications functionality for all remote workers to use regardless of location or device operating system
- Must have best-in-class service reliability and uptime
- Must eliminate communications reliance on the existing network
- Must ensure current privacy & security standards are met
- Must offer flexible agreement terms to accommodate for future changes
- And lastly, must be deployed in a cost-efficient and timely manner



THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS WITH A HYBRID PBX APPROACH

A hybrid approach gave the district's staff and teachers the ability to use RingCentral softphone applications while also utilizing the existing on-premise phone system for established district locations, such as offices or classrooms.

The RingCentral platform would provide key benefits to deliver a better communication experience, such as private SMS texting and multimedia messaging from school district numbers, as well as a video platform that could be launched for on-demand parent/teacher meetings or teacher/student mentoring. Teachers could also call from anywhere, from any device, with a school district number without compromising any personal information.

RingCentral would also allow school administrators to answer parent calls across any available desktop or mobile platform, either as an internet VoIP call or as a 10-digit dial to landlines or cell phones. This was a tremendous advantage since many inbound calls throughout the district were going unanswered during the early part of COVID due to restrictions in the region.

Meanwhile, the Mitel MiVoice Connect on-site phone system would be integrated with RingCentral so the school district could maintain their existing dial plan and provide for interoperability, thus reducing further disruption. This was achieved by using an InGate Siperator Session Border Controller (SBC) to create a secure connection between the two platforms with SIP trunking and 7-digital dialing.

By implementing the hybrid approach using RingCentral, each individual facility could remain operational in the event of a wide area network (WAN) failure.

"We genuinely appreciate all the hard work the Converged team put into helping us vet potential solutions and ultimately migrating to RingCentral," said our client, an IT leader within the school district. "Their expertise cannot be understated-they ensured a very smooth transition with excellent guidance every step of the way."

RINGCENTRAL OFFICE AND MITEL HYBRID SOLUTION PROVIDES REMOTE COMMUNICATION FEATURES WITHOUT REPLACING LOCAL DIALING FEATURES

The district opted for full-feature licensing of RingCentral Office along with other RingCentral Office tools, including video and messaging. Teachers could now implement virtual classes using RingCentral Video plus connect with parents and faculty with one-click HD video meetings, SMS texting, and instant messaging (IM) directly through the RingCentral application.

This architecture also allowed the district's RingCentral users to continue using the same extensions as legacy phone system and vice versa. This was critical since classrooms did not have direct dial numbers and therefore had to be reached through an automated attendant. With the new integration, users on both platforms could call and transfer to each other just like they did before without having to use any new extensions.

To adhere to proper security and safety procedures, each school maintained local trunks to be able to reach 911, and the on-premise gateways ensured that original phones in the building continued to operate.

Likewise, ensuring security for all users throughout the district regardless of location or device used was easy with RingCentral. Their communications cloud platform is protected by seven layers of enterprise-grade security including TLS and SRTP encryptions between all endpoints, protecting the network and all data, applications, physical data centers and hosts.





CONVERGED HELPED THE DISTRICT SAVE TIME AND REDUCE COSTS

Without the hybrid RingCentral solution, the school district would have been hit with unbelievable costs to increase their hardware capacity required for remote workers during the pandemic. Converged provided senior account reps and technical account managers (TAMs) to run a cost analysis and work closely with the district's leaders to maximize their potential savings. This included overseeing the deployment, ensuring phone numbers were routed correctly and other programming tasks involved with the rollout.

Converged TAMs handled the training for the entire district's staff to ensure users quickly adapted to the new RingCentral platform. This included custom documents and training materials plus virtual classes custom-tailored to specific roles for over 7,000 users throughout the organization.

"Many businesses are under the impression that it's risky to move communications to the cloud, said Rittenhouse, "but this integration shows how the cloud delivers capabilities that on-premises systems do not have. It showcases how flexibility without capital expenditures can be a significant competitive advantage."

THE DISTRICT PLANS FOR CLOUD-BASED CONTACT CENTER ENVIRONMENT FOR FUTURE EVENTS

It may seem strange for a school district to consider a contact center environment, but its Board of Education members are already thinking about post-pandemic realities where high call volumes and the need to quickly share information will be necessary.

With a highly successful unified communications as-a-service (UCaaS) adoption, the district is now in the process of evaluating RingCentral Contact Center to provide greater levels of service to faculty, teachers, parents, and the entire school district community.

"Due to the pandemic, the district's IT team is supporting teachers remotely and must use different technology tools than they did the past. Overnight, they had to shift to new technologies which has led to the growing need for alternate channels of support that are efficient and easy to manage under a single platform."

*Chris Frey, VP of Cloud and Contact Centers
Converged Technology Professionals*

IT SUPPORT HELP DESK

A cloud-based contact center with robust omnichannel functionality will provide many advantages for the IT support department that they did not previously have due to system hardware and licensing limitations. When the pandemic began, it was clear that the existing Mitel system was not equipped to handle the mass influx of support calls and would need significant investment in additional equipment and infrastructure to support the district's needs. This forced the support team to begin looking for alternative, even temporary, solutions.

The district's IT team currently relies on incoming tickets submitted online and voice calls for handling support requests from district users. Now they are looking at features like skills-based routing, web chat, and other methods to provide improved customer support in the new remote and hybrid environment. With a cloud-based contact center that is cost-effective, scalable, and is easy to manage from any location, the future is looking bright for the district's IT team and the citizens they support.

EMERGENCY COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Additionally, the district's county played a massive role in community outreach for the state. They received a grant from Humana to provide emergency social services for local communities to help ease and support citizens through uncertainty caused by COVID-19. With the help of Humana and the district, Converged deployed the necessary framework on the RingCentral platform for the social services help desk in a matter of six hours.

Since the district plays an active role in the community, it considered the cloud-based contact center a valuable tool in providing greater public-facing support. The district could now offer better communication with its community with additional inbound and outbound options such as web chat, SMS, email, and pre-recorded messages that were sent through an auto-attendant. The contact center will drastically simplify how they communicate with the public during similar scenarios in the future.

The district is now finding themselves to be well positioned to adapt to the everchanging needs quickly and continually of those within the school district as well as the community they serve.

ABOUT ZK RESEARCH

Zeus Kerravala is the founder and principal analyst with ZK Research, a widely recognized leading expert in the field of UCaaS. His team provides research and long-term strategic advice on unified communications and better IT practices for enterprise business around the globe.

This case study was co-authored by ZK Research and Converged Technology Professionals, a RingCentral Diamond partner helping school districts experience improved communications and collaboration by migrating to the cloud