



55 Broad St, 20th Floor
New York, NY
1.800.801.3381
www.onsip.com

OnSIP: The Leading Phone System For Educational Institutions

By Nicole Hayward
Junction Networks

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Abstract

When investing in a phone system replacement, school districts have two main options: an on-premise PBX or a hosted VoIP services. To decide on the best technology and vendor, the school district's IT decision makers have to consider several factors, including feature requirements and maintenance, to reliability, and budgetary constraints.

In this paper, we investigate the commonly cited needs of educational institutions and explore how OnSIP both meets and exceeds these specifications— particularly with SIP phone interoperability; no equipment or software required; no contracts or commitments; free SIP-SIP calling across school locations; mobile VoIP; and a free, technologically-advanced unified communications interface— all within the school's budgetary constraints.

Problem Statement

Educational institutions have specific functional and budgetary requirements when considering a phone system investment.

When investing in a phone system replacement, school districts have several options ranging from an on-premise PBX solution to hosted VoIP services. To decide on the best technology and vendor, the educational institution's IT decision maker has several factors to consider. First, it's important that the phone system solution meet a minimum set of functionality requirements, typically including: ability to keep a main phone number, Public Switch Telephone Network (PSTN) access,

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extension dialing, call transfer, voicemail, auto attendant, configurable business hour rules, and automatic call distribution (ACD) queues. Secondly, educational institutions may consider aspects of a phone system that make deployment and maintenance easier, such as the equipment required and whether it can service multiple schools. Finally, school districts commonly have a set budget for technology, restricting both the number of IT projects that can be done in a given fiscal year and the services considered. As such, a phone system replacement that meets the school districts features requirements and is easy

This white paper will review how OnSIP not only meets, but exceeds most phone system requirements for school districts at a fraction of the cost of alternative hosted and on-premise solutions.

OnSIP Solution Features

OnSIP offers an enterprise-grade, distributed phone system with no contract required and minimal capital expense.

VOICEMAIL

OnSIP offers voicemail mailboxes for users and groups of users. School administrators and faculty will have

various options for accessing and managing their voicemail:

- Dial the user's voicemail box during the attendant menu
- Listen to voicemail as a .WAV attachment in the user's email.
- Log into My.OnSIP, a free unified communications interface, and listen to voicemail.

AUTO ATTENDANT

Using the OnSIP Auto Attendant Menu, schools can have their inbound calls answered with a professional greeting, followed by a list of touchtone menu options for routing calls to school administration and educators. A common use for the initial auto attendant is to give the caller options to hear the attendant menu in multiple languages. OnSIP customers can upload a recording of choice, e.g. a custom voice talent recording or the principal's voice recording, for an added touch. School districts can configure separate attendant menus for each school. In addition, customers have the option of making extension dialing available such that callers can dial a faculty member's phone directly.

UNLIMITED EXTENSIONS

With OnSIP, school districts can add an unlimited number of phones, users, and extensions for free. This is highly beneficial as it simplifies faculty changes and room changes. For example, if an educator is moved to another room, and their prior classroom becomes a study hall, the

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educator can keep his/her extension, and a new extension can be provisioned for the study hall phone at no additional cost.

FREE EXTENSION DIALING AND TRANSFER

OnSIP offers free extension-to-extension calls and transfer amongst OnSIP users, even between users in separate locations. As such, a school district that deploys OnSIP can greatly decrease the schools' phone bills as all calls between faculty are free, both from classroom to classroom and school to school. In addition, school faculty will have the convenience of extension dialing and transferring calls from classroom to classroom and school to school. This is one of the many benefits that is inherent OnSIP's platform architecture and pricing, a hosted SIP platform, wherein all SIP-to-SIP calls are free.

CALLER ID

All OnSIP users have configurable Caller ID settings, and all incoming calls will display the Caller ID information received. Outbound caller ID can be set at the school and/or the school district level.

CALL PARK

OnSIP users have the ability to park calls and pick them up from another phone on the OnSIP network or an external phone. In particular, school administrators may find this feature convenient, as they are able to park a call from their office phone, walk down a hall, and access that call from a phone in a classroom.*

E-911 DIALING

OnSIP customers can enable and configure E911 dialing for multiple locations and then assign each user to a specific location. OnSIP offers specific instructions for deploying E911 service and displaying proper signage for each phone.

DO NOT DISTURB SETTINGS

OnSIP end users are able to send their calls directly to voicemail via a Do Not Disturb (DND) function on most SIP phones and via the My.OnSIP.com browser interface. The DND setting can be particularly helpful for educators who do not want their phone to ring during class.

AUTOMATIC CALL DISTRIBUTION (ACD) QUEUES

Automatic Call Distribution (ACD) Queues give customers the capability to route calls to the appropriate departments and faculty members. Once logged in, they will receive calls from the queue based on the pre-selected ring strategy. OnSIP offers a number of available ring strategies:

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- Least Used Agent
- Round Robin
- Random
- Ring All

By requiring users to log into the queue, OnSIP ensures all calls are actively distributed properly. If a member of the school faculty goes on break or leaves for the day, s/he simply can log out of the queue to stop receiving calls.

OnSIP customers have complete control over a number of queue settings, including:

- Max time in queue for callers
- Max time failover location
- Estimated wait time announcement
- Post call wrap-up time

GROUPS

OnSIP customers can use groups to efficiently handle calls amongst a team or department. For example, school administrative offices can set a group ring strategy to ring a Principle, followed by the Vice Principle, followed by a receptionist, such that a call is less likely to end up in voicemail in the absence of a single faculty member.

BUSINESS HOUR ROUTING

Business Hour Rules allow OnSIP customers to set call routing rules during standard business hours, as defined by the customer, and off-business hours. For example, an educational institution may wish to set call routing to administration during the school day, and then to a voicemail box or operator during off-hours.

MUSIC ON HOLD

OnSIP provides basic and enhanced Music On Hold (MoH) settings. With an OnSIP package, customers can choose from 3 MoH stations: elevator, jazz, and classical for their users.

Additionally, the customer can add additional MoH channels and choose from thousands of music streams on a per-user basis. This small attribute can make a big difference in your institution's character; for example, a Spanish teacher may choose a music stream featuring music from Spain. A classical music instructor may choose a music stream featuring their favorite composer, etc. A college may wish to create their own music stream of their live radio show. That way, when a faculty member puts a caller on hold, the caller hears the faculty member's music stream of choice.

HD CONFERENCING

OnSIP offers High Definition (HD) calls and conferencing. All callers using wideband-capable IP phones and quality Internet connections will experience exceptionally clear call quality. OnSIP customers can assign a phone number, extension, and/or PIN to conference bridges.

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HD conferencing can save both individual institutions and school districts money by allowing institutions to hold quality-sounding meetings over the telephone. Additionally, a school administrator who often holds meetings may choose to have their own personal conference bridge to host parent-teacher discussions, department meetings, etc.

VIDEO CALLING

Video-capable SIP-based software phones and hard phones readily work with OnSIP. This feature is free and allows school faculty to make free, quality video calls between classrooms and other institutions also using SIP-based video phones.

SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENTS

Announcements are a simple, but powerful, tool to deliver important messages to callers at a desired routing point in your hosted PBX service. Educational institutions commonly use the OnSIP special announcements feature to state information about school closings, schedule changes, and significant calling menu changes.

UNIFIED COMMUNICATIONS BROWSER INTERFACE

OnSIP offers a free unified communications (UC) interface, My.OnSIP. My.OnSIP is a browser interface that mixes Instant Messaging with presence, voicemail management, and phone call control. With My.OnSIP, school faculty can view their coworkers' online and phone presence (who's available for chat and who's on or off a call). My.OnSIP users can also click to call their coworkers, drag and drop calls, and listen to voicemails – all in one place. As a completely browser-based interface, My.OnSIP has no system requirements and no required software downloads or updates.

MOBILE VOIP APPLICATIONS

Mobile VoIP applications are particularly advantageous because they allow users make and receive calls as if they are using their office phone and without using up mobile minutes. OnSIP works with any SIP phone – from a software phone to a desk phone. OnSIP users simply need to configure their phones with their OnSIP credentials. As such, OnSIP also works with SIP-based mobile applications. For instance, faculty members who have an Android can use CSIP Simple for free; iPhone users can download and use Bria, a user-friendly application that is expected to be video calling-capable in the near future.

Essentially, with a SIP mobile application, a mobile phone can be transformed into a desk phone. When faculty members make outbound calls on their mobile SIP applications, their school caller IDs will

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display at the calls' endpoint. They will also be able to take advantage of the extension-to-extension dialing features they'd otherwise use on their desk phones. This can offer significant call savings for institutions as school faculty can dial coworkers' extensions from their mobile phones for free. Below are a few example scenarios that demonstrate time and cost savings provided by a mobile VoIP application and OnSIP:

- A cafeteria monitor can make a free mobile call to the janitor's extension to explain a cleanup need.
- From his mobile phone and while on the road to a distant sports game, a coach can dial the school administration office extension for free.
- A school principal can make a free mobile call to a colleague within the school district if both schools are using OnSIP.

Anyone using OnSIP can simply download an app onto his/her smart phone to have a mobile device working exactly like a desk phone.

OnSIP Solution Benefits

DISTRIBUTED LOCATIONS SUPPORTED

As previously stated, OnSIP offers free extension-to-extension calls and transfer amongst OnSIP users, even between users in separate locations. This is unique to the OnSIP system— made possible by a patent-pending, multi-location, distributed SIP proxy (a feature our competitors either can't offer, or for which they charge additional fees). In contrast, to achieve the same benefits, institutions that deploy an on-premise PBX solution require equipment in each location and have to worry about specific firewall and security considerations. With OnSIP, extension dialing and transfer amongst distributed locations will always remain simple (no equipment necessary) and free.

RELIABILITY AND QoS

OnSIP was built with redundancy in mind. We utilize redundant data centers, servers, routers, Internet connections, and upstream carriers to provide an extremely reliable VoIP service. In addition, we own our hardware and network, so our services are never compromised by load balancing with others (which can happen in a virtual hosting environment).

The OnSIP platform has scaled well with >10,000 business customers since 2004. The platform is distributed across an N+1 network infrastructure, creating the ability to scale simply with commodity hardware.

OnSIP offers immediate and transparent communication during service interruptions. All information is published

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on a public Network Alerts blog, and updates are offered via social media channels, Twitter and Facebook. In addition, OnSIP agents have direct access to our Channel Manager, facilitating timely responses to customer concerns. Finally, OnSIP agents have access to an extensive OnSIP Knowledgebase, offering troubleshooting incite and tips for successful OnSIP deployments.

LOW MAINTENANCE

Unlike on-premise PBX solutions as well as several competitor hosted solutions, OnSIP requires no equipment beyond SIP phones and a reliable broadband connection. Additionally, OnSIP does not require any software downloads beyond [rare] phone firmware updates. These minimal requirements create few points of failure for OnSIP deployments and thus minimize costs spent in troubleshooting, software updates, and equipment updates.

NO MONTHLY OnSIP CONTRACT REQUIRED

As a hosted, on-demand service, OnSIP requires no service contract. This is beneficial to the end customer as any contract engagement is purely up to the customer and their IT consultant/reseller.

EASY, FAST DEPLOYMENT

With absolutely minimal equipment requirements, SIP interoperability, and an intuitive admin interface, OnSIP is easy and quick to deploy. OnSIP certified resellers are able to configure a new phone system for educational institutions in a matter of days— and in some cases, hours).

Case Study: Texas School District

By choosing OnSIP, a Texas school district saved 50% on their phone bills while gaining unified communications features and free extension-to-extension dialing across separate schools.

Size of District:

230 Users (270 faculty members)
Over 2,000 students

Started Using OnSIP:

August 1st, 2011

Deployment Details:

In the summer of 2011, a school district in Texas considered phone system replacements. With four schools to consider, the school district identified that the majority of calling took place between faculty, both within and across separate school locations. As such, the IT decision makers aimed to increase faculty members' ability to communicate without raising their phone bills. The district also desired a



solution with little to no commitment and the ability to customize their service offerings.

Working with an OnSIP agent, the school district began to consider OnSIP as a replacement for their current phone system based on OnSIP's free SIP-to-SIP calling and zero-contract policy. The OnSIP agent also informed the district's IT decision makers of OnSIP features, including web interface, custom plug-ins, click-to-call, voicemail, unified messaging, and more— all of which they did not have with their Verizon service plan.

After deciding with an OnSIP agent to deploy an OnSIP phone system, the school district decreased their phone bills by 50% of what it would cost for a Verizon system with a comparable feature set. OnSIP also removed their need to house PBX equipment, freeing up valuable physical space that can now be used for teaching and storage purposes. The OnSIP agent also ran training sessions for the school district's faculty to communicate how to take advantage of OnSIP's call-handling, voicemail, phone setup, and unified communications browser interface with ease.

OnSIP Recognition

Since being founded in 2004, OnSIP has been highly recognized as a premier and advanced VoIP

provider. *Channel Reseller News* recently recognized OnSIP as one of the Top 15 VoIP Players to Watch. OnSIP has also won two American Business Awards (Stevies) for Best Management Team of the Year (2011) and for Best New Product of the Year (2010). In 2008, OnSIP was awarded the Unified Communications Product of the Year and the Internet Telephony Product of the Year. OnSIP has matched this recognition by growing exponentially every year, in terms of sales, added features, and consumer appeal.

Find an OnSIP Agent

School districts and individual institutions interested in OnSIP Hosted VoIP can call OnSIP at 1.800.801.3381 for references to local OnSIP resellers.

* Available January 2012