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Connect Teachers, Parents, and Students with FortiVoice Secure Unified Communications

Executive Summary

Schools today are often overwhelmed by constantly evolving technologies in applications, phones, and devices that are crucial for building an efficient communications infrastructure that will last into the future. With tight budgets and limited staff, schools need a cost-effective phone solution that meets functional requirements with simplified management and easy administration. In addition, campus safety, cybersecurity, and compliance are important factors that need to be considered when evaluating phone systems.

The FortiVoice Secure Unified Communications (UC) solution delivers all-inclusive calling, conferencing, chat, and fax features for every user in a reliable single platform without the premium. Built on Fortinet's leading security technology and the latest E911 compliance, FortiVoice gives schools an enterprise-grade, secure phone system that enhances staff collaboration and efficiency. The FortiVoice Gateway enables dual LAN connections and local survivability, providing assurance for always-on communications even if a network is down (during an emergency or natural disaster). FortiVoice Secure UC helps schools build stronger relationships among students, parents, and teachers, making learning fun and productive across campuses.

Unreliable Phone Systems Impact School Safety and Efficiency

Maintaining constant connectivity is important for every school due to its never-ending need for communication. When the phone system is down, the school may not be able to make or receive calls to parents or even public safety agencies in the event of an incident. During the 2021–2022 school, there were 193 incidents of gunfire at preschools and K–12 schools, nearly quadruple the average number of gunfire incidents since 2013.[2] To improve public safety, federal requirements have mandated all organizations, including schools and government agencies, to implement phone systems that enable first responders with detailed and life-saving data from a device on which a call is placed. A reliable phone system with these emergency capabilities becomes crucial in every school district.

Many schools and institutions today still operate with legacy phone systems. These aging equipment and devices have often reached the end of life or are not compatible with modern communication technology. They are expensive to upgrade and very resource-intensive to maintain, which requires specialized IT expertise. According to the 2022 IT Operations Survey, 21% of respondent indicated that legacy systems continue to post a challenge for growth and innovation.[3] These legacy phone systems are neither scalable for school expansion nor flexible enough to support today's modern communication needs.

Nearly 30% of publicly reported outages in 2021 lasted more than 24 hours. Over 60% of system failures result in at least $100,000 in total losses.[1]

Schools, like many other businesses, can benefit from the adoption of new technology. But new technology can also introduce new risks, both to the resilience of school district operations and to the safety of school community members, including students and teachers. K–12 schools are popular targets for hackers because districts have loads of data. But, many have limited security protections due to a resource-constrained IT team. During 2021, the K–12 Cyber Incident Map cataloged a total of 166 school incidents affecting schools in 162 school districts across 38 states.[4] These incidents have cost schools a lot of wasted time and money.

FortiVoice: Secure, Cost-effective Solution for K–12 Education

As a recognized leader in enterprise security and networking, Fortinet understands that keeping operational efficiency and campus safety to optimize the quality of education is a top priority. Fortinet delivers FortiVoice Secure UC to help schools bring the latest safety and security communications capabilities to campuses efficiently and economically while making the most of existing infrastructure and resources.

All-inclusive communications

FortiVoice provides a single communication platform with integrated voice, conferencing, chat, and fax functions to help teachers and staff communicate and collaborate easier. Schools can further accelerate operational efficiency with robust features like auto attendants, multiple languages, autodialer, voicemail-to-email, paging, group chats, conferencing, and more.

Enterprise-grade security

FortiVoice includes advanced security and encryption features as well as user privilege and policy management to protect conversations and data. As part of the Fortinet Security Fabric, FortiVoice integrates seamlessly with FortiGate Next-Generation Firewalls and Fortinet Secure SD-WAN to provide schools with end-to-end protection from network to phone communications.

Unmatched reliability

FortiVoice is designed to deliver the highest levels of reliability with local survivability support to prevent phone downtime. FortiVoice provides native capabilities for implementing redundancy and high availability that allows for data synchronization and decreases the chances of data loss in the event of hardware failure.

E911 safety compliance

Fully compliant with Kari's Law and Ray Baum's Act, FortiVoice goes beyond E911 emergency call support. FortiVoice enables schools to help response personnel reach the school's accurate location quickly and to notify staff to guide responders upon arrival. Plus, emergency override ensures crisis calls can't get blocked, even if all lines are busy.

Web-based management

The FortiVoice intuitive cloud portal helps IT simplify configuration and centralize management across locations and devices. All FortiFone IP phones are auto-provisioned for easy deployment and quick onboarding. This allows the consolidation of resources and ease of calling among offices while providing flexibility and call handling for each school's unique needs.

Mobility and collaboration

FortiVoice offers a mobile-friendly FortiFone softclient to call, chat, and access voicemails from anywhere, anytime. Staff and teachers use the same business phone number and extension to communicate directly from FortiFone softclient on their smartphones or computers and stay connected with students and parents, without revealing their phone numbers.

Quick deployment

FortiVoice is a quality, reliable communications solution for schools that is simple to deploy with flexible options for on-premises, virtual environments, and cloud. Thus, districts can select whichever form factor best meets their schools' communications and budget requirements.

Quality Education Starts with Connecting Schools and Families

Whether using on-premises or cloud-based communications solutions, reliable and secure connectivity is crucial for any school. FortiVoice Secure UC and FortiFone IP phones deliver the ultimate solution for schools to create an efficient communication environment that connects teachers, staff, parents, and students.

- **Secure and always-on communications**
  Cybercrimes are everywhere and one of the biggest concerns for IT teams in every school. Attacks like DDoS are a common way by which hackers flood the network server and cause phone downtime. As a recognized leader in cybersecurity, Fortinet built FortiVoice with security in mind. Packed with advanced security features and support for local survivability, FortiVoice gives schools a reliable and always-on communications solution to connect staff, teachers, parents, and students.

- **Optimal team efficiency and collaboration**
  The FortiVoice Secure UC solution gives schools all the communications capabilities they need in one easy-to-use platform. Its intuitive portal helps reduce districts' operating expenses with centralized deployment, configuration, and management across all locations, devices, and users. This improves administrative efficiencies and team collaboration while keeping communications costs affordable.

- **Get more with less**
  Having a quality, reliable phone system does not need to break the budget. FortiVoice helps school districts save more from their investment while avoiding lost employee productivity from downtime. Unlike other vendors that require additional hardware or licenses for add-on features, FortiVoice offers an affordable, all-inclusive phone system with secure calling, chat, conferencing, fax, and more for every extension.

- **Simplified management with a trusted vendor**
  Managing multiple systems, devices, and applications from multiple vendors creates the challenges of interoperation. It also introduces security risks. For over 20 years, Fortinet has been a driving force in the evolution of cybersecurity and the convergence of networking, communications, and security. Our broad, complementary portfolio is built from the ground up with integration and automation in mind, enabling more efficient, self-healing operations and a rapid response to known and unknown threats. Your school can have a single pane of visibility across all Fortinet products and benefit the optimal protection from a trusted vendor.

"Deploying 1,000 users with FortiFone softclient took us a few minutes on the back end. That was a hugely important project, and it took almost no time to get up and running."

– Robert Emerson, CTO,
Farmington Municipal Schools

"It was love at first sight [with FortiVoice]. The price was right. The phones are simple to run and to manage."

– Robert Emerson, CTO,
Farmington Municipal Schools

Conclusion

A school is like a small community, connecting people together on a daily basis. Communication becomes a critical element in connecting with the outside world and for those linked to the institution to get in touch. When looking to replace an aging phone system, it is important to understand that not all communications solutions are suitable for your school district. Schools need a secure, integrated platform to unify operations across locations for full visibility and maximum phone uptime with today's evolving cybercrimes.

FortiVoice Secure UC enables schools to accelerate operational efficiency and campus safety by offering clear and timely communications. FortiVoice is comprehensive, affordable, mobile-friendly, and backed by Fortinet's leading security technologies. Schools can save more from deploying FortiVoice Secure UC and dedicate their available resources to focus on driving better quality of education.

1   2022 Annual Outage Analysis Report, "Uptime Institute's 2022 Outage Analysis Finds Downtime Costs and Consequences Worsening as Industry Efforts to Curb Outage Frequency Fall Short," June 08, 2022.

2   Everytown Research and Policy Report, "How To Stop Shootings and Gun Violence in Schools, A Plan to Keep Students Safe," August 19, 2022.

3   Kaseya White Paper, "2022 IT Operations Survey Results Report: Portrait of an IT Pro," July 8, 2022.

4   K12 Security Information Exchange, "The State of K–12 Cybersecurity: Year in Review," 2022 Annual Report.

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