



GREAT NECK PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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New, Modern Phone System for School District

By Marc Epstein, district technology director

“Watson, come here. I need you.” Standing on the shoulders of a famous telephone first, such as this memorable quote from Alexander Graham Bell, the Great Neck Public Schools has rolled out a brand new, state-of-the-art phone system. The district first installed telephones 105 years ago, in 1904, the same year the first kindergarten began. Coincidentally, the new phone system and a new, full-day kindergarten will arrive together for the 2009–2010 school year.

The new Voice-Over-Internet Protocol (VOIP) solution from Alcatel-Lucent replaces the district’s outdated Verizon Intellipath Centrex system, which has been in use for the past 25 years. The new phone system leverages the district’s existing Fiber Optic Wide Area Network, which facilitates voice, data, and video communications in 14 buildings, including 10 schools, two adult learning centers, administration, and security.

A VOIP solution differs from a traditional phone system. It uses the district’s internal network, rather than an outside phone company, to route phone calls. It eliminates the one-to-one relationship between phone lines and phones in favor of a shared phone service, saving a considerable amount of money on recurring fees. The district expects to save over \$100,000 a year in service charges by implementing the new phone system, while providing new phones to all offices and classrooms. In addition, the district

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will receive BOCES aid on the project and E-Rate reimbursements on the phone service for additional savings.

New Phone Numbers

Perhaps the biggest change to affect the district and the community is new phone numbers. The district has procured a range of 1,000 new phone numbers, beginning with the district's new main number: (516) 441-4000.

New telephone numbers (main offices for the schools) are listed below:

District: (516) 441-4000

Superintendent's Office: (516) 441-4001

Security Office: (516) 441-4911

North High School: (516) 441-4700

South High School: (516) 441-4800

North Middle School: (516) 441-4500

South Middle School: (516) 441-4600

Village School: (516) 441-4900

SEAL Academy at Clover Drive: (516) 441-4960

E.M. Baker School: (516) 441-4100

J.F. Kennedy School: (516) 441-4200

Lakeville School: (516) 441-4300

Saddle Rock School: (516) 441-4400

Parkville School (LAPK & Universal Prekindergarten): (516) 441-4350

Pupil Personnel Services at Clover Drive: (516) 441-4970

Cumberland Adult Program: (516) 441-4949

Adult Learning Center at Clover Drive: (516) 441-4950

The new phone numbers will be publicized in the school district calendar, on school stationary, and on the district Web site.

About the New System

To make the new phone system possible, it was necessary to abandon the wiring for the old phone system, install new cable, and upgrade the network infrastructure. The new phone service was installed over five primary rate interface (PRI) phone circuits in two locations—three at the Phipps Administration Building and two at North High School (PRI is a telecommunications standard for carrying voice and data transmissions). These PRIs provide load balancing and redundancy of service. Battery backups and, ultimately, generator connections will maintain phone service in the event of a power interruption. A small number of analog phone lines from the old phone system will remain for alarms and emergencies.

The project, which was some two years in the making and contemplated for more than five, was a collaborative effort among district staff, predominantly John Powell, assistant superintendent for business; Marc Epstein, district technology director; Robert Devlin, supervisor of buildings and grounds; Jason Martin, co-coordinator of data processing services; and Joseph Cangialosi, coordinator of technical support services. It also involved a number of outside agencies, including Nassau BOCES, SpeedWire, Alcatel-Lucent, and Long Island Fiber Exchange.

The VOIP system includes more than 1,200 new Alcatel “iptouch” phones to replace existing phones and adds phones to every classroom, the first time that capability has been provided in the schools.

The district purchased two phone models—an office phone and a more basic model for classrooms. The phone system will be integrated with each school’s public address-intercom system, enabling the new classroom

phone to double as a phone and an intercom. To minimize classroom disruption, classroom phones will not be directly reachable from outside the school or district.

The VOIP phone system has all the features of a modern phone system, including excellent digital audio quality, caller ID, speakerphone capability, call hold, call transfer, conference call, voice mail, and other features. A phone directory is built into the phones so that users can look up phone extensions without the need of printed guides.

Training for administrators and staff occurred over a two-week period, with the new phones working side-by-side with the old ones.

Other Initiatives

The VOIP phone system is one of several communications initiatives undertaken by the district to improve the home-school connection. The GNPS Web site and GNPS/TV Channel have provided information to the community for many years. More recently, the Infinite Campus ParentPortal began providing Web-based access for parents to their children's student information, including attendance, progress reports, report cards, state assessments, and immunization records. Last year, the district implemented the Web-based ParentLink school notification system used to communicate with parents about emergencies, school closings, delayed openings, early dismissals, and the like. It was used to transmit important and timely information about snow days, the H1N1 flu virus, and mosquito spraying in Nassau County. ParentLink also allows parents to update their emergency contact information, including work and cell phone numbers, and e-mail and text message addresses.

The Great Neck Public Schools will continue its efforts to modernize technology systems to benefit parent communication, as well as classroom

New GNPS Phone System

instruction and learning. The district is most appreciative of the school community that provides ongoing support of its technology program.

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