

Selling Voice Successfully in the Education Vertical

Know the prospect

Education is a unique vertical often grouped with state and local government under the SLED (State, Local, Education) market. Public schools frequently involve a government component, which brings specific funding structures and procurement processes that partners need to understand. Additionally, education institutions often have unique requirements, and key decisions are typically made by school boards. Here is a brief overview of how funding and management vary across the education sector:

	Private		Public	
K-12	Funding	Tuition, endowments, donations and grants, and other mostly private sources	Funding	Primarily local and state government with some federal dollars
	Management	Independent boards of trustees or religious bodies	Management	Local school district (could be municipal, county, or regional)
Higher Ed	Funding	Tuition, endowments, donations and grants, and other private funding sources	Funding	Tuition, endowments, and government grants
	Management	Independent boards of trustees	Management	State governments and their governing boards

- Some partners choose to focus on one segment within the education vertical, for example, independent private K-12 schools.
- Word-of-mouth recommendations are powerful in this vertical, but partners also find success with email marketing and participating in public bids.
- Be prepared for long sales cycles. In some cases, particularly in the public sphere, tech updates may require a lot of political transparency from schools.
- Timing is also crucial. Implementation will almost always happen in June/July. Some partners start talks in the December/January time frame, and sometimes even in the summer one year out.

Understand their needs

Schools tend to have very basic needs and they don't want a lot of features. Some functionality that may not seem simple to you could be perceived as an upgrade by schools, for example, having a unified extension plan with building-to-building intercom.

Pain points and challenges

- Legacy PBX systems that are end of life and no longer supported by the manufacturers
- Troubleshooting can be a challenge without the ability to see call issues and get sufficient call reporting
- Cost control is critical

Key requirements

- Redundancy and failover
- Flexibility in ringing and other associated programming across the network
- Security
- Integration with access control systems, legacy paging equipment, single line telephones, etc.
- Migration support

Navigate key decision-makers

It's crucial to build a strong relationship with the person(s) responsible for IT at the school. In addition to getting details about their IT environment, you'll also want to understand the pricing level you need to meet. Many schools are looking to keep costs in line with their legacy services, and if you stay in that range, you might be able to avoid a protracted RFP bidding and vetting process. Other key influencers include the business manager/officer and finance person. Ultimately, it will be the school board who makes the final decision.

Communicate relevant value

- Showcase your knowledge of the equipment, services, and your installation approach and relate the technical data to their specific network topology requirements and security concerns.
- Demonstrate how you can build in backup and failover for disaster recovery.
- Position yourself against the big nationwide players by emphasizing the value of being a local provider to deliver better service and white-glove support through the migration process.
- Highlight how easy it is to change automated attendants.
- Offer references for other schools and school systems you work with.

Keep it simple. Don't emphasize all the available capabilities. Instead ask if they have any particular feature/integration requirements and address those specifically. Here are some capabilities to highlight:

- Rock-solid call quality
- Flexibility in extension types—e.g., standard extension for common areas vs. full UC extension that includes software, voicemail, etc., or the ability to provide teachers with a cloud extension that has voicemail and “shared” phones
- Automated attendant

Create compelling packaging and pricing

Some partners only offer unlimited calling packages to schools, while others break out usage in separate per-location bills to align with their education customers' accounting format. When thinking about how to create your packages, consider the price sensitivity of this vertical as well as what features to include within a seat cost (e.g., voicemail-to-email) and what to charge extra for (e.g., additional UC capabilities, SMS, integrations, etc.).

SkySwitch has a low-usage seat program with low-volume pricing available for the education vertical. You could consider, for example, charging the low-volume rate for classrooms and full seat rate for other phones. To learn more about this program, contact your account manager.



With these tips, you will be able to have a relevant and differentiated conversation with prospects in the education vertical.