

# Alberta educators put ThinkTel to the test

How a large Alberta school division solved communication deficiencies and walked away with 75% cost savings.



## THE CHALLENGE: Tightening school budgets, high communication costs

Formed in 1995, Golden Hills School Division (GHSD) is the amalgamation of three school jurisdictions over a large geographical area across rural mid-eastern Alberta.

With the main office in Strathmore, and 25 sites dispersed across a vast geography, accessing reliable, efficient, and cost-effective communications was mission critical.

GHSD was already using VoIP services, but relied on PRIs in three central locations—Strathmore, Drumheller, and Three Hills—to connect the remote zones. Analog lines terminated at schools not yet on the district VOIP solution, and one site was on a telco-hosted Centrex line that dialled back to one of the three central locations. Costs were high, and continuing this scenario with tightening school

budgets was unsustainable.

The GHSD team decided to leverage SIP Trunking to resolve their communications deficiencies and better manage telecommunications

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Stephen Elaschuk, Network Technician

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costs. They were already using high-speed networking but wanted a provider with SuperNet capabilities. Several ‘big-name’ partners suggested using their own VPNs or deploying direct fibre across the network, but GHSD wanted their own VPN to run the system.

Enter ThinkTel.

## THE SOLUTION: Tailoring, testing and engagement

GHSD contacted ThinkTel to discuss specific requirements needed in their situation, including SuperNet compatibility, GHSD’s own VPN connectivity, and local number portability. ThinkTel facilitated a 60-day demo over public Internet, with several DIDs in various rate centres to concurrently test alongside their PRI setup. The testing was successful.

“Not only was the transition to ThinkSIP seamless and easy,” explains Stephen Elaschuk, Network Technician with GHSD, “we were able to perform it during our busiest time of year without any of our staff, students, or parents noticing. I felt like a magician pulling a tablecloth out from under a set table, and replacing it with another one at the same time!”

Transitioning the production service to Axia SuperNet was completed over

a six-week period, and GHSD went Live with four sites for a further six-month trial. Following this final test, the system was rolled out across all sites easily, quickly, and without any downtime.

**THE RESULTS:**

**Increased capacity, more services, and a 75% cost savings**

GHSD realized a 75% cost savings for a superior suite of services and features, some of which were previously unavailable. In addition, the added bonus of ThinkTel's "channel bursting"



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option allows for increased capacity only if/when it is needed. The entire telecommunications bill now fits on the IT Manager's purchase card!

"Being able to size our telephony service to the exact requirements of our organization is amazing," says Elaschuck. "The ability to automatically add capacity [...] during emergencies or times of inclement weather means that we rarely need to spend time managing our service, giving us more time to administer the things that matter."

**Steady savings, lightning fast tech support**

GHSD has noted that the cost savings initially realized are consistent month to month and are very satisfied with the transition. In addition, GHSD has had nothing but positive experiences

with ThinkTel support teams—on the rare occasions that any technical assistance is needed. "On the two occasions I recall contacting ThinkTel Support, resolution time was lightning fast," explains Elaschuck. "We had a caller ID inquiry that was handled within 45 minutes and a request for additional toll free numbers that were up and running within 30 minutes of calling ThinkTel!"

At the 2014 ATLE (Alberta Technology Leaders In Education) Conference in Calgary, GHSD presented their SIP Trunking transition in a well-attended session to a delighted audience. Several representatives of other school districts have since engaged with ThinkTel (a sponsor and exhibitor at the event) to see how they too could leverage the experience in the Educational sector and assist with their respective situations. "Ease of management is another huge factor for us and would likely be for other school divisions especially," Elaschuck adds.

The ThinkSIP solution is clear; traditional telecom service, robust features, and reliable performance, at costs that have consistently provided significant savings. For organizations with a budget to consider, ThinkTel is the Tier 1 Canadian partner to engage.

[siptrunking.thinktel.ca](http://siptrunking.thinktel.ca)

Golden Hills School Division



**BY THE NUMBERS**

6,500 students



374 teachers



351 support staff



12 communities



18 Hutterite colonies



17 regular schools



4 outreach schools

2 Christian 2 Virtual



1 international program