High Schools Deploy Hundreds of Konftel Conferencing Solutions to Support Hybrid Learning

Like many other school districts forced to solve the technology challenges of hybrid learning during the pandemic, Joliet Township High School District 204, 30 miles southwest of Chicago, considered conferencing solutions to help bring together remote and in-class students. And when the district's two high schools – serving more than 6,000 students – started up this fall, every classroom included a Konftel C2055Wx video collaboration kit.

"We've been a 1-to-1 school district for 12 years, and we've already offered several blended learning classes," explains Wendy Davis, Network and Media Manager for the Joliet Township High School District. "Although we started to explore collaboration technology when we thought we'd still be remote, we know teachers will be able to use this now to deliver instruction in whatever way they prefer. They've been very creative."
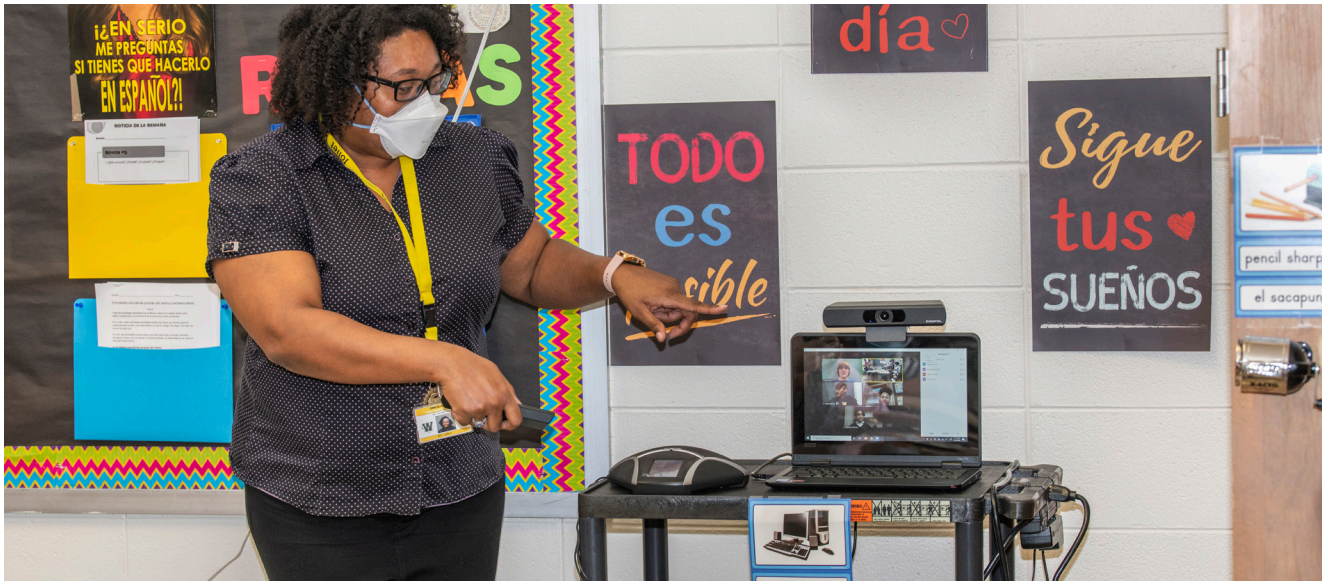
While teachers and students had experience with remote learning before COVID-19, it took Illinois' 2020 shelter in place orders and a quick pivot to all-remote learning to understand that the experience would benefit greatly from better technology—and that it's here to stay.

"We add more blended classes every year, and our students like getting ready for college by taking these classes," Davis continues.

With a Konftel C2055Wx for every class, Joliet Township High School District is delivering its usual high-quality education in whatever format fits the situation.

KONFTEL SOLUTIONS PASS THE TEST

In October 2020, Joliet Township High Schools assembled a committee to evaluate technology solutions for blended learning. Administrators and staff knew that for an unknowable amount of time, some percentage of students and teachers would return to classrooms while others stayed home. They even understood that delayed vaccination of the district's more than 4,000 students under the age of 16 could mean they should be

prepared to offer additional blended learning into the 2021-22 school year.

Joliet High Schools' prior experience with blended learning, and its experience with remote learning to-date, indicated a new technology solution was required.

"Sound was a big part of the challenge," Davis says. "And teachers said the microphones and cameras built into their laptops weren't enough."

The committee tested five solutions in December 2020, then piloted three of them for several months in early 2021. In April 2021, Joliet Township High Schools decided to purchase 375 Konftel C2055Wx solutions, enough for every classroom in the district's two high schools, plus spares, and extra systems for shared spaces or other applications, like virtual field trips. Davis' technology team also acquired hundreds of AV carts so teachers could position the Konftel systems where they worked best in the classroom.

The Konftel C2055Wx comprises three components: a Konftel Cam20 USB conference camera capable of 4K resolution; a Konftel 55Wx conference phone with the company's clear OmniSound HD audio technology and USB or Bluetooth connectivity for maximum flexibility; and Konftel's unique OCC Hub, which comes with three USB ports in and one port out so that connecting the camera, conference phone, and another USB-based peripheral to the teacher's laptop requires only one cable connection.

Teachers in the pilot lauded the high quality of the Konftel camera and conference phone. One said, "I love the speaker. I can talk and move around the room and my students hear me perfectly at home and in class."

Whereas the prior hybrid setup had in-class students logging into an online tool and using headphones to hear their remote classmates, the Konftel solution made that workaround obsolete. "I like that when students in class respond to those at home, they can hear them through the speaker, so there's no need for them to even connect to Zoom, giving me the opportunity to give my in-person students a more 'normal' school experience," a teacher said.

During the Konftel pilot, several remote students said the sound was so good, they felt like they were in the room with the teacher.

BROAD SUPPORT FOR COLLABORATION TOOLS

The fact that Konftel solutions natively support all major collaboration solutions was important for Joliet High Schools. Although the district has standardized on Microsoft Windows-based solutions and Office 365, when it comes to remote collaboration tools, teachers are free to choose what works best for them, whether it's Microsoft Team, Google Meet, or Zoom. The Konftel solution is plug-and-play, so all a class needs to do is launch its preferred collaboration platform and it's ready to learn—no additional software is required.

"Every year we have to update the software image that goes on our teachers' laptops," Davis explains. "When we were building the image for the coming year, it was great that we didn't have to plan for any drivers or other software to work with the Konftel solutions. It's truly plug-and-play and we didn't have to add anything to our image."

And the Konftel OCC Hub can support a variety of USB-based peripherals for incorporation into blended learning. Joliet High School classrooms include many other technologies, such as LCD projectors, smart boards, and more.

"Depending on what you're teaching, you may have unique hardware," says Davis. "We've got math teachers using Wacom tablets and we have microscopes that use USB. Plus, there's always the desire to future-proof a system, because we never know what technology will come into the classroom next."

In addition to blended learning, Davis expects teachers will use the Konftel solutions to collaborate with their peers, hold parent-teacher conferences, pursue professional development opportunities, and more.

Equipment:

· 375 Konftel C2055Wx solutions, plus hundreds of AV carts for flexible placement

Important for Joliet, Illinois, High Schools:

· High quality picture and audio performance
· Native support for all major collaboration platforms
· A 'natural' learning experience
· Plug-and-play operation with no additional software