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## SPECIAL REPORT: Part 3

# Revitalizing the School Lunch Line through Fingerprint Identification

*Part three of a four part special report focusing on the benefits of biometrics in a K-12 atmosphere.*

By now many principals, superintendents, administrators and K-12 food service operators have heard of school lunch biometrics, or the use of high tech devices such as fingerprint readers, to recognize students and allow for the automated payment and accounting of school lunch purchases.

Once the province of the FBI and criminal investigators, fingerprint technology is now regularly being harnessed at K-12 schools around the nation. Not for Orwellian motives such as surveillance, identification or tracking, but for school lunches and breakfasts.

This special report provides information and answers to the following questions:

- **A layman's explanation of biometric technology and privacy issues**
- **How parents can use such systems to monitor and control where their child's lunch money is being spent**

Continued from last months issue of What's for Lunch.

### **SECTION IV: How to Maximize Federal Funding**

Studies show that many schools suffer from insufficient funding because they have failed to qualify every student who is entitled to a free or discounted meal. As a result, schools facing rising food costs coupled with budget shortfalls have been forced to hike lunch prices for paying students and rely more heavily on less nutritious processed food.

If the main obstacle to keeping accurate records were merely an organizational flaw, the problem would have been solved long ago. In fact, what keeps government dollars from reaching school coffers is often a far more sensitive issue: the social stigma of being labeled poor. Some families at the poverty level ignore school requests to answer questions about their financial standing so that their children won't have to face the jeers of their peers.

Angela Robinson, food service bookkeeper

for South Carolina's Orangeburg Consolidated School District 4, said she understands why underprivileged families are reluctant to cooperate: despite promises of confidentiality, invariably the truth leaks out. "Everything's supposed to be confidential. But you would still know the difference in people's backgrounds with the older, inefficient accounting systems." The older accounting system was not user-friendly either. School officials could not see personal account balances as each student went through the lunch line. Instead, to check balances, administrators would have to print out an entire list of lunch accounts at the end of the day.

**"what keeps government dollars from reaching school coffers is often a far more sensitive issue: the social stigma of being labeled poor"**

Also, while the older card-carrying system kept the background of each student confidential, Robinson said it created other problems. It is true that many students were embarrassed to let anyone know they were receiving a free lunch. But others thought it was "cool" and shared their status freely. For instance, on days when they did not intend to eat lunch, these same students would loan their cards to friends. As a result, cards were often lost or stolen and replacing them created more work for already busy school officials.

In some ways, Robinson's school district has the opposite problem faced by more diverse districts. With 71 percent of its 4,300 students qualifying for free or discounted meals, poverty is an all too common occurrence. But that hasn't erased the stigma. In fact, the

large need for subsidy has made it all the more critical that Orangeburg Consolidated School District 4 find ways to enroll all eligible students before applying for federal and state help. In 2003, Robinson's school district decided to implement an appropriate biometric technology system to allow the district to improve its means of identifying poor students while securing privacy.

"Our previous system was old as dirt. There was no accountability. We couldn't keep up with anybody's balances. It was very cumbersome," Robinson said. "Comparing what we had with a biometric system is like comparing an old bicycle to a new car."

"I'm sure it is helping us generate more funding. It gives us a higher free and reduced-fee participation," said Robinson, who estimates federal and state funding has increased about 5 percent annually since 2003.

The system has succeeded, in part, because it makes laborious – and sometimes ineffective – administrative tasks so much easier. For example, it keeps track of all K-12 students as they enter and leave the school district. If a student who was eligible for a free lunch the previous year has yet to enroll this year, the software will alert school officials so that a letter can be sent to that parent asking for clarification. In general, the technology is designed to alert administrators to inconsistencies and other problems that may harm their ability to garner subsidies.

Moreover, the system vastly improves on old methods of tallying the total number of eligible students. In the past, a cashier at each Orangeburg district school building

was responsible for counting the subsidized meal forms received. Inaccuracies were the norm because cashiers were not necessarily consistent. Now Robinson, who is responsible for free and reduced-fee enrollment for the entire district, can key in and manage data herself.

#### **SECTION IV: Reducing Unpaid Lunch Charges**

In response to stepped-up federal enforcement of unpaid debts, school lunch programs across the country are now looking to reduce lunch room-related financial losses – namely unpaid lunch charges – by employing biometric student pre-identification systems.

The root of the problem is that students are able to enter the lunch line to fill up their trays. Students cannot be pre-screened with traditional systems, since federal law requires that POS systems must be at positioned at end of the lunch line. If schools are able to put an end to school lunch charges before they occur, they could gain some control over how much lunch room-related debt they incur. It could also eliminate the need for attempting to collect debt from financially strapped or uncooperative parents.

Federal law requires that students at the primary level with overdrawn accounts must given an alternative meal that meets the basic nutrition requirements. This alternative meal is typically a peanut butter and jelly sandwich along with milk or orange juice or a cheese sandwich for those with food allergies.

At the secondary level, however, it is up to the discretion of individual schools and

districts whether or not to feed students whose accounts are in the red. Although the practice of taking a meal out of a student hand at the register when a negative balance is discovered is not mandated, many school systems allow the student to charge the meal against his or her account. Taking a student's lunch tray from his or her hands at the cashier station is not only extremely embarrassing for the student, but food that has been served cannot be returned to the lunch line, and would have to be tossed out.

The plan, instead, is to create a system that will save schools from repeatedly having to adjust the amount students are allowed to charge on insufficient funds, eliminate continual decisions in regards to what a child without money will be given to eat, and reducing the need for teachers and staff to police the lunch lines in order to prevent potential "chargers" from making it into the lunch line. The system will simply require students to scan a finger at a kiosk before they enter the lunch room. The system will inform the student whether or not they have exceeded the negative charge amount. Students who have sufficient funds or those in the free or reduced lunch program will be allowed to enter the lunch line. How to handle the students who have insufficient funds will be up to the discretion of individual school districts—whether it is offering them a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, a small snack, or simply turning them away.

**Part 4 of this article will be available in next months issue of "...What's for Lunch".**

## **Legislative Digest: Child Nutrition Reauthorization**

School lunch is a hot topic in Congress! Since the beginning of the 111th Congress in January 2009, nearly 60 school nutrition related bills have been introduced in anticipation of Child Nutrition Reauthorization. Below is a brief synopsis of some of the key pieces of child nutrition legislation introduced this Congress. Since many of the Senate bills were included as provisions in the Senate Reauthorization bill, this list focuses primarily on legislation introduced in the House of Representatives.

**S. 3307 – The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act**  
This is the Senate version of the Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act, introduced in late March by Senate Agriculture Committee Chairman Blanche Lincoln (D-Ark.). Some of the key provisions included in this bill are:

- Performance-based reimbursement rate increase for new meal patterns;

- Nutrition standards for competitive foods;
- Direct certification for children receiving Medicaid benefits;
- Eliminating individual applications through community eligibility; and
- Expansion of afterschool meals for at-risk children.

S. 3307 was unanimously approved by the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry. The legislation is now awaiting consideration by the full Senate.

**H.R. 1324 / S. 934 – The Child Nutrition Promotion and School Lunch Protection Act**

H.R. 1324 / S. 934 would set competitive foods standards for school meals. Introduced in the House by Representative

Lynne Woolsey (D-Calif.) and Senate by Senator Tom Harkin (D-Iowa), this legislation would require the Secretary of Agriculture to set nutrition standards for foods sold outside of the National School Lunch Program. This bill would also set time and place standards for all foods sold during the school day. Many of the bill's provisions have been incorporated into the larger S. 3307 as described above.

**H.R. 2690 – School Meals Enhancement Act of 2009**

Introduced by Representative Joe Sestak (D-Penn.), this legislation would implement a school-wide paperless free school meal program. Local education agencies (LEAs) would be allowed to select certain schools that may provide free meals to all students without using paper-based applications to determine their eligibility. Schools must have at least 65% of the

student body eligible for free meals or 75% eligible for free and reduced.

### **H.R. 3277 – School Breakfast and Education Improvement Act of 2009**

If passed, H.R. 3277 would require the Secretary of Agriculture to award competitive grants to school districts to establish or enhance school breakfast programs in schools where at least 65% of the students are eligible for free or reduced price school meals. Districts awarded these grants would be required to increase the amount of local or fresh produce, provide nutrition education, and increase participation through universal school breakfast programs. The bill was introduced by Representative Gwen Moore (D-Wis.).

### **H.R. 3321 – AFTERSchool Meals Act of 2009**

Another bill introduced by Representative Moore, H.R. 3321 would provide reimbursements to any institution that provides meals to at-risk students after-school hours, on weekends, vacations, or holidays during the regular school year.

### **H.R. 4148 – Hunger Free Schools Act**

H.R. 4148 would improve and expand direct certification for school nutrition programs. If passed, this legislation would allow students who are eligible for Medicaid or SCHIP to be certified for free or reduced price school meals. Iowa Representative Dave Loebsack (D) introduced this bill.

### **H.R. 4325 – Universal Classroom Breakfast Expansion Act**

Introduced by Representative Paul Tonko (D-N.Y.), this bill would establish a grant program to expand universal classroom breakfast programs. If passed, the legislation would allow the Secretary of Agriculture to award competitive grants to school nutrition programs.

### **H.R. 4590 – School Meal Safety and Standards Act**

H.R. 4590 is a comprehensive bill seeking to improve the recall and hold system for foods provided to the National School Lunch Program. This bill was introduced by Representative Sestak (D-Penn.).

### **H.R. 4638 – Healthy Start Act**

Introduced in March by Representative Stephanie Herseth Sandlin (D-S.D.), H.R. 4638 would provide school nutrition programs with 5 cents in breakfast commodity assistance. Currently, the school nutrition programs only receive commodity assistance for school lunch, not school breakfast.

### **H.R. 4710 – Farm to School Improvements Act of 2010**

If passed, this legislation would provide competitive grants to schools, non-profit organizations, and other groups to expand

access to farm to school programs. The bill was introduced by Representative Rush Holt (D-N.J.)

### **H.R. 4734 – Increased Program Access Act**

This legislation, introduced by Representative Lynn Woolsey (D-Calif.), would reimburse Summer Food Service Programs for children in service institutions and food programs for children in afterschool care for free meals or snacks served to children in areas where at least 40% (currently, 50%) of the children meet the income eligibility criteria for free or reduced price meals under the school lunch and breakfast programs.

### **H.R. 4870 – Healthy School Meals Act of 2010**

Introduced by Representative Jared Polis (D-Colo.), this bill will establish a pilot program evaluating the use of plant-based meals in the school nutrition programs. The Secretary of Agriculture would then be required to provide recommendations for specific plant-based foods and provide additional commodity assistance to include these foods in the school nutrition programs.

### **H.R. 4958 – Healthy Children Through School Nutrition Education Act**

H.R. 4958 would require schools participating in the National School Lunch Program and the School Breakfast Program to include a provision in their local school wellness policy requiring schools to offer 50 hours of nutrition education each school year. Representative Joe Baca (D-Calif.) introduced this legislation.

### **H.R. 4963 – Healthy Milk and Dairy Choices in Schools Act of 2010**

This bill would require the fat content of milk served in the school nutrition programs to be consistent with the latest version of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. It would also establish a three-year pilot program in which the Secretary of Agriculture would purchase low-fat cheese for the commodity programs. This bill was introduced by Connecticut Representative Joe Courtney (D).

### **H.R. 5012 – Weekends Without Hunger Act**

H.R. 5012 would direct the Secretary of Agriculture to implement a five year program providing commodities to non-profit programs that provide nutritious meals to at-risk children on weekends and holidays. School food authorities, elementary and secondary schools, and emergency feeding agencies would be eligible to receive these commodities. This bill was introduced by Representative Dina Titus (D-Nev.).

### **H.R. 5027 – Eating Healthy at School Act of 2010**

In April, Representative Paul Tonko (D-NY)

introduced legislation that will ensure school meals are meeting federal standards. The Eating Healthy at School Act, H.R. 5027, directs the Secretary of Agriculture to assess the efficiency of current administrative review systems to ensure that school meals are compliant with Federal meal standards.

### **H.R. 5090 – Nutrition Education and Wellness in Schools “NEW” Act**

This legislation would require school districts to evaluate their local school wellness policies every three years. The legislation also includes a provision that would replace the Team Nutrition Network with the Wellness and Nutrition Network. Representative Jared Polis (D-Colo.) introduced this bill.

### **H.R. 5167 – School Meals Stigma Reduction Act**

The School Meals Stigma Reduction Act is aimed at reducing the stigma associated with students who have unpaid meal charges. If passed, H.R. 5167 would require school nutrition programs to receive state approval for substitute meal policies and ensure that these policies do not create a stigma for the child. It would also require school nutrition programs to ensure that student who receive free and reduced price meals are not overtly identified. The legislation was introduced by Representative Keith Ellison (D-Minn.).

### **H.R. 5202 – School Lunch Protection Act of 2010**

H.R. 5202, introduced by Representative Judy Chu (D-Calif.), would ensure that school nutrition programs are able to correctly use federal funds. The legislation would require the Secretary of Agriculture to issue guidance on allowable costs that may be charged to school districts, including direct and indirect costs. The School Lunch Protection Act would also require the Secretary to conduct a study to assess the extent that school nutrition programs pay for indirect costs and what the financial implications are. Provisions within this legislation have been included in the bill S. 3307.

For additional information on these bills, and all child nutrition related legislation introduced this Congress, please visit the link below.

<http://capwiz.com/asfa/issues/>

Article provided by:



[www.schoolnutrition.org](http://www.schoolnutrition.org)

# 6 Points of Purchasing a POS System (and costly ones to avoid)

The school cafeteria Point-of-Sale (POS) market is a fast growing area of software development as all schools have a need for electronic record keeping and elimination of manual processes. This has attracted more and more POS companies to develop solutions for school cafeterias. With budgets getting cut and cafeteria programs struggling to turn a profit, schools are turning to cashless or near-cashless systems that allow parents to prepay onto an account and simply have their students deduct money from their account.



The growth of this market coupled with the real need of the schools has attracted many companies to develop systems as to what they feel their customers need. With so many POS offerings, schools find the task of selecting the right vendor rather daunting. The problem is trying to select the right vendor as all of the companies make similar claims as to what they can do. Notwithstanding, just because these solutions sound alike, don't fall into the trap that they are all alike. Now is the time that schools need to ask hard questions to the vendors to identify ones that cannot provide the level of service that they require.

One way to evaluate a POS company is talk to references. They are industry peers that will provide an unbiased opinion on the vendor, application and ultimately their level of customer support. In addition, please reference the following guide, "6 Points of Purchasing a POS System (and costly ones to avoid)".

## 1.) Proven Track Record

Find a company that has at least 10 years experience providing POS solutions. There are many variables, but an established company with a good customer base should be a better choice and a safer bet than one who is new to the market. This would also be the time to call references. Ask the vendor for a list of customers that they could speak to in regards to your company as a whole. Local references are great, but they are not the end-all, be-all. Ask hard questions about customer service – when everything runs fine, it's great. It's when you have a problem, will you be taken care of, or, will you be dumped into phone queue only to leave a voicemail.

## 2.) Not a Beauty Contest

Pretty screens are nice, but that's all they are—pretty. Be wary of vendors that only want to talk about how nice the software looks. There should be more substance behind the scenes than just screen shots. POS software vendors can spend their development money on pretty screens or on the fundamental backbone of the system. You want a system that runs day in and day out and not a pretty system that is broken all the time.

## 3.) Don't be oversold and under-delivered

Make sure all of your requirements are met. It's easy for a vendor to say "YES" to all of your questions. Software is different than a tangible good. If you want a red car with a sunroof and you go to the car lot, you can actually pick out a red car with a sunroof because you can see it and physically touch it. With software, have the company show you how it will do what you want. That way, you actually know it does what it should. You don't want to install the whole system, only to find out that it doesn't do what you thought it would.

## 4.) Know your business processes and procedures beforehand

What are you trying to accomplish

with your new POS system? Is it an increase in accountability, increase in lunch line speed, decrease in cash handling/reconciliation, more reimbursements from an increase in free and reduced numbers? If you know the problems you are trying to solve, you will be more prepared during your search. Be prepared to make decisions on your current processes – Is this the most efficient way to do this? Can we change a little to gain a lot?

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**With so many POS offerings, schools find the task of selecting the right vendor rather daunting. The problem is trying to select the right vendor as all of the companies make similar claims as to what they can do.**

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## 5.) Stay away from "cheap"

Nothing good ever comes out of "cheap". What looks like a good deal on paper, ultimately leads to problems down the road. A reliable product from a trusted vendor who can provide you a solution to your problems, streamline accounting, decrease cash handling, increase federal reimbursements and funding, enable backend integration to your student information system and provide support when you need it isn't free and doesn't come cheap. Selecting the right vendor is imperative, as the last thing you want to do is purchase another system a year later because the cheap one you bought

doesn't work. Remember – if it doesn't work, it doesn't matter.

### 6.) Watch out for “thin client – hosted solutions”

The movement and trend in the market is to move to ASP (Application Service Provider) or SaaS (Software as a Service) models where the POS company will host your data on a web

server and you just access your system with a website. This is a great model for some industries but not for school POS environments. You need to make sure that your POS system has offline capabilities and can run independent of the server, just in case the internet, network or server goes down. Students will eat lunch and come through your line whether or not your internet connection is up. You need to

be able to run your POS, even if the server is unavailable and then sync your transactions once the connection is restore. The alternative – P&P method (Pen and Paper).

*Article written by: David Pisanick, Vice President and COO of Food Service Solutions, Inc.*

## Study Finds Soy Based Vegetarian Options Acceptable to Students

A study, recently published in the April 2010 issue of the Journal of School Health, found that middle school students readily accepted soy-based versions of popular school lunch items. In the study, soy-based versions of beef patties, chicken nuggets, chicken slices (served in a Caesar salad) and macaroni and cheese were substituted for the traditional menu items in five middle schools in the Montgomery County, Maryland school district.

Researchers compared the soy-based items with the traditional menu items by measuring student plate waste. The plate waste data showed that students consumed the same amount of the soy-based version of patties, nuggets, and pasta. However,

students consumed less of the soy-based chicken slice than the regular chicken in the salad.

**On average, the soy-based version of the traditional menu items had fewer calories; less total fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol; and more iron, fiber and sodium.**

On average, the soy-based versions of the traditional menu items had fewer calories; less total fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol; and more iron, fiber, and sodium. As school nutrition programs strive to meet Healthier US School guidelines and better serve vegetarian customers, soy-based versions of popular items can be a viable option.

Article provided by:



[www.schoolnutrition.org](http://www.schoolnutrition.org)

...WHAT'S FOR LUNCH?



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