

Choosing a Meal POS Software Provider?

What Schools & Districts
Need to Know



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9 Reasons Why Your District Needs a Meal POS System



During the school year, [nearly 100,000 schools](#) serve hot lunches to over 29 million students. And over [20 million](#) of these meals are either free or reduced-price lunches, which many students from low-income families have come to depend on. Managing these meal accounts takes quite a bit of administration, which is why schools need a meal point-of-sale software system. If you're not familiar with what a [POS system does](#), it manages the check outs for student meals and handles school lunch account payments made by parents.

Here are just 10 of the many reasons your school needs an exceptional POS software system to handle school meal payments and accounts. Having these in hand will not only help you justify the expense but give you an idea of what to look for in a provider.

1. Speed up transactions

The right POS system will speed up transactions and minimize the time students spend waiting in line. Cashiers can quickly ring students up and move them through the lines, eliminating bottlenecks and time spent waiting at the register.

And schools can make the lines move even faster by incorporating digital menu boards in the cafeteria. These menu boards will display all the lunch items, so students can choose what they want while they're waiting in line. That way, when it's their turn to select their food, they already know what they want.

2. Accuracy

Another benefit of using a POS system is that it ensures accuracy. Many of the steps the cashier will take are automated, which reduces the likelihood they'll make mistakes.

The staff member can either scan an item's barcode or select the product button on the screen. This eliminates the need to manually look up certain items. And the cashier can finalize the payment by scanning a prepaid card, using a code on a pin pad, initiating a student name lookup or a variety of other options!

3. Convenience

The right POS system is more convenient for school staff and the families of students. That's because your POS system will come with an online portal where parents can access their child's meal payment account.

Parents can make sure there is always money on their student's account. They can make secure online payments and set automatic reminders, so they'll know when their child's lunch balance is getting low.

Several POS systems will include auto-replenish as well, which can help parents automate payments when their child's balance goes below a certain threshold and ensure schools take on less lunch debt.



4. Monitoring and transparency

Once kids are in school, many parents start to feel like they don't really know what's going on. That's why one of the biggest benefits of a POS system is the added transparency it provides parents.

Parents can log into the online portal and quickly see what kinds of meals their child is eating each day. They can also access a list of their transaction history and add spending limits to their child's account.

Plus, many kids have dietary restrictions due to allergies and cultural or religious preferences. Parents can easily update this information in their student's online lunch portal, and cashiers can then see this information on the POS when a student is passing through the lunch line to check out.

5. Improves cafeteria management

The right software will not only make it easier for families to manage student lunches, but it will save your staff time.

The right service will be easily customizable, so you can tailor your POS to your school's unique food service needs. And the software should be intuitive and easy to use so all staff members can navigate it, process payments and void transactions when necessary.

6. Reporting features

The right POS system will automatically generate reports you can use. This is incredibly useful when you need to see what items are the most popular with students. It can also help with NSLP compliance by tracking each meal eligible for reimbursement.

7. Students can pre-order meals

Another increasingly popular advantage of a flexible POS system is that it gives students the option to pre-order their meals.

At the beginning of the week or month, parents can log into the online portal and see what meals are available. They can then pre-order their student's meals, so the cafeteria knows what kinds of food to prepare ahead of time.

This is more convenient for parents and staff members. Parents get to plan ahead, and they know what their children are eating for lunch at school. And staff members can operate the cafeteria more efficiently because they already know what meals to prepare for students.

8. Increases hot lunch participation

The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) provides free or reduced price lunches to over 29 million kids on a daily basis. So it's important schools have a lunch ordering system that supports participation in the NSLP.

The right software will make it easier for eligible families to sign up, while protecting their privacy by anonymizing student participation. This prevents lunch shaming and encourages more students to enroll.

9. Mobile responsive

If you want to offer families the convenience of online payments to update their students' meal account balances, then you need a payment software that's mobile responsive. Nearly all of us are on our phones constantly, so a payment software that's easy to use from a smartphone is a must.

Most parents will update their child's account while they are on their phone and on the go, taking a moment to add to the balance or make payments while they wait in the school pickup line or have a spare moment on their break from work. Choosing a lunch order system that allows for in-app purchases and is mobile responsive will ensure maximum participation levels.



10 Questions to Ask Any Potential Provider



Now that you're familiar as to what a meal POS provider can do for your school or district, here are 10 questions you should ask any provider before committing. Setting up a POS system can be a significant investment of time and money. Asking these questions upfront will save your school or district plenty of both.

1. Is it intuitive and easy to learn?

Cafeteria staff have a lot to handle come lunchtime, so they need a POS system that's intuitive and easy to use. Staff members should be able to navigate the software, no matter how "technologically-challenged" they consider themselves.

The software should be easy to navigate, have a touchscreen interface and allow cashiers to select a student's items and check them out quickly. And cashiers should be able to easily add additional a la carte items for faster checkout.

Questions are bound to come up. Whether they involve general operational questions or how to access specific features, you'll want to partner with a company that provides U.S.-based support. With the right support, you can get the help needed to resolve any problems with the software.

Many companies will also offer additional training at no extra cost and provide useful articles that explain each step of the processes.

2. Is it fast and reliable?

One of the biggest challenges for school administrators is finding a way to avoid long, slow-moving lunch lines. It's tough to move students through line quickly, allowing them time to enjoy their meal and then get back to learning.

The right school lunch system will make it easier to move students quickly through the lunch line. An intuitive [POS system](#) will allow students to pay quickly, so the line keeps moving, and there are no holdups.

You can also provide digital menu boards for students, so they can decide what to order before reaching the front of the line. A digital menu board will make it easier for students to quickly choose their food instead of pausing to think once they get to the lunch counter.

3. Do they offer multiple payment options?

School lunch POS systems need to accept multiple forms of payment. The system should accept pre-paid online account balances (by swiping an ID card, for example), cash in-person, check in-person and credit card in-person.

And the right POS system will keep student payment information safe and won't save personal data. Plus, it's very important that schools have a way to accept contactless payments from students.

A popular option for schools using online account balances is to issue lunch cards to their students, or link their student ID card to their lunch account. Teachers can distribute the lunch cards to younger students when it's time for lunch, and older students can store these cards on their smartphone.



4. Does it let students pre-order meals?

One of the best ways to speed up the hot lunch line is to allow students to order ahead of time. Families can place their lunch order the night before or at the beginning of the week, and the staff can have the meals ready and waiting when students arrive for lunch. Pre-ordering will shorten the line for the other students who didn't pre-order their food.

This also helps reduce the burden on food service staff, who have a better idea in advance of how much they'll need of each menu item and are less likely to have to rush to prepare extra food at the last minute.

5. Does it offer online access for families?

Your POS system should come with an online portal where parents can easily access their child's hot lunch account. The right school lunch software system will allow parents to put money on their child's account, pre-order meals and see their transaction history. It will even include an auto-replenish feature. They should also be able to set spending limits and specify food restrictions.

6. Do they offer a variety of hardware options to go with their software?

Your school's needs are unique, which is why you need a variety of hardware for checkout. Perhaps your school has a lot of students to move through lunch lines quickly. In that case, you'll likely want a lightning fast checkout method such as [biometrics](#). Or, your school may need a contactless option, such as ID cards. Whatever checkout method or methods you choose, you'll want your provider to offer the versatility needed.

Choosing a provider that offers a portfolio of equipment with their POS software preloaded on it will save you a ton of time. At Vanco, we preload our software onto the hardware to make setup take only 20 minutes on average. This is important for busy staff who don't have a lot of time to troubleshoot setup issues.

7. Is the hardware easy to clean and sanitize?

Your school's POS system should be as easy to maintain as possible and it should also be easy to clean and sanitize. Maintaining proper hygiene helps ensure your food service meets local and state health standards for food prep.

You should be able to easily wipe down high-touch POS systems with a Clorox disinfectant wipe. You can wipe down these systems at the beginning of each lunch shift. If the hardware is easy to clean, it helps minimize downtime and increase efficiency.

8. Do they offer free or reduced lunch plan management?

For school districts with a large percentage of free or reduced lunch eligible families, the ability to manage free and reduced lunch plans is critical. The right supporting software will help take applications online and calculate a student's eligibility.

It will also allow you to easily track eligible free or reduced meals for reimbursement. And your POS system should keep this information confidential, so there's nothing to cause students to feel embarrassed or put on the spot at checkout.

When your POS system manages free and reduced lunch plans, you'll be able to keep an accurate record of everyone who is eligible and involved in the program. These kinds of records will allow your school to maximize reimbursements and allow as many students as possible to participate.

9. Do they offer reporting features?

Your school lunch software should provide easy reporting features. Having the right reports automatically generated for you will save staff and administrators hours of valuable time. The right POS system will show you total meal counts and allow you to complete federal and state reimbursement reports.

10. Does it take other payments for items beyond school lunches?

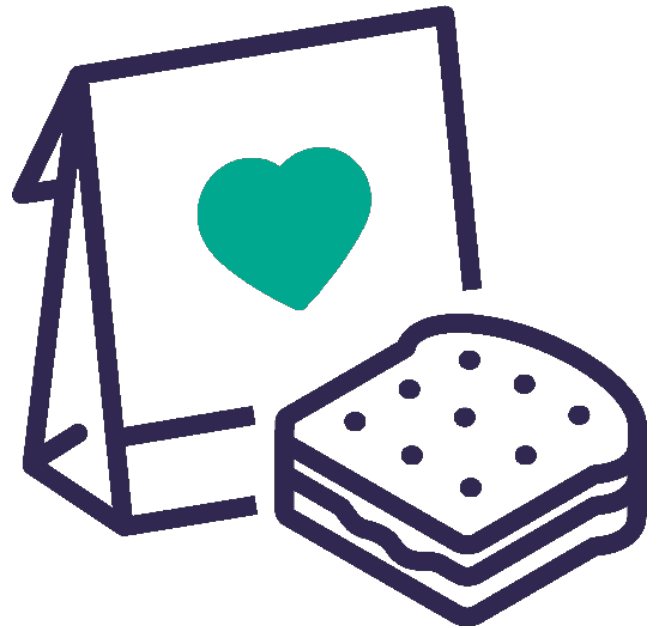
Meal transactions often make up the majority of a school district's payments, but there are plenty of others to track and manage. Instead of having multiple systems to collect payments, it's possible to use one. Some providers will offer a central terminal that allows parents and stakeholders to easily make all their payments in one place. For example, a parent can pay for their child's extracurricular activities, field trip, lunch account balance and AP test all in one place.

Aside from relieving the burden on parents, a central solution makes your staff's work easier. It cuts down on calls from confused parents trying to navigate numerous payment systems. Staff can also save time by accessing reports in one central place, and reconciliation is a breeze with just one system.



Three-step process for simplifying school meals and payments

Having a separate POS system and payment software can add several tedious tasks for your staff and leaves parents with a poor experience. Save time, create simplicity for parents and offer contactless checkout options with Vanco's system.



1. Request a demo and receive our free cashless campus consultation.

2. Sign up and let us build you a custom web store to manage meals and payments.

3. Enjoy the time-savings and streamline the checkout experience with contactless options.

Request a Demo

800.323.5953

VancoPayments.com/Education

