

# WHAT SCHOOLS CAN DO ABOUT SCHOOL LUNCH DEBT COLLECTION



**VANCO**  
EDUCATION

# **INTRODUCTION**

*The United States doesn't have a framework for tracking student lunch debt. For this reason, it's unclear how much student lunch debt American schools hold. However, the conversation regarding the topic is becoming more prominent as many schools reel from budget cuts.*

*To learn more about what schools can do about school lunch debt collection, keep reading.*



# THE GRIM REALITY OF SCHOOL LUNCH DEBT

It's hard to tell if school lunch debt is growing. It's possible that the problem is simply more noticeable in the wake of shrinking school budgets. Nevertheless, student lunch debt is a problem shared by [nearly 60%](#) of America's schools.

In schools across the United States, parents are facing outstanding student lunch debt. As a result, many young learners are left with Graham crackers and milk for lunch.

In Denver, for instance, the school district has a policy in place for when parents can't afford to pay for [school lunch](#). Students can continue to receive up to six dollars' worth of meals for free.

Meals for kindergarten through fifth-grade students cost \$2.00. Meanwhile, meals for students in grades eight through six cost \$2.25. For grades nine and up, however, lunch costs \$2.75.

In elementary school, the six-dollar limit amounts to three lunches. In middle and high school, however, the policy only covers two lunches.

Once students surpass the six-dollar meal allocation, they'll receive an alternative meal. An alternative meal includes milk and a cheese sandwich.

In many cases, however, parents still fail to pay for meals. When this happens, the district will feed the children white milk and Graham crackers.

The policy is stated clearly on the Denver public school system's meal prices webpage. However, the school does make exceptions for students who receive free lunches.



## **LOOKING AT THE PROBLEM BEYOND DEBT**

Only about 25% of students pay full price for school lunches, according to a BBC exposé. That equates to nearly 8 million students.

The rest of the student body qualifies for free and reduced-price meals. [Government-funded programs](#) contribute or pay for the meals of millions of students across the United States. The government provides support based on family income.

For the remaining families, there are times when parents cannot make lunch payments. In these cases, some schools have refused to serve their children's meals. Other schools have followed the example of the Denver public school system and served snacks as an alternative.

Some schools have reversed their policy of denying children's meals for lack of payment. For instance, the Rhode Island school district recently reversed its policy of doing just that.

The school believed that the policy promoted "lunch shaming." Administrators felt that the practice embarrassed students whose parents [couldn't pay](#) for meals.



# **THE IMPORTANCE OF KEEPING THE BOOKS BALANCED**

Currently, many administrators are grappling with how to settle the debt for school lunch. Keeping lunch debt balanced isn't necessarily about profit. The problem is somewhat more complex.

In Denver, for instance, officials expressed that they must follow federal regulations. Those regulations prohibit students who don't qualify for free or reduced lunch from receiving unlimited meals.

Accordingly, the school district must manage the issue in the best way possible. If the school district were to continue feeding children, the act is considered theft under federal guidelines.

For this reason, many students run the risk of going without lunch. This outcome is something that no school administrator wants.

As a result, Denver school officials adopted a policy of providing alternative meals. The meals aren't full meals.

However, they're a better option than allowing students to go a day without eating. For now, milk and Graham crackers are the best solutions that the school can provide.

Denver officials express that they try diligently to reach parents regarding school lunch debt. Also, there are many reasons why parents can't afford to pay for student meals. Nevertheless, the problem continues to go unresolved in many instances.

School officials state that they're doing the best they can. The bottom line is that school administrators must do more to solve the problem.



## **HOW UNPAID LUNCH DEBT AFFECTS CHILDREN**

Kids need a healthy, balanced meal during the school day. It's not their fault when their school lunch fees go unpaid.

However, alternative meals create another problem. A lunch that consists of milk and Graham crackers is a telltale sign that children's parents have not paid school lunch debt.

In some instances, kids skip lunch for this reason. They're afraid of the stigma associated with the snack. Resultantly, a growing number of schools have turned to school lunch debt charity to cover outstanding balances.

Furthermore, school lunch debt isn't a problem that goes away. Outstanding school lunch balances carry over to the next year. It also transfers to schools in the same district.

For this reason, many students start the new year under the same circumstances. Ultimately, it's the children who are penalized for school lunch debt. In a way, it's like they're getting shamed and punished for something over which they have no control.



# ONE COMMUNITY'S STRUGGLE WITH SCHOOL LUNCH DEBT

In Nashville, school officials recently appealed to the public for help with paying for unpaid school lunch debt. Officials there wanted the community to help put an end to [lunch shaming](#). Accordingly, they compelled residents to help pay off student lunch debt.

A school official urged Metro Nashville Public School officials to list the unpaid lunch balances in the school district. District officials complied. They released an online list of 26 schools.

Each school had unpaid lunch balances of more than \$200. In total, the balance of unpaid lunches was close to \$68,000.

The school district must find some way to cover this expense. Nashville school officials express that they don't have discretionary funds to cover the balance.

Currently, the district serves mostly low-income students. Many of the students qualify for free or reduced-price meals.

However, the district doesn't have the funding to provide free lunches for all students who qualify. Primarily, school officials worry that a lack of sustenance will impede the student's ability to learn.



# HOW TO PAY OFF SCHOOL LUNCH DEBT

Fortunately, there's a better way to mitigate school lunch debt. You can use technology to [increase school lunch participation](#). By automating free or reduced-price meal enrollment, you can ensure that as many eligible kids as possible participate in meal assistance programs.

An [automated system](#) will make it easier for kids to sign up for available meal assistance. It will also allow you to provide online [meal ordering](#).

Ultimately, you can use technology to improve cafeteria management. With the right software, you can make it easier for families to manage student lunches.

Technology can also help to reduce your administrative workload. The right technology solutions are easily customizable.

With automated technology, staff members can manage student orders easily. However, it's important to use an intuitive application that's easy for staff members to learn.

With the right technology, your cashiers can move lines faster. In doing so, it can help you to maintain current school safety guidelines.



# HOW SCHOOL LUNCH SOFTWARE WORKS

A [centralized management system](#) enables you to do away with a patchwork of software. It will also allow you to accept online payments.

Today, school officials are extremely busy. There's no time for outdated administrative collection tasks. The right technology can end your struggle with multiple platforms and vendors.

By choosing the right technology, you can create a cashless campus. Most importantly, you can free your administrative staff from repetitive manual tasks and payment processing.

As a result, you'll find your staff is free from managing simple accounting tasks, meal payments, registration fees and other basic functions. Furthermore, the right technology can integrate with your existing software.

By updating your technology, you can bring your district together. Moreover, you can simplify the lives of families, students and staff members.

For example, today's technology offerings can help you to simplify payments. They'll also help you cut down on paperwork.

In many instances, a leading online payment system can reconcile payments in 10 minutes or less. You can use this kind of system to accept online meal account payments. You can also incorporate [contactless point-of-sale](#) tools.

Furthermore, you can even use technology to enable families to preorder meals for their children. With the right technology solution, you can make cafeteria management easy.



## **BENEFITS OF DIGITIZING SCHOOL LUNCH PAYMENTS**

Today, the right technology vendor can deliver online payment processing systems that are safe and secure. Online payments are one of the best ways to speed up [lunch ordering](#) and reduce student lunch debt. This kind of system can streamline school lunch debt collection considerably.

However, parents must trust your technology. They want to know that their information is secure. When selecting a payment system, it's important to work with a payment processor that complies with the [Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard](#).

In addition, it's important to choose a technology that works across a range of devices. Cash and check payments are slowly falling out of favor.

For some parents, the problem isn't if they can pay off their lunch debt, but how to pay it. In many cases, the task gets eclipsed by life's responsibilities. For this reason, it's important to make paying for student lunch as easy as possible.

Today, parents need to do things while they're on the go. Accordingly, it's vital to provide a payment portal that parents can access using their smartphones. By choosing a technology solution that's convenient for parents, you'll ensure maximum participation and decrease student lunch debt.



# **CHOOSING A TECHNOLOGY PARTNER**

When searching for a technology partner, it's important to find a vendor that's experienced in providing academic solutions. An experienced vendor can help you to streamline your operation. More importantly, they'll help to enrich your community.

If you're looking for tried-and-true guidelines for choosing a provider, check out [this guide](#), which offers 17 tips to help you choose.

Though all the tips within the guide are important, the most important is providing a centralized hub for all school payments. With a one stop shop for school payments, districts save their staff countless hours of administration while making the payment process easy for parents, and when payments are easy to make, parents will be able to pay for lunches on time, preventing additional lunch debt.

# GET STARTED TODAY!



**A patchwork of legacy software and payment methods can make you feel disorganized, anxious and overwhelmed.** Your staff, parents and students all deserve a better experience that's secure and easy-to-use. With Vanco's software, districts can easily collect all school fees in one place, and parents and families can quickly make all payments from one central hub.

Let your parents, families and staff enjoy the hassle-free payment process. Follow these three steps!

1. [Request a demo](#) and receive our free cashless campus consultation.
2. Sign up and let us build you a custom Web Store.
3. Enjoy easy online sales, time-savings and the simplicity of being able to track all your district payments in one place.

**800.323.5953**

[VancoPayments.com/Education](http://VancoPayments.com/Education)

**VANCO**  
EDUCATION