YOUR GUIDE TO TRANSFORMING THE CAFETERIA *DURING COVID-19*

VANCO
EDUCATION

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INTRODUCTION

With COVID-19, school administrators have needed to rethink many of their daily routines. And one of the most significant areas that has had to change is the school cafeteria.

It's no longer feasible to have 300 kids crowded into the cafeteria at one time. Staff members need to minimize crowding, give students room to spread out and incorporate proper social distancing procedures.

Follow the guidelines we present to incorporate the best school cafeteria procedures for your district.

THE SIX BEST PRACTICES FOR ADJUSTING YOUR SCHOOL CAFETERIA FOR COVID-19

One of the challenges educators face is creating and enforcing new procedures that keep students safe while providing a positive learning experience. It's no small feat and will take some trial and error, but here are some best practices to try.

1   *Create a positive environment*

Even in light of social distancing procedures, it's important to create a positive lunchroom environment students will enjoy. Make sure students have enough time to eat and a way to socialize with friends – even if it's from a distance.

One of the things that can help is having students go to recess before lunch. Studies have shown students are more relaxed and behave better at lunch when they go to recess first.

2   *Make the room comfortable*

The lighting in the room can have a big impact on student behavior. Opt for natural lighting instead of fluorescent lights, which can cause headaches. If that's not an option, incandescent bulbs are a better choice.

It's also important to think about the temperature and comfort of the room. Try to regulate the room temperature at 68 degrees.

3   *Rethink the seating arrangements*

One of the biggest things that will have to change about your cafeteria procedures is the seating arrangements. Schools can't allow students to be crowded into one area anymore.
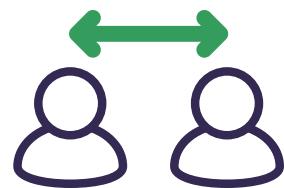
Make sure the tables and chairs are evenly spaced out so students can sit six feet apart from each other. Students can still talk and socialize, but from a distance.

4   *Encourage cleanliness*

Teachers are going to have to work with students to encourage cleanliness and teach them how to clean up after themselves. When students come into the lunchroom, have them wash their hands or use hand sanitizer.

Emphasize the importance of not sharing items with classmates and encourage them to clean up after themselves once they're finished eating. And show students how to properly dispose of items like tissues and napkins.

5   *Consider other lunchtime arrangements*

And finally, some schools may need to rethink the cafeteria arrangement altogether. Social distancing in the cafeteria may be too difficult, and in that case, schools can use other formats.

For instance, you can have students eat in their classrooms instead. This keeps the group numbers small and makes social distancing possible. Or you could have students eat lunch on a rotating schedule, so there aren't so many students in the cafeteria at once.

6 *Make lunch lines faster and safer*

During the school day, most kids look forward to their lunch period, only to discover that it's surprisingly short. For many children, 20 minutes isn't much time after they wait in a long school lunch line to receive their food.

And now, thanks to the effects of the COVID-19, many school districts are rethinking their cafeteria setup entirely. Having kids tightly packed in lunch lines is not only inefficient, but unsafe and could further the spread of the virus.

That's why you'll need your procedures to keep lunch lines moving quickly, while limiting the number of kids in a line.
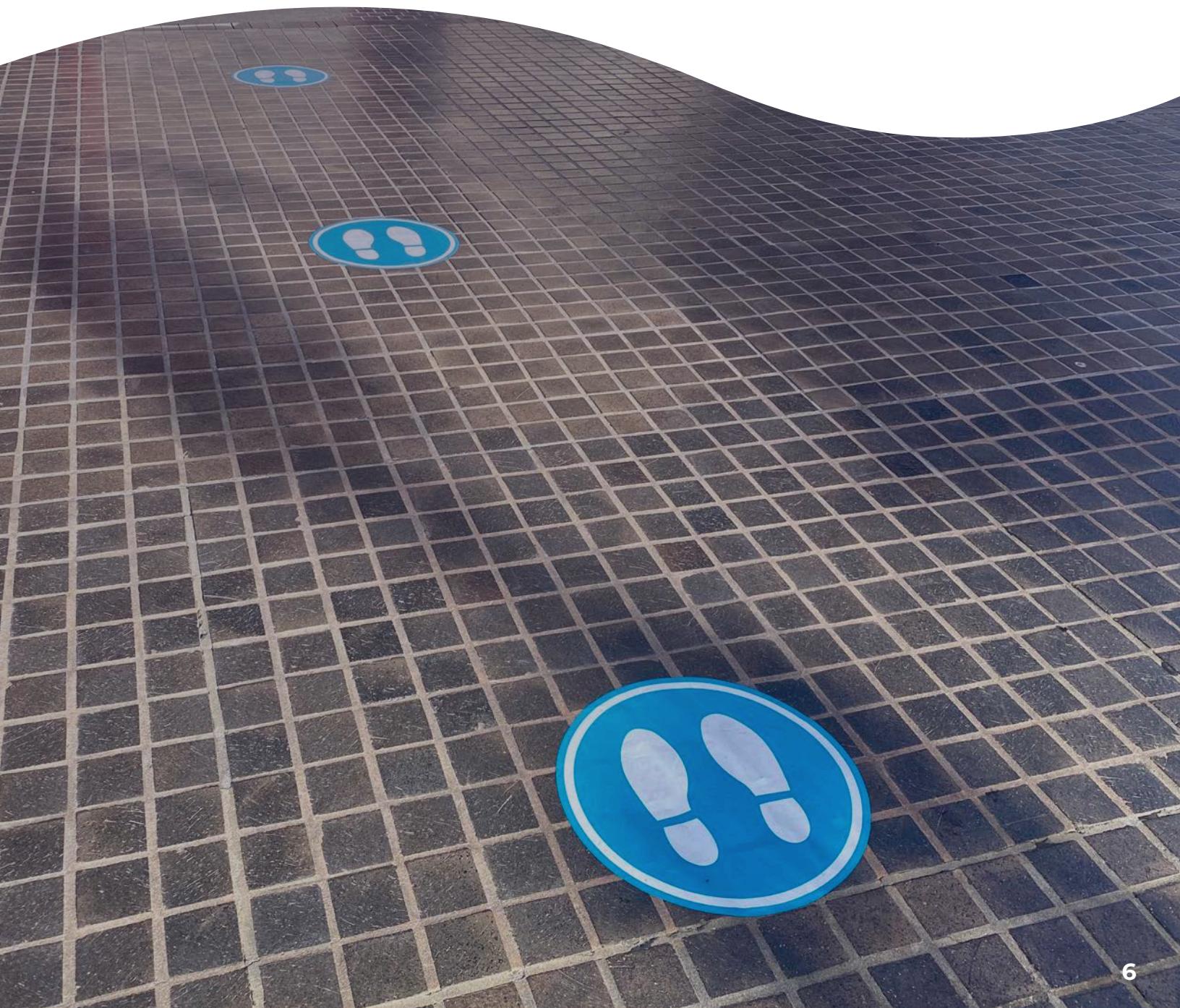
NINE WAYS TO SPEED UP LUNCH LINES

There are several tried and true ways to make lunch lines safer and faster. Here is how your school or district can do it.

1 *Set up a sanitation station*

Keep students and staff safe by creating a sanitation station outside of the cafeteria. At this station, students can either wash their hands or use hand sanitizer. Frequently touched surfaces should also be cleaned and disinfected on a regular basis.

And schools can help by providing sufficient paper towels, no-touch trash cans, and tissues. Staff members can also educate kids on the proper way to dispose of any used items.

2 *Eliminate bottlenecks*

Overcrowding is one of the biggest problems schools will need to avoid. It's not safe to have large groups of students standing in line waiting to receive their food. One of the ways schools can reduce this problem is by setting up markers on the floor. Social distancing markers will help students know how to stay six feet apart and use proper social distancing.

3 *Get rid of self-service stations*

Previously, many schools set up self-service stations in the cafeteria. Kids could serve themselves salad, an entre and pick out any other items they wanted.

Instead, schools should find a way to pre-package items to minimize contact between students and staff members. And schools should move away from using serving trays and opt for disposable bags instead.

4 *Encourage online payments*

This year, all families should be encouraged to utilize online payments. When parents pay online, it's easier to make sure their student's lunch account is always funded. Online payments will save students from reaching the front of the line only to discover they are out of lunch money.

When schools incorporate the right school lunch software, parents can pay via credit cards, debit cards, and ACH payments. And they can set up automatic reminders when their child's lunch balance gets low.

5 Increase cashless payments

For the students who do pay in person, cashless payments are going to be another way to speed up lunch lines. For example, parents can put their student's lunch money on a prepaid card. Students can then scan these cards using barcode scanners or biometric scanners. Be aware that touchless checkout options – such as barcode scanners – are preferred here. If you choose to use biometric scanners, be sure to sanitize them between each transaction to minimize risk.

6 Use an efficient POS system

If staff members have access to an efficient point-of-sale (POS) system, they'll be able to move students through the lines much faster. Touch screen monitors are easier to navigate and will allow cashiers to check students out quickly, no matter how tech-savvy they are.

7 Have students pre-order their meals

One of the biggest ways schools can cut down on lunch lines is by having students pre-order their meals. When parents sign into the online portal, they can see what meals are available for the following week. They can then pre-order these meals ahead of time.

Pre-ordering is beneficial for parents and cafeteria staff. It helps parents plan ahead and know what their child will be having for lunch each day. And it helps staff members prepare the food in advance, so meals are ready and waiting for students.

8 Have kids eat on a staggered lunch schedule

One of the best ways to maintain proper social distancing is by reducing the number of students in the cafeteria at one time. Having kids on a staggered lunch schedule is a good way to do this.
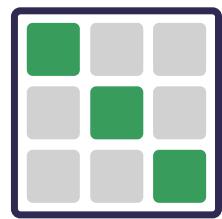
A staggered lunch schedule will make it easier for kids to maintain six feet of distance while they're standing in the lunch line. It will also give them more room to spread out while they're eating.

9 Deliver meals to the classroom

And finally, schools can eliminate lunch lines altogether by delivering pre-ordered meals to the classroom. Right now, the cafeteria may be too large of a space for students to safely gather. By having students eat lunch in classrooms, they can avoid any overcrowding and maintain six feet of social distance.

5 STEPS TO IMPLEMENT YOUR NEW SCHOOL CAFETERIA PROCEDURES

Now that you have some ideas for improving your school's cafeteria procedures, how do you actually go about implementing them? Here are five steps to get started:

1 *Outline about the problem*

The first place to start is by outlining the problem you're trying to solve. You have to understand the current problem before you can start coming up with solutions.

What are your current cafeteria procedures, and how are they incompatible with social distancing? What are the processes that need to be changed first?

And how will you know if your solution is successful? Write up a short statement defining what success looks like, and how you will know you've achieved it.

2 *Assess your current procedures*

Now you want to assess your current cafeteria procedures and make note of any issues. You can do this by making note of the cafeteria layout, taking notes and talking to other staff members about their ideas for improvement.

How many students are in the cafeteria at any one time? How much time does the staff have between lunch periods to clean and sanitize tables? Once you understand the current procedures, you can begin to come up with solutions.

3 *Brainstorm solutions*

Now that you understand the problem, it's time to start brainstorming solutions. And one of the easiest ways to start is by looking at what other schools are doing to solve the problem.

How are other schools handling overcrowding in the cafeteria and cutting down on the time spent in lunch lines? How are they able to ensure students are sit six feet apart in the cafeteria?

Make a list of all the possible solutions you could implement and start writing out some scenarios. Be sure to share your ideas with other staff members and get feedback.

4 *Implement your final design*

Once you've outlined the problem and have come up with solutions, it's time to implement your final design. Do the new cafeteria procedures solve the problem you outlined in the first step? Implementing your new cafeteria procedures may take some tweaking, but in time, you'll get it right.

5 *Streamline the process with the right software*

Having the right POS and food service software can speed up lunch lines, make staff more efficient, make it easier to implement social distancing guidelines, streamline payments for parents and simplify the process for students.

Unfortunately, if you choose the wrong POS and payment provider, your school can lose countless hours of productivity and be out a few thousands of dollars.

For more than 20 years, **Vanco** has provided K-12 school districts a convenient online payment experience for all school-related activities from meal payments to athletics fees to child care and beyond. We've helped thousands of districts move toward becoming cashless with a custom Web Store that simplifies fee payments and streamlines reconciliation.

HOW TO CHOOSE THE RIGHT MEAL *POS SOFTWARE* FOR YOUR SCHOOL OR DISTRICT...

The selection of your provider can be a little daunting, but with a few best practices, you can make the best decision for your school or district. That's why we built a guide to help you simplify the decision-making process.

Our free guide will help you to...

- **Understand the 10 reasons your school or district needs a great meal POS software provider.**

- **Receive the 10 questions you need to ask to make the best decision for your school or district.**

- **Save thousands and countless hours by avoiding the wrong choice.**

- **Get the three-step process for simplifying school meals and payments.**

Don't waste countless hours and thousands of dollars on the wrong choice. Get the guidance you need to make an informed decision.

Download the Guide

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