

Finding the Right K-12 School Nutrition Software

To Maximize Your Return on Investment



LINQ

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Not everything that
can be counted counts,
and not everything that
counts can be counted.

Albert Einstein



Introduction

The past year has completely revolutionized the way K-12 school food service teams operate.

As districts made the leap from in-person to remote and hybrid learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic, nutrition directors had to quickly adjust school meal programs to ensure students were fed – no matter how or where they were learning.

Such a rapid pivot can create a whole list of new challenges and concerns such as:



Student Hunger

Keeping students fed, especially those participating in free and reduced lunch programs.



Staffing Changes

Balancing staff reduction and the ever-changing demand for staff resources.



Financial Loss

[More than half of SNA survey respondents](#) reported financial loss for the 2019-2020 school year, and 32% did not have sufficient funds to cover their net loss.



Funding

Will there be enough emergency funding to properly operate and cover financial losses?



Contactless Serving

How to serve meals easily while adhering to health and safety protocols.



Sanitation Procedures

How to efficiently and properly sanitize the front of house and back of house between uses.

As students continue a mix of in-person and remote learning, the health and financial concerns remain, but the means of the operation have begun to shift and normalize.

With this new normal, more and more districts are taking a hard look at their resources and how to leverage them to keep food service teams and students healthy, while maximizing efficiency.

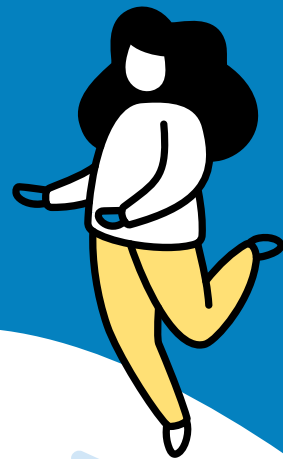
The importance of investing in integrated technology solutions, such as school nutrition management software, has never been more prevalent.

In this guide, we'll look at the following:

- + The importance of return on investment in school technology purchases
- + How to identify your district's needs - now and into the future
- + What to consider as you select the right nutrition solution
- + Where to find the right software for your school nutrition program
- + Planning for a successful implementation

It's officially time to dive in! Let's take a look at school funding and the importance of maximizing the ROI for school technology purchases.

The ROI of Nutrition Software



Some school nutrition programs struggle to get the funding they need to operate successfully. Find out why a quick ROI matters when choosing school nutrition management software.

School Funding and The Importance of ROI

It's no surprise that schools and IT teams are struggling to get the funding they need to support even their core operations during and post pandemic. Investing in new software for your district may seem like the last thing on the docket for the near (or even the distant) future, but it might be exactly what you need to gain additional functionality and operational efficiencies while reducing overall costs.

What if we told you that [the right technology solution can actually save you hundreds of thousands of dollars](#) in the long run?

Outdated and disjointed technology systems are inefficient and result in:

- + Over-extended resources and time spent on unnecessary manual processes and inaccurate data inputs and updates
- + Lack of accessibility to front-of-house systems during Internet outages
- + Manual maintenance that requires IT assistance and creates extra costs each year
- + Complex, proprietary hardware that only works with native software and requires IT maintenance

Investing in the right school nutrition software quickly removes these distractions, allowing districts to focus on what really matters - their students.

Much of today's modern technology makes it possible to automate processes, eliminate clunky hardware and operate with (or without) Internet access, while reducing your cybersecurity risks and keeping sensitive student data protected.

The Little Things Add Up

The time spent adding items to a nutrition management system can create additional labor costs. In a competitive system, it can take roughly 31 minutes to add a single item so that it appears everywhere. **In LINQ, powered by TITAN, it takes 15 minutes to add an item, and you only have to enter once.** That adds up to a massive time savings!

The Needs of Your District



Now that you understand the importance of investing in the right solution for your school nutrition program, it's time to evaluate the current needs of your district.

Evaluating Your District's Needs

Every K-12 district is unique. It's important to evaluate the needs specific to your district before you begin to understand the type of school nutrition software solution you should choose. **Be sure to consider the following:**

The Size of Your District

An easy way to determine the right provider for you is the size of your district and IT team. Maybe you're small now (5,000 students or less), but you plan to expand, and need a scalable solution that can grow with you. Or maybe your district is large (13,000+ students), and you need a customizable and scalable school meals management solution that goes beyond basic functionality.

What You're Missing

The past year has come with more challenges to count for K-12 schools, but technology providers have answered with powerful, innovative solutions that are reliable and secure. Some solutions come packed with features to help you manage the times, like safely expediting grab-and-go and delivery meal service or getting reimbursed for off-site meals. Consider what you're missing to save time and money and boost performance. Then, compile a wish list of features to look for in a school nutrition solution.

Your Reporting Requirements

Reporting can be a huge time investment, so it's a good idea to understand how often reporting is needed from the school nutrition department and to whom the reports will go to in order to ensure compliance with state and federal program regulations. Different providers of school nutrition management software offer various types of reporting. You might want to consider taking advantage of automated reporting - this could be a massive time-saver!

Planning for the Future

Instead of identifying a solution based on your needs right now, you should also consider your needs and potential possibilities for school meal programs in the future. For instance, will your current solution continue to help the school nutrition program meal service through alternative means – Grab & Go, carryout pickup, delivery, etc.? If not, what type of system will help you with that capability?

Is now the time to switch technology providers? If not, when would be the smoothest time to transition? What resources are needed to transition and implement a new solution? Are those currently available to you? Assessing your future needs also ensures you're not overbuying for your current needs now, while selecting a provider that can help you easily scale and grow.

Remote Accessibility

Although K-12 schools are slowly shifting back to full-time, in-person learning, you'll likely need remote accessibility for the foreseeable future. If there will be a need for the school nutrition team to use the software off-premises, what does that access look like? Make a list of everything the food service team needs to operate efficiently outside of the cafeteria to ensure the solution has ultimate service flexibility.

Connected Technologies

Consider the systems that need to be connected to your nutrition management software, such as a payment system, accounting software, family communication tools, and the district's SIS. To truly reap the benefits of an all-in-one, integrated solution, you'll need to assess solution compatibilities and your current IT architecture.



Lesson from Little Larry

Little Larry, a first-grader, is fanatical about ice cream. He quickly found that he could purchase ice cream every day at lunch without his parents knowing. Why? Because the POS system used at Larry's school didn't sync in real-time with the lunch payment system. [Real-time syncing helps schools avoid communication delays.](#)

Is It Time to Invest in a New School Nutrition Solution?

New technology is quite a big commitment, but the upfront investment in migrating to a new solution can ultimately save you and your staff more time and money **within 12 months or less.**

Connecting the benefits to the overall need to identify your district's return on investment from both a financial and operational perspective is key to determining the right time for new technology.

So now ask yourself the following questions:

- + Is your solution proprietary, and does it require manual maintenance?
- + Do you have to pay extra for system updates?
- + Does your system require patching to other software to operate?
- + Are your IT resources spending a sizable portion of their time on system issues?
- + Do your software updates require IT assistance?
- + Do internet outages impact food service or operations on your current system?
- + Do you lack remote accessibility?
- + Is a manager's PC required to facilitate interconnecting Point of Service Terminals?
- + Do the current solutions rely on manual data entry for reporting, item management or student information updates?
- + Are you personally monitoring for compliance and ever-changing school nutrition regulations?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, chances are that your district has enormous cost-saving potential and efficiencies to gain with a new school nutrition system - just like this LINQ, powered by TITAN customer!



“**S**ince switching to LINQ, powered by TITAN, we have had a great impact on our district. The ease of use and excellent customer service has helped Konocti Unified with a seamless process for applying for the CEP program. We were already a CEP school, but with LINQ, powered by TITAN’s communication with the Aeries Student Information System, we were able to achieve the highest certification the district has received.

Because of LINQ, powered by TITAN, Konocti Unified received a **100% free paid status, which increased revenue by \$135,000 for the 2018-19 school year.** I highly recommend LINQ, powered by TITAN to other districts that are looking to have the best possible DRCT percentages to qualify for the CEP program.”

Mandy Lopez

Director of Child Nutrition, Konocti Unified School District

Searching for the Right School Nutrition Solution



Not all school nutrition management systems are created equal. Next, let's take a look at some key things to look for during your search.

Your Search Starts Here!

Selecting the right provider that can effectively accommodate your current and growing needs is the ultimate way to gain functionality, efficiencies, and see a maximum return on investment.

Spoiler alert: not all providers are created equally. Here are the best ways to begin your search for a provider and top items to consider (and what to avoid) when choosing school nutrition management software.

Where to Look

In a market rife with options, searching for the right solution can be overwhelming. An internet search can help, but might leave you even more overwhelmed. We recommend taking a deeper dive by consulting K-12 resources with helpful information and support, such as:

- + State and national school nutrition associations
- + Other school districts in your state
- + School nutrition and food service groups and trending conversations on social media (such as LinkedIn)
- + Live or on-demand product demos and webinars from trusted providers

Consulting with other schools or districts that have been in your situation is oftentimes the best way to gain hyper-relevant and actionable insights. It's important to hear others' experiences to get a true picture of a vendor's reputation and what they have to offer, not only during the sales process, but throughout onboarding and long after.

Once you've accomplished that, you can search for product demos with a few of your top choices. Getting a visual of the software will tell you almost everything you need to know about a solution.

What to Look For

K-12 School Experience

First and foremost, you'll want to avoid software providers that weren't designed for K-12 schools. Although they may seem to have similar features, and might even boast a lower price tag, the needs of K-12 nutrition programs are incredibly unique. With ever-changing compliance and regulations to keep in mind, you need a partner whose foundation is built on education and can support your district now and in the future as education continues to evolve.

Air-Tight Cybersecurity

Cybersecurity has always been a huge concern for K-12 schools and is even more prevalent in times during the pandemic with remote learning and additional student data being stored electronically. Although it may seem counterintuitive to throw more of your data into cyberspace, the cloud is more secure than storing data on premise. In addition, it's vital to ensure your provider is protected by encryption between all browsers and that their datacenter meets compliance requirements.

Flexibility

You don't want to be stuck paying for features and functionality you don't plan to use. You might only need a small, out-of-the-box solution. Or, you may have a large district with a complex structure and many customization requirements. Either way, these are great questions to ask as you continue to vet options. Flexibility is important now, so you aren't limited (or over-served) later.

Transparent Pricing

Remember, investing in the right software versus purchasing what seems like the least expensive option will offer your district more value and cost savings in the long run. Here are questions to ask when evaluating pricing structures:

- + Are you able to add more functionality as your budget increases?
- + Are upgrades extra?
- + Are system updates extra?
- + Do you have to pay for an IT consultant to make any updates or help troubleshoot?
- + Are there other hidden fees?

Full Integration

To truly streamline your food service operations from top to bottom and maximize cost savings, you need a solution that allows you to eliminate extraneous hardware and manual processes. Many companies lay claim to the fact that their solution is holistic and works well with other solutions. Unfortunately, this may not always be the case and could end up costing you more money in the long run.

User-Friendliness

Consider your team of users and their technical skills when demoing an interface. Is it intuitive? Is it efficient? Are there any unnecessary or extra steps in the daily processes? Although there will always be a learning curve when switching technologies, food service teams need to be able to do their jobs as quickly and seamlessly as possible. Be sure to ask each provider about training resources to help make for a smoother transition during the onboarding process.

Unlimited On-Demand Support

High-touch, high-quality training and support are vital to the success of a migration to a new school nutrition software. Meeting your staff where they are is key to success. Contextualized, on-demand, self-paced training that is available to your entire staff at any time can be very helpful. In order to gain maximum efficiencies and cost savings, the onboarding process should be specific to your district needs and infrastructure. In the future, when an inevitable issue arises, you'll need a go-to resource or contact that is ultra-responsive. Ask questions about the support process - for both now and in the future. Be sure to ask each provider

about training resources to help make for a smoother transition during the onboarding process.

Last, But Not Least: Features

Now that you've evaluated your district's needs and eliminated options lacking a great reputation with K-12 schools or quality support processes, it's time to look at functionality. Today's cloud-based nutrition management programs are loaded with features to help K-12 districts just like yours serve thousands of students safely and efficiently.

Powerful Technology



POS System

Speed up your lines. Save time training staff. Eliminate the cost of installing software, updates and drivers. Save money on expensive hardware.



SIS Integration

Maximize reimbursements by ensuring students appear at the POS in a timely fashion. Protect students with the up-to-date and accurate information.



Application Processing

Increase participation with online applications submission from any device without a required login. Real time POS integration maximizes your reimbursement claims.



Direct Certification

Save time and increase your reimbursement funding by leveraging powerful algorithms.

What could you save with LINQ's TITAN System?

We have found that the typical large school district **saves an average of \$1.2M* within five years** with the all-in-one TITAN System from LINQ. Want to know how much your district could save by making the switch? Click the button below to find out!

[Calculate my savings!](#)

Contactless Solutions



Online Pre-Ordering

Modernize your operation, shrink your lines and decrease waste by letting your students order ahead of time.



Online Menus

Increase stakeholder trust by ensuring your posted menus are always accurate, while saving time by eliminating manual updating.



Remote Accessibility

Flexible food service creates more opportunities for students to participate and keeps your staff safe.



Touchless Student IDs

Eliminate extra contact with digital student identification.

Reporting & Planning



Production Records

Full integration production allows you to accurately drive inventory and purchasing without any additional work. Save time, reduce costs and increase accuracy.



Financial Accounting

Interacts seamlessly with all Food Service modules to provide accurate, real-time data and financial insights.



Inventory Management

A real time inventory platform reduces costs, saves time and informs action. Always know how much you have, where it is and identify trouble areas.



Menu Planning

Increase accuracy and save time. Eliminates the cumbersome task of making changes and then waiting on reports to run before you can make informed decisions.

Proactive Communication



School Nutrition Website

Keep parents informed on the latest menus, serving locations and more with a custom site.



Family Portal

Increase parental engagement and satisfaction with one unified, real time, accurate access point, instead of sending them to multiple websites.



Customizable Notifications

Easily communicate important program information by email or text from one place to speed up the process.

In addition to robust features, LINQ, powered by TITAN provides the only truly integrated nutrition program that doesn't require any extra purchases (boosting your ROI even further). Plus, we provide so much more than software. From high-touch implementation and training to designated representatives who push for your success, we are there for you every step of the way.

Let's take a look at the next steps and how to ensure you'll get the support you need for a successful migration.

“Transitioning from our old software was faster than expected because LINQ, powered by TITAN’s implementation plan was so smooth. The support team is very receptive, quick reacting and awesome problem solvers.

Just like the team, the system is so responsive! I love working with the TITAN team and highly recommend them for your school district. You will not regret it.”

Tanya Harter

Director of Child Nutrition, Paradise Unified School District



Implementation Planning



When you have an official list of your district's needs, it's time to start working on your implementation plan. Here's what you need to know...

Planning for a Successful Software Implementation

Now that you have a clear understanding of what will work best for your district, consider what you need to make the migration and implementation to a new solution as seamless and pain-free as possible.

First off, it's important that you don't exhaust your budget purchasing a new solution that doesn't include implementation support or proper training for the nutrition team and key staff - view the product purchase, installation, and go-live process as a whole. Get the total cost upfront by having them include items beyond the product in the total conversion cost. This way, you can avoid hidden fees while gaining complete migration support.

Proper implementation will help you get the most out of your investment. If you purchase a mid to enterprise-level product, you get so much more than just the software. You will also get implementation support converting existing data, connecting other interfaces, and training for the platform.

Training is instrumental in the onboarding process and achieving buy-in with the food service team. Whether it's in-person or virtual, make sure training is included in the overall cost so that your launch can go off without a hitch.

LINQ, Powered by TITAN has a unique understanding of the education industry - a number of the company's leadership and associates are prior nutrition or IT directors for K-12 schools.

Our software is built specifically for the needs of school districts regardless of size. You can trust that our team of experts are there to help you now, and anytime you need us in the future.

Let's take a look at the average implementation schedule you might find when adding the LINQ's TITAN school nutrition management software to your program.

Average Implementation Timeline

When districts select LINQ, powered by TITAN for school nutrition program management, our consultants—former food service directors and nutritionists—are with them for the entire implementation phase.

We configure each module and verify the desired process workflow. Here is a high-level preview of our implementation timeline:

Planning and district configuration

District organizes internal staff for planning meetings.

1

Design product modules

District prepares communication plan for families.

2

Launch modules with focus on localized configurations to specific schools & cafeterias

District completes setup with assistance from LINQ.

3

Ongoing training using TITAN Academy

District successfully completes training and post-launch survey.

4

Thorough Training with LINQ, powered by TITAN

Learning how to use a new solution is challenging for mosts, and it's especially tough with the time constraints that come with working in K-12 schools.

At LINQ, powered by TITAN, we provide districts access to TITAN Academy, which is loaded with video resources and quick reference guides.

Our in-depth and on-demand training courses include the following:

- + Learning plans by your district's role
- + Video-based learning
- + Instructor-led training
- + Assignments
- + Knowledge tests
- + Certificate of course completion
- + Quick reference guides
- + Instructional materials
- + Embedded training mode (Cashiers, POS)
- + Regularly scheduled follow-up webinars

When district's invest in the system from LINQ, powered by TITAN, we want to guarantee their success; everyone should enjoy using the system so that it makes their lives a little easier. From parents to cafeteria managers to nutrition directors, LINQ, powered by TITAN is a wholistic solution for districts just like yours.

Conclusion

Selecting the best school nutrition management software for your district takes time and effort, but the benefits and return can make all the difference in the continued success of school meal programs for your district.

An all-in-one nutrition solution not only simplifies food service operations but also reduces costs from inefficient, manual processes, and physical hardware. Treat the nutrition management purchase as a long-term investment by choosing a provider that has the capabilities you need and will be a long-term partner in your success.

[Learn more about what LINQ has to offer your district and the cost savings you could gain today.](#)

About LINQ

LINQ, powered by TITAN, is the nation's fastest-growing K-12 school nutrition software provider, providing fully-integrated cloud solutions that empower food service teams and families with instant access to real-time information.

In times like today, your district needs a reliable and streamlined solution to empower your food service team and increase participation in the nutrition program. With transparent pricing, scalable options, and unlimited support, there are never any unwelcome surprises later. Plus, we manage the infrastructure, security, and backups so you can rest easy knowing you're always in compliance.





Districts that use LINQ save money, time, and achieve faster return on investment. Find out how much you can start saving today.

[Learn more now!](#)