

Willmar Streamlines Cafeteria Operations with Campus Food Service

Willmar Public Schools recognized the need for an efficient way to replace its antiquated cafeteria management processes. The district was already using Infinite Campus® for its student information system (SIS) and it looked to the company to provide an integrated food service solution. As the first Campus Food Service customer in 2003, Willmar helped pioneer the development of the functionality and, six years later, Campus Food Service continues to meet Willmar's ever-changing cafeteria challenges.

All About Integration

After years of using a freestanding DOS system that relied on lunch cards and unreliable sales tracking, Willmar realized the benefits of having a food service solution that was integrated with its student data and able to seamlessly communicate to parents and guardians.

With the ability to download vital data from the SIS to the point-of-sale (POS) monitor, student identification became a routine and reliable part of each sale. Using this information, Willmar's lunch line cashiers are able to accurately determine individual account balances, as well as free and reduced lunch status, without delay or error, as each student passes through the line.

The process is simple: the student or faculty member enters their personal identification number (PIN) into a touchpad and the POS terminal provides the cafeteria employee with photo ID verification along with appropriate meal demographic information. The system records the transaction and the data is sent immediately to the Infinite Campus database.

"We also found other solutions and opportunities with Infinite Campus using the student ID on the POS," said Annette Derouin, director of food and nutrition services. "The high school uses the POS ID for school dances to be sure our students are the ones attending the event. That's been a nice addition."

Real-time Information Available

The immediate transfer of data from the POS to Infinite Campus makes daily account use available to parents and guardians through Campus Portal. Parents are able to monitor their students' diet, account balance and expenditure patterns. Are they skipping meals? Are they overspending for meals?

Derouin comments, "Being integrated was a real 'friendliness' for parents. They can easily monitor their students' lunch accounts. All that information is now on the Campus Portal - the ability to look at their schedule, health history, attendance and also the school meals and lunch balances. We've really had good feedback from this."

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Willmar, Minnesota
4,100 Students

Efficient Cafeteria Operations

Serving breakfast, snacks and lunch to hundreds of students in ten schools five days per week could be a logistical nightmare for any school. Students and staff must be fed quickly and efficiently to insure that everyone is served within the school schedule and that a high standard of customer service is maintained. This service must be provided in a way that is also cost effective. With Campus Food Service POS functionality, two cashiers can process over 750 Willmar student breakfasts in fifteen minutes.

Discussing the new levels of efficiency in Willmar's cafeteria Derouin says, "Before we started breakfast in the classroom, we either had check sheets or cashiers at all the K8 buildings to account for those meals. Now we just put a breakfast bar code on the top of the sheet. When the sheets come back, we give the cashiers fifteen minutes to process 800 kids and they do it. It's a great capability for us."

To accomplish this, the POS terminals use touch screen technology with a self-evident visual data entry screen. As a student or staff member goes through the cafeteria line each enters a PIN into the touchpad and the POS terminal gives the cashier their photo ID, and appropriate account and meal information. Willmar's integrated system records the transaction and the data is immediately recorded in Infinite Campus.

ROI with Campus Food Service

As a separately financed activity, Willmar School's food service must maintain a positive ROI. To do this requires controlling personnel costs, accurate tracking of individual accounts and eliminating waste through effective planning. These requisites for positive ROI are accomplished through the increased efficiency possible through the use of Campus Food Service.

"I can't stress enough the improved accountability for us to manage not only food service, but also the financial side of food service," said Derouin. "I am responsible for maintaining a positive fund balance and making adjustments throughout the year to make sure we're always in the black and operating as a business. I rely on the accurate and real-time data I get from Campus Food Service to manage this complex side of the cafeteria."

Personnel costs are controlled through the integration of Infinite Campus and the IBM SurePOS™ terminals. Line workers and cashiers are able to process customers efficiently. This reduces the need for additional cashier lines, thus improving district ROI.

Free and reduced meals funding is pivotal to the financial well-being of a food service program. The accuracy and ready availability of approved application data drives funding for both food service and general fund income. Willmar is able to receive an application, approve it and provide the student with an appropriately priced meal on the same day.

Regarding the integration of the lunch line and the Campus Free and Reduced Application Management (FRAM), Derouin states, "Our district has a 48.3 free and reduced meals percentage, so applications from half our households are processed and it's critical that the system works the way it should because it drives our funding. Our accuracy and the number of applications which we process are really the key."

Customized Reporting

Crystal Goosman, Willmar Acquisitions, Claims and Accounting Assistant, appreciates the reporting capabilities of Campus Food Service. "There are a lot of reporting options in Infinite Campus. The ability to write ad hoc reports as well as canned reports is a really nice benefit. It helps me do my job better."

Campus Food Service comes with transaction, balance and accounting reports built into the system. Willmar administrators take advantage of the information in the integrated database to create ad hoc and custom reports for federal, state, and district communication.

Nationwide Food Service Support

The Campus Food Service Advisory Committee is represented by people from all over the country. It is encouraging to know that across state lines, federal school guidelines can be discussed as a group with Infinite Campus

As a long-time food service customer, Willmar not only shares problems and the solutions available through Campus Food Service, it works with Infinite Campus to anticipate and address new problems as they arise from such sources as new federal regulations.

"When we come to the food service advisory meetings, it's really encouraging that the food service people at Infinite Campus are listening to customer needs and willing to develop what our operation really needs. To me, that's wonderful," Derouin says. "There is a consensus that we have similar issues. It's great to have a community of users to share ideas."

About Infinite Campus

For more than a decade, Infinite Campus has successfully implemented its solutions for customers of all sizes. Today, Infinite Campus applications manage more than 4 million students in 42 states. Infinite Campus customers range from districts with fewer than 100 students to those with more than 100,000 as well as regional consortia, state departments of education and the federal government.