

# Future Schools

Putting their finger on it



Students in Tolland School District use biometric scanners, the latest in food service technology, to pay for their lunches.



**W**HEN STUDENTS FILE IN FOR LUNCH in Tolland (CT) School District, they are encouraged to give cafeteria staff members the finger—to pay, that is. The point-of-sale (POS) system identifies students by matching their fingerprints to a digital facsimile.

The biometric solution offers the usual advantages of conventional POS systems—faster lunch lines, efficient record keeping, and the option for parents to prepay and monitor what their children are eating. The system, installed by Food Service Solutions of Altoona, Pennsylvania, sidestepped an additional problem: Kids can—and will—lose electronic cards and forget personal ID numbers. In Tolland, once the image of a fingerprint is entered into the system, the student simply places his or her finger on a thumbprint-size scanner when paying for food. The student's name and account number appear on the terminal, and the debit is entered.

The idea of their kids' getting fingerprinted didn't rest easy with parents at first, despite the district's assurance that the process is confidential. "Initially, a few of them got really emotional about it," says Jackie Schipka, director of food service for Tolland. "It was effort on our part to educate parents about the process. [But] we told them, 'We're going to do it. We're not asking for permission. You can opt out of it if you want.'"

Each year, fewer families do opt out. Three years after the district installed the system, only three of the 250 students entering the 2004-05 kindergarten class did not partake in the program. Here's hoping they aren't the forgetful type.

—Jacqueline Heinz

## Tolland (CT) School District

**Number of schools:** Four (one PreK-2, one for grades 3-4, one middle, and one high school)

**Number of students:** 3,124

**What the district did:** Installed POS systems with biometric scanning in all cafeteria lunch lines

**What the system does:** Puts efficient and effective food service at kids' fingertips

**Equipment:** Eight POS stations, nine scanners

**Cost of hardware:** A POS station and a scanner cost about \$1,500 to \$2,000 each.