

Taylor County Schools modernize the lunch

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GRAFTON – Many remember the days when you went through the lunch line and were required to give one of the cooks your student number before you could get your lunch.

Many of the younger generation will recall having an ID card that was necessary to prove who you were. Students in Taylor County Schools soon will have their finger print scanned for their hot lunch.

Every business in today's society is looking for ways to more effectively streamline its process, while at the same time being cost conscious.

Biometric finger scanning is an effort by the Taylor County School System to "provide security for your child's cafeteria account, eliminate clerical errors and provide students an easy way to identify themselves when using the cafeteria."

In a letter sent home to parents earlier in the month, Taylor County School officials proclaimed that, "Biometric identification is an automated method of identifying a person based upon physical or behavioral characteristics." The letter went on to say that, "Our school system has selected identiMetrics biometric finger scanning identification software because it is fast, accurate, cost effective and non-intrusive."

This system is designed to use a finger scanner, to which the included software scans the fingerprint to create and store individual templates of unique points, which identify each student. Parents have been told that, "When the student returns, the software again scans the finger and looks for a match in the data base." The student is thus identified when a match is found.

Although this system sounds a lot like what is used by the government to identify fingerprints in the criminal system, school officials assure parents that such is not the case.

"At no time is a fingerprint image stored. No fingerprints can be recreated, or delivered, to any agency – governmental or otherwise." Parents were also told that, "When your child graduates or is no longer enrolled in the school system, the templates are deleted."

Those parents in objection to having their children's

fingerprints scanned were given the opportunity to opt out of the system by sending written notification to the Director of Child Nutrition Services by November 10.

This system was put into operation on Wednesday, November 16, at Grafton High School. Other schools in the county will be added to the database in the near future. Mary Tucker, Director of Child Nutrition Services for the Taylor County School System, stated after the launch of the new system, "Things have gone very good, much faster than we anticipated."

Tucker wants to remind everyone that she will be working now through the start of the Christmas break to get everyone logged into the system, which is scheduled to "go live" the first day students return from Christmas break.

Tucker has been delighted with everyone's response to the new system and the advancements in the Taylor County School System. "Parents can go on line to make meal payments now," commented Tucker as she discussed such advancements.

She also stated that there was an option this year for families that have the need to fill out an online meal application, to which 44% of those meal applications this year were done on line.



Tucker noted that such a large percentage of those applying and using this tool was fantastic since Taylor County is the seventh largest recipient of free, or reduced, lunches in the state.

In making this change, school officials remind everyone, "Many areas in a school require identification. The most common kinds of identification currently in use are picture ID cards, ID numbers, and, of course, visual identification. Each of these methods creates its own issues and is a drain on the time and resources of IT departments."

They continued their argument for this advancement by stating that, "Cards are regularly forgotten, lost, mutilated and shared; ID numbers are easily forgotten, swapped or stolen. Also, visual identification is a poor solution, especially with today's considerable security concerns and reporting issues. By using biometrics for identification, the problems and costs associated with the current methods can be avoided and new standards of accountability can be put into place."