



Sean Wong, Roosevelt High School principal, and Emi Tajima, an incoming 11th-grader, demonstrated Tuesday the school's biometric ID system, which allows students to pay for lunches with a finger scan. The system, which does not involve fingerprints, uses a scanner that is hooked up to a laptop computer.

Kalani High next in lunch line to go biometric

Students at Roosevelt High School began using a biometric finger scan instead of regular ID cards to get their cafeteria meals last year, and Kalani High School will follow suit and adopt the new identification system this fall.

They are among several local schools whose principals have decided to try the technology, which is supposed to make food service more efficient and accurate. Stevenson, Dole and Central middle schools began using a biometric ID system in the spring semester, and a few other campuses are considering it.

Roosevelt Principal Sean Wong said things went smoothly when the identiMetrics system launched at his school, and it will continue this fall. Parents

were given a chance to opt out of the program, but he said just a handful did so out of a student body of about 1,300.

"It improved the efficiency of our meal service," Wong said. "Our meal count actually went up. It's much more secure, too."

Previously, students who misplaced their school ID cards would head to the school office to get temporary ones, burdening the office staff and slowing things down, or just skip lunch. Now they pay for their meals with a touch of their fingertips.

"It is not a fingerprint," Wong stressed. "I think that was a legitimate concern from parents or the public. That was one of the concerns I had."

“It improved the efficiency of our meal service,” Wong said. “Our meal count actually went up. It’s much more secure, too.”

The technology was developed by identiMetrics, a company based in Jenkins, Pa. Its machines scan a student’s fingertip and capture numerous specific points. Those points are translated into a binary number that is saved in an encrypted database and linked to the student’s school ID number.

No fingerprint is saved and none can be re-created, according to Anne Marie Dunphy, chief financial officer of identiMetrics. Asked about privacy concerns, she said a traditional school ID card has more identifying information, including photos and names. The same goes for yearbooks.

“It’s not fingerprints; we do a finger scan,” Dunphy said. “I think people are really understanding that biometrics protect their privacy rather than infringe on it. When you have a smartphone that has a biometric scanner, it’s to protect your phone.”

Kalani’s principal, Mitchell Otani, introduced the system with a letter in students’ registration packets this summer. It included a tear-off slip allowing parents and guardians to opt out by Aug. 1.

“This system is an effort to provide accurate identification and security for our students’ accounts and ensure that others cannot charge items to your child’s account,” he wrote.

Just as at Roosevelt, students can still use ID cards if they prefer. Wong said Roosevelt also uses biometric IDs to identify students at prom and to check out Chromebooks.

Kalani student Jett Neeley, who will be a senior, hadn’t yet heard about the biometric IDs last week, but thought it might speed up lunch service, which

had some computer problems last year.

“It sounds interesting,” Neeley said. “I don’t have a problem with it.”

The decisions to try the biometric scanners are being made at the school level, not by the state Department of Education. Principals use school funds to buy the system.

A couple of elementary schools that tried the biometric system several years ago eventually dropped it. Waiakea Elementary School on Hawaii island gave it up a few years ago after a leadership change. Palolo Elementary School also used it several years ago but discontinued it after running into problems with errors, a clerk said.

Dunphy, identiMetric’s co-founder, said costs run about \$1,500 for the biometric engine and \$600 for each scan location, with a 20 percent annual fee for licensing and support. She said the company has been offering the service since 2002.

“We have over a million kids scanning in every day across the United States,” she said. “This isn’t cutting-edge anymore. This is something that schools are using to improve efficiency.”

