Use of Point-Of-Service Systems in School Nutrition Programs: Types, Challenges, and Training

OBJECTIVES
To investigate the use of paper-based and electronic Point-of-Service (POS) systems in school nutrition programs (SNPs), including associated challenges, desired skills and training practices for personnel handling POS systems.

RESULTS
A total of 319 (60.9% response rate) provided usable data.

Common POS Software Programs
- NutriSkins (n = 55, 33.4%)
- WebSmart (n = 30, 6.8%)
- Skywave (n = 30, 6.8%)
- Systems Design (n = 20, 6.8%)
- PCS Revenue Control Systems (n = 19, 6.8%)
- PrimeroEdge (n = 14, 4.8%)

Factors Affect Selection
- Availability of technical support by the vendors (n = 321, 75.4%)
- The ease of identifying students (n = 321, 75.4%)
- Ease of training employees (n = 321, 75.4%)

Electronic POS System
- n = 295, 91.8%

Functions
- Generate a summary of meals served (n = 272, 94.5%)
- Manage student account balances and transactions (n = 272, 94.5%)
- Identify an applicant’s eligibility status (n = 272, 94.5%)

Challenges
- Difficulty customizing reports (n = 15, 51.6%)
- Problems with software (n = 12, 7.2%)
- Lack of technical support (n = 14, 4.8%)

Reasons of Use
- Small school district size (n = 26, 87.4%)
- Lack of funding (n = 22, 71.4%)
- Employees’ lack of knowledge and skills to operate an electronic POS system (n = 20, 64.5%)

Paper-Based POS System
- n = 43, 13.5%

Challenges
- Reporting an accurate reimbursable meal count (n = 19, 67.2%)
- Time lag in data processing (n = 22, 64.7%)
- Handling of students’ confidential information (n = 20, 60.6%)

Top Three Desirable Skills for POS System Handlers
- Good customer service skills (n = 197, 55.6%)
- Computer proficiency (n = 164, 51.8%)
- Knowledge about NSLP payment and reimbursement (n = 154, 48.2%)

TRAINING PRACTICES FOR POS HANDLERS

Training providers: District directors (n = 150, 49.5%), POS system providers (n = 123, 38.6%) and another employee who had previously handled the POS system (n = 111, 34.8%)

Training frequency: Newly assigned as cashier (n = 222, 70.9%) or at the beginning of each academic year (n = 164, 52.4%)

Training formats: On-the-job training (n = 286, 89.7%) and off-the-job, standalone training (n = 105, 32.9%)

Length of training: Mostly less than one hour (n = 84, 26.3%) or between one and two hours (n = 84, 26.3%)

CONCLUSIONS
- Electronic POS system improves efficiency of school nutrition operations, yet there are challenges associated with this system.
- Paper-based POS system is less common, but is used by small school districts with limited resources.
- Soft (i.e., customer service) and technical skills (i.e., computer proficiency) are important for employees operating POS systems.

RECOMMENDATIONS

School Nutrition Program Directors May:
- Utilize a form of electronic POS Systems to reduce manual work.
- Contact POS providers for product demonstrations.
- Offer competitive compensation packages to attract and retain qualified individuals.
- Ensure employees handling POS systems receive regular training and are cross-trained.

USDA, State Agencies, ICN, or SNA May:
- Develop a standardized format for districts using paper-based POS system.