

Meet the lunch lady's new best friend

ROME, Georgia (AP) -- It takes more than a lunch lady to run today's public school cafeterias. ⁽¹⁾It takes a logistics(物流管理) expert.

Take Rome's West End Elementary, where two classrooms of students charge(突撃する) into the lunchroom every five minutes, load their trays up with corn dogs, steak nuggets and fresh fruit and pile into (どやどややって来る) cashier Lydia Galego's line.

Galego, though, has a new tool to help handle the rush. Each student stops at a computer in front of Galego and presses an index finger up to a reader before trotting off(小走りで行く) to a table. The student's names flash across Galego's monitor, and each of their prepaid accounts are automatically debited \$1.10.

Colleges and high schools have used fingerprint scanners to stop non-students from sneaking into(忍び込む) dining halls and gyms. Now elementary schools are joining in, hoping that biometric(生物測定の) devices are a good way to keep lines moving and pay for meals. Districts elsewhere in the country use finger scans to dispense(分配する) medicine, take attendance, check out books in the library or ensure that bus-riding students get off at the right stop.

Jay Fry, CEO of biometrics maker identiMetrics Inc., said elementary school districts are one of his company's fastest-growing markets. "Elementary schools had for a long time *shied away from*(-するのを尻込みする) these systems, because of the size of the finger," said Fry, a former middle school principal. But new devices can now identify a child as young as 4.

In Rome, administrators sent letters notifying(通知する) parents of the program, explaining that fingerprints are neither stored by the system -- it analyzes certain points on a finger only -- nor linked to the Internet. Only 35 students opted out(見合わせる).

The scanners -- part of a *pilot program*(実験計画) recently unveiled in Rome's 10 schools -- have cut West End's lunch wait in half. "⁽²⁾They're moving through the lines faster and getting more time to eat," Doyleene Burns, the cafeteria's manager, said above the din(どよめき) of chattering(おしゃべりする) students. "⁽³⁾That's what we're all aiming for -- more time for them to eat."

For her part, Galego is sure not to leave everything to the computers. She surveys each plate, ready to remind students if they've forgotten a fruit or doubled on dessert. Call ⁽⁴⁾it a low-tech safeguard(防護対策) to a high-tech solution.(391)