LINQ PAYMENTS

Do more for your students, budget, and district.

À la carte isn't just an option. It's your most flexible, fastest-growing lever to alleviate fiscal pressure. Students across all income levels buy snacks, drinks, and extras every day.



What high-performing districts already know

Menu design, not family income, drives à la carte purchases. Performance gaps between schools come down to what's offered and how it's priced, not who the students are. Purchase preferences are consistent between students receiving free and reduced-price meals and students paying full price.

5 recommendations to grow your à la carte program

01.

Audit your top 5 items at each school and standardize the proven performers.

02.

Match the size of food options to school level. Mini whole wheat slices for elementary, larger slices for middle school, entrée-style for high school.

03.

Keep popular items affordable with Smart Snacks compliance in mind, so students keep buying them.

04.

Identify your best performing menus by grade level and replicate it for schools without a la carte programs.

05.

Push online account funding and digital payment adoption to make purchases frictionless with low-balance alerts and easily topped up accounts.

$140 to $150+

is what top-performing programs collect per student.

Based on LINQ customer data

Who benefits and how

District

À la carte revenue flows directly to the Nutrition fund, reducing general fund subsidies.

Nutrition services team

A strong à la carte program gives Nutrition Services Directors the ability to manage budget shortfalls, staffing levels, and demonstrate financial performance.

Students

Students get choice, variety, and items they want.
For students who receive free meals, à la carte means healthier snack options at low cost, and a cafeteria experience that doesn't single them out.

What students actually buy by school level

Elementary School	Middle School	High School
Pizza slice (whole wheat, 4"×6"): $1.25–$2.00	Pizza (8-slice): $1.75–$2.75	Cheeseburger: $2.50–$4.00
Baked chips: $0.75–$1.25	Chips (all varieties): $0.75–$1.50	Nachos / loaded items: $2.00–$3.50
Ice cream / fruit bar: $0.75–$1.50	Ice cream / frozen treat: $1.00–$1.75	Chips (premium / larger): $1.25–$2.00
100% juice / water: $0.50–$1.00	Flavored water / sports drink: $1.00–$1.75	Ice cream / gelato: $1.25–$2.50
Rice Krispies-style treat: $0.75–$1.00	Cookie / bakery item: $0.75–$1.25	Bottled water / sports drink: $1.25–$2.00
Average spend per student per year		
$30–$60	$80–$130	$100–$160

Request a demo

Find out how districts like yours are keeping meal accounts funded, lines moving fast, and every family engaged.

Linq.com/payments

Note: Consult your state agency for Healthier US School Challenge (HUSSC) and pricing guidelines. All snacks and food items outlined in this guide meet USDA Smart Snacks in School standards. Price ranges and average student spend figures are derived from analysis of LINQ customers who built successful à la carte programs.