

K-12 Student Information System Buyer's Guide

Find the Right Fit for Your School



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What You Need From an SIS

A student information system is the data core for your school. When you choose an SIS, you make a long-term investment of time, resources, and energy across your institution. And that's how it should be. Your SIS forms the stable architecture from which you derive your school's single source of truth.

Getting Started

We're here to help you cut through the noise and discover what your school needs from an SIS (and what the journey looks like to get there). As you work through this guide, think about how your SIS will eventually impact the objectives and goals of every department at your institution, including:

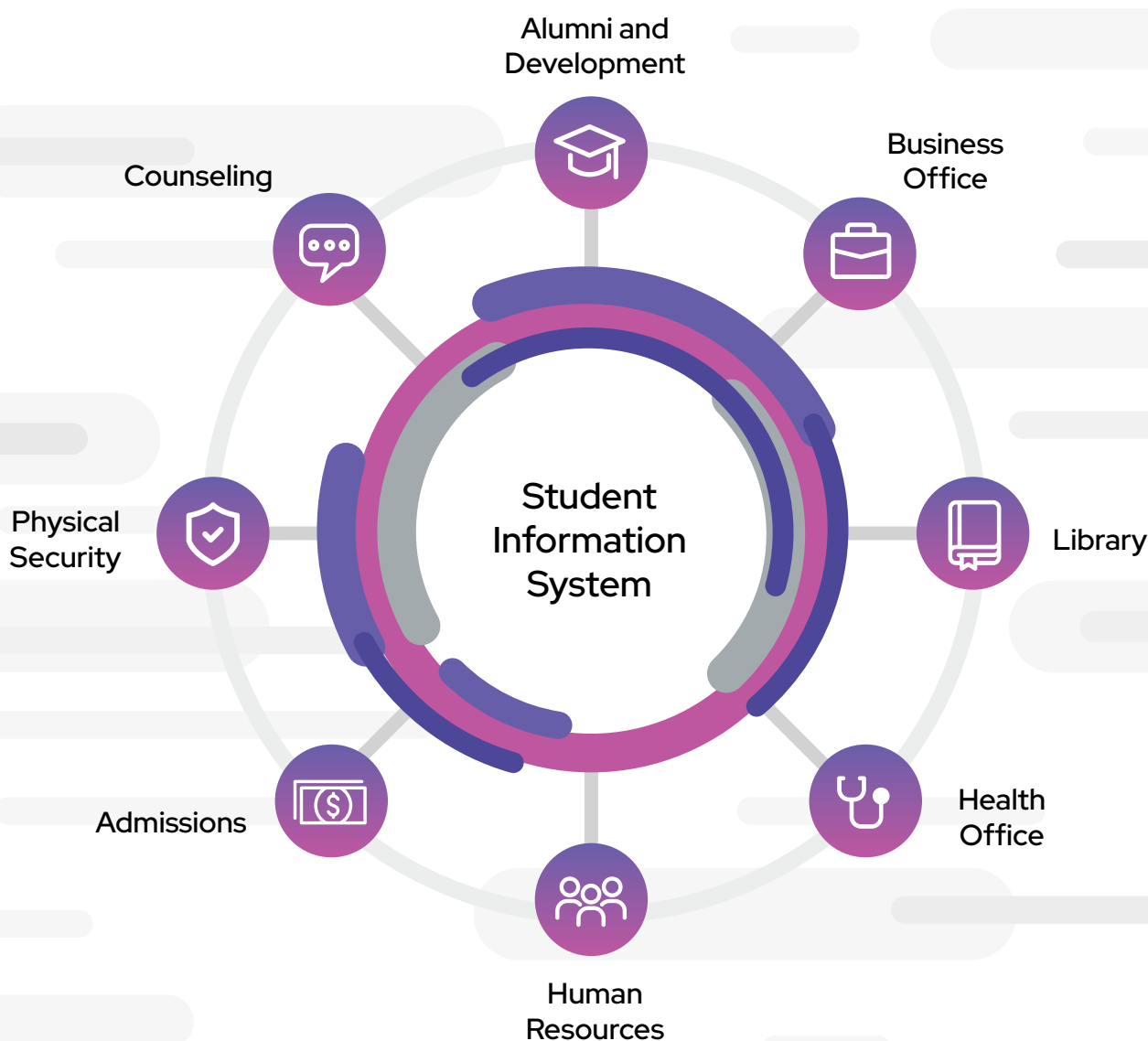
- Five-year enrollment projections
- Year-over-year budget goals
- Student outcomes
- Improved communication metrics to families
- Healthier inquiry pipeline
- Better fundraising appeals and campaigns
- Advanced reporting and transparency across the school

Notes:



A Whole-School Solution

Student information systems interact with and connect all areas and departments of your school. On the next couple of pages, we'll take a closer look at the two most common SIS solution structures.



For more information on FACTS SIS,
visit FACTSmgt.com/SIS



Solution Structure 1: Full Menu

Choosing an SIS can feel like deciding which fast-food restaurant to visit for dinner. Everyone has burgers and fries on the menu, but which has the best? All the menus look the same!

A fully integrated SIS solution is the equivalent of getting one of everything on the menu: a burger, fries, drink, and dessert. A fully integrated SIS menu comes with benefits like:

- A single source of truth for data and reporting
- Ease of use and single sign-on for parents, students, and teachers
- Consolidated onboarding, training, and professional development
- Decreased number of customer support contacts
- Time savings with automated processes and efficient reconciliation

Notes:





Solution Structure 2: The Combo

Sometimes you want to go to three different restaurants for your burger, fries, and drink. The alternative to a fully integrated SIS is a combo solution. The technology infrastructure is designed around software purchased from various providers that is analyzed to give you the best offering in each area. Benefits of this structure include:

- Allows for more experimentation because system upgrades aren't dependent on a single solution.
- Freedom to explore an array of solutions that suit each department
- IT team members can be more specialized because they don't have to support the whole infrastructure
- Possibility for a shorter implementation timeframe with staged onboarding
- Flexibility to make competitive shifts as new software becomes available

Notes:





Features for Everyone

Your student information system affects everyone at your school, so it's important to consider the needs of your administration, teachers, and parents in addition to your school's infrastructure. Before you start shopping for a new SIS, evaluate what features you currently have and what you're missing. We've compiled an extensive list to help you determine your priorities.

Notes:

For Administrators

Student Inquiry

Feature	Have It	Need It
Student and family CRM functionality for prospects		
Customizable student checklist for admissions office personnel		
Standard or customizable online inquiry form		
Data separation between prospective and enrolled students in the SIS		
Track completion of the inquiry process		
Reporting on the number of inquiries by grade		
Ability to add sub-statuses or tracking mechanisms for inquiries		
Admissions event management, including automated RSVP reminders, cancellations, and modifications		
Add individual tasks to prospects with due dates and task management list		



Admissions

Feature	Have It	Need It
Track students applying for school over multiple years		
Provide a customizable online application, including multiple forms		
Allow upload of supporting documentation by parents during the application process		
Provide electronic reference forms for external teachers, coaches, principals, etc.		
Manage an application waiting list		
Allow current families to apply for siblings without an additional set of credentials and automatically bring over family demographic information		
Migrate students from application to enrolled status without requiring re-entry of data		
Admissions event management, including automated RSVP reminders, cancellations, and modifications		
Report application status of prospective students and summarize by grade		



Re-Enrollment

Feature	Have It	Need It
Progress students to the next grade en masse at the end of the school year		
Provide an online re-enrollment process with majority of data pre-populated		
Allow parents to upload updated documentation via an online portal		
Allow current parents to access re-enrollment without having an additional set of credentials		
Allow students to request courses online		
Track completion of the re-enrollment process		
Easily report on retention rate, new enrollments, and statistics in multiple formats		
Admissions event management, including automated RSVP reminders, cancellations, and modifications		
Report application status of prospective students and summarize by grade		



Student Tracking

Feature	Have It	Need It
Track student contact, address, and demographic information		
Track student grade level and enrollment status		
Display student pictures		
Mass upload student pictures		
Record student automobile information		
Record student public school district information		
Record student church affiliation and significant religious dates		
Record student standardized test scores, including mass upload of multiple scores		
Provide custom fields to track any additional school-specific information		
Show student dashboard to see useful information at a glance		
Easily track student behavior, advisor meetings, and community service hours		
Link students to siblings and parents		
Show student dashboard to see useful information at a glance		
Link students to grandparents and emergency contacts		
Provide security-specific electronic student portfolio to house all electronic documents		



Staff Tracking

Feature	Have It	Need It
Track staff member contact, address, title, and department information		
Record degrees, certifications, and continuing education/training		
Track staff HR information (security-specific) such as salary and compensation and behavior events		
Provide custom staff fields		
Manage use of substitutes for absent teachers		
Track user-specific security rights for each faculty and staff member		
Conduct and track staff observations and evaluations		
Provide a security-specific electronic staff portfolio to house all electronic documents and records		

Notes:



Course and Class Information

Feature	Have It	Need It
Record course description that populates into a course catalog		
Record course standards and allow mass upload via import tool		
Record skill sets associated with courses		
Record available course credits and course levels (Standard, AP, Honors)		
Record how course averages are treated on report cards and transcripts		
Assign pre-requisites, co-requisites, and grade level defaults to courses		
Create multiple sections of a class at one time		
Record class instructors, room number, day of week, period number, and terms where the class is offered		
Create classes for sports teams or activities to record student participation		



Communication

Feature	Have It	Need It
Build dynamic group email distribution lists by enrollment status, grade level, class, activity, etc.		
Send emails to parents, students, and staff via point-and-click without looking up email addresses		
Automatically assign email signatures to all outgoing emails		
Automatically send a carbon copy of email to sender		
Easily track email history for user and/or schoolwide correspondence		
Create email newsletter templates that can be shared schoolwide		
Schedule weekly emails to automatically distribute progress reports, excessive absences, missing work, current grades, etc., to parents and other designated staff		



Food and Nutrition Services

Feature	Have It	Need It
Post lunch menu calendars online		
Allow parents to order, view, and pay for lunches and past balances online		
Allow lunch ordering from the classroom		
Provide point-of-sale capability for lunch line for à la carte items		
Provide barcode and fingerprint scanning to identify students purchasing lunch through the lunch line		
Manage free and reduced lunch billing		



Health Management

Feature	Have It	Need It
Record shot records and determine immunization compliancy		
Track doctor, dentist, preferred hospital, and permission to treat information		
Record instructions for scheduled medications		
Track medical conditions and allergies		
Maintain a medical event log		
Allow security-controlled upload of medical documents into students' portfolios		



Behavior Management

Feature	Have It	Need It
Document discipline events, sanctions, and demerits		
Automatically email documented discipline event notices to parents		
Automatically post documented discipline events to a parent portal		
Document parent/teacher conference discussions		
Maintain a medical event log		
Allow security-controlled upload of medical documents into students' portfolios		

Notes:



Elementary and High School Scheduling

Feature	Have It	Need It
Enroll/un-enroll individual students into individual classes (elementary)		
Enroll/un-enroll individual students into a group of classes simultaneously (elementary)		
Develop schedules around specialty classes, i.e. music, art, PE (elementary)		
Allow scheduling for next school year while in the current school year (high school)		
Create a non-conflicting student, staff, and room schedule (high school)		
Support straight five-day, block, rotating block, and weekend class schedules (high school)		
Set prerequisites and grade level restrictions to determine which courses students can request (high school)		
Allow students to request courses online, which drives request-based scheduling (high school)		
Allow multiple scheduling templates to accounts for additional academic programs (high school)		



Report Cards, Transcripts, Class Rank, and Honors

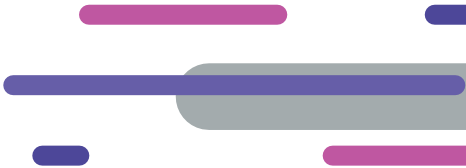
Feature	Have It	Need It
Automatically load term-ending grades from gradebook to report card		
Allow hand entry of term-ending grades		
Automatically calculate semester and final grades		
Automatically load attendance results onto report card		
Allow skill set grading		
Allow entry of comments, comment codes, and citizenship codes onto report cards		
Monitor and report missing report card grades		
Provide free report card templates		
Provide completely customized report cards		
Store historical transcript information for enrolled, withdrawn, and graduated students		
Automatically load report card grades onto transcripts		
Provide free transcript templates		
Provide completely customized transcripts		
Support multiple GPA calculations		
Display GPA, class rank, attendance, and standardized test results		
Calculate class rank and/or honor roll by GPA, UGPA, or average		
Use report card or transcript grades for class rank and honor roll calculation		
Provide flexibility to include or exclude electives		



Reporting

Feature	Have It	Need It
Provide canned, standard reports for each functional area		
Provide ad-hoc query capability		
Provide database exports for external analysis and reporting		

Notes:



For Teachers

Attendance

Feature	Have It	Need It
Take attendance from the classroom and display in real time to administrators and parents		
Allow daily, twice-per-day, and period attendance taking		
Provide flexible attendance codes		
Allow school office to update attendance status based on notes received from parents		
Create seating charts with student pictures		
Take attendance using seating charts		
View attendance by day, week, month, and term		

Notes:



Behavior Management

Feature	Have It	Need It
Create daily lesson plans and associate course objectives that are documented in the course description		
Automatically add homework assignments, documented in the gradebook, to lesson plans		
Automatically post lesson plans to parent portal		
Automatically move lesson plans forward or backward for virtual learning, holidays, etc.		
Share lesson plans among different sections of the class		
Create master lesson plans to reuse on an ongoing basis		
Create assignments with flexible point values and weightings and associate them with any grading category		
Copy assignments from one class gradebook to another		
Assign due dates to homework and in-class assignments		
Create master lesson plans to reuse on an ongoing basis		
Automatically post homework assignments and due dates on the parent portal		



For Parents

Secure Access, School Information, Student Info, and Online Forms

Feature	Have It	Need It
Provide secure SSL logins for parents		
Allow parents to access information on multiple children in the family simultaneously with a single login		
Control which children, parents, or family members have access to view in the case of unique family situations		
Post school announcements and calendar items		
Post picture galleries		
Post lunch menus and allow online lunch ordering		
Post newsletters and other school resources		
Display school and staff directories		
Display student grades and progress reports in real time directly from the teacher gradebook		
Display homework assignments in real time directly from the teacher gradebook		
Display today's homework for all children in a family on a single screen and single report		



Feature	Have It	Need It
Display today's homework for all children in a family on a single screen and single report		
Display teacher lesson plans directly from the teacher gradebook		
Display student attendance items		
Display discipline events		
Display history of medical events		
Display student schedules		
Display report cards		
Display transcripts		
Post surveys online for parents to view and complete		
Provide the re-enrollment process online for parents to complete		
Provide demographic forms online for parents to view and update		
Provide permission slips online for parents to complete		
Provide a screen for updating parent passwords		



For Your Infrastructure

In-Product Integration

Feature	Have It	Need It
Provide all features and functionality in a single, integrated solution		
Data entered into one feature area is immediately available in other areas that use that data		
Immediately display the names of students in teacher gradebooks when they are enrolled in classes		
Immediately display grades and homework assignments in the parent portal when they are entered in teacher's gradebooks		

Cloud-Based Access

Feature	Have It	Need It
Provide access to all administrative, academic, and infrastructural features and areas via cloud-based frontend applications		
Ability for faculty and staff to perform their jobs whether they are at school or working remotely/virtually		
Allow parents to log into parent portal from any device (phone, laptop, tablet, etc.) with internet access		
Entire SIS and parent portal are mobile responsive		



Remote Hosting

Feature	Have It	Need It
Remotely hosted servers house data and provide web access		
Servers are maintained and data is backed up daily		
Disaster recovery of data is available		

Notes:



Support Services

Feature	Have It	Need It
Convert existing data and load into a new database at no extra cost		
Set up software to match operation of school at no extra charge		
Provide initial training onsite or online as requested		
Provide completely customized report cards to display and calculate grades as defined by school		
Provide completely customized transcripts to display and calculate grades and GPAs as defined by school		
Provide custom reports for a fee as defined by school		
Provide online training and documentation of SIS areas and feature sets		
Provide all software upgrades free of charge		
Provide on-demand live phone support for questions and technical issues		
Provide email support		
Provide money-back satisfaction guarantee		



Third-Party Integrations

Feature	Have It	Need It
Integrate with third-party providers using real-time data exchanges or data imports/exports		
Integrate with learning management systems		
Integrate with fundraising software		
Integrate with website content management solutions		
Integrate with IEP software		
Integrate with emergency alert services		
Integrate with accounting packages		
Integrate with providers of managed tuition services		
Provide on-demand live phone support for questions and technical issues		
Provide email support		





What to Expect: Implementation

Upgrading your SIS is a significant investment of financial and people resources. Researching providers, choosing a system, implementation, onboarding, and training all have a resource impact on your institution. It's important to choose an SIS provider who will help you through every step of the process and offer solutions customized to your school's unique needs.

Implementation doesn't stop at prescribed dates and times. You need a provider who offers ongoing support to help your school community adopt your new system. Here are a few stages you can expect during implementation.

1. Kickoff Call
2. Data Collection, Conversion, and Database Setup
3. Milestone and Progress Check-ins
4. Continued Team Training
5. Designated Account Maintenance Team
6. Delayed/Final Data Conversion

Next Steps

Embarking on a journey to find a new student information system requires trust and partnership between a school and provider. Transparency about milestones, expectations, and needs is crucial.

At this point, you've considered which type of solution structure you want, what features you need, and what expectations you should have for the implementation process. But before you sign a contract, it's also necessary to evaluate an SIS provider's values and business practices.

Ask yourself questions like:

- How long has this provider been in the business?
- How many schools does this provider serve?
- What technology and innovation investments does this provider make?
- What type of customer service model does this provider offer?
- What are this provider's data security standards?
- How does this provider's mission align with my school's mission?

Need Help Navigating the Process?

We know choosing an SIS is a big decision. FACTS is here to help. [Our team of experts](#) is available to answer your questions and provide advice relevant to your school's specific needs.

That's why FACTS is trusted by over 12,000 schools. We believe in improving school management through service and technology. And we are committed to helping school communities solve the unique challenges they face.

Ready to take the next step with FACTS?

[Contact our team of experts](#) or [visit our website](#) to learn how we can support your school.