

# IS YOUR SIS OPTIMIZED FOR ONLINE EDUCATION?



**KEY CONSIDERATIONS  
WHEN CHOOSING AN SIS FOR  
YOUR ONLINE NEEDS**



## INTRODUCTION

Online learning has become an increasingly important part of the overall educational experience, accelerated by the worldwide Covid pandemic. Pandemic or not, online learning is here to stay and institutions from K12 to higher education to corporate enterprises are finding ways to deliver the best possible experience for their learners. A critical element of online learning is the Student Information System (SIS), a school management software designed specifically to allow online learners to review course catalogs, register for courses, pay bills and engage with their educational provider. Some SIS' even integrate Learning Management Systems (LMSs), payment gateways and other tools used by programs. Given the growth in online learning, it is no surprise that investment in SIS systems is expected to grow 15% per year through 2028.\*

SIS platforms are an invaluable tool to help any learning institution deliver effective learning. But, there are major differences in SIS requirements for an online environment vs bricks and mortar. In this document, we will discuss the benefits of what a good SIS can do, as well as the features of what a SIS for online education should provide. A good SIS can significantly improve operational efficiency, user experience, student tracking and communication, all in the service of improving online learning. An SIS can significantly improve the managing of student records, enrollments, grades and financial information.



School administrators need a way to efficiently manage this important data to benefit the students and the school. Since SIS is an online platform, it makes it easy to use anywhere, anytime. Importantly, a good SIS can also save countless hours of online learning administration, so educators can focus on what they do best - helping students learn and thrive!



## BENEFITS AND FEATURES OF A GOOD SIS

The list of best-in-class SIS features and benefits is almost endless, but there are some that are crucial to the administration of a good online learning program.



### EASY, CLEAR AND INTUITIVE INTERFACE

Perhaps most importantly, the effectiveness of an SIS relies on users' adoption of the powerful benefits it offers. If an SIS is clunky and difficult to navigate, users will revert to manual, analog operations. Data will be lost, time will be wasted and dissatisfaction will rise. That is why an optimal SIS provides a superior user experience, through the use of dashboards and user-friendly screens, offering comprehensive access to information and an easy data visualization interface.



### BRANDING AND ACCESS

The best SIS platforms can be used by multiple schools or programs under a main entity, with each sub-division having its own branding and access to their data and their students.



### ONLINE ADMISSIONS

Students can create their own account and submit an application to the school, which goes through a customizable approval process until it is accepted.



### REGISTRATION

Students can peruse available courses and the educational staff approves these requests, which turn into enrollments.



### SELF-PACING

If needed, an SIS rolling enrollment feature allows students to have different start dates. Pacing may be defined at the enrollment level to track student progress.



### STUDENT PORTAL

Students can request courses, track their academic progress, view calendar events, access their courses and make payments using their portal. A quality SIS should allow administrators and students to effectively manage the education process.



### ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT

With a good SIS, school staff can track the progress of students enrolled in courses and send emails to students matching some criteria using existing templates or creating new ones. SIS platforms can generate transcripts, report on student activity, enroll students in the appropriate sections of a course, and more.



### STAFF MANAGEMENT

The best SIS platforms also track teacher information, including personal information, utilization levels (to ensure appropriate enrollment numbers), certifications and performance.



## BENEFITS AND FEATURES OF A GOOD SIS continued...



### ACCOUNTING

Good SIS platforms interface with external payment services (Stripe®, PayPal®, Authorize.Net®, etc.) so that students can make online payments, and different amounts can be charged to different student groups.



### APPLICATION INTEGRATION

Application integration lets external applications interface with the SIS. Administrators can also “bulk upload” csv files to create courses, students and sections. Additionally, SIS’s can be integrated with Learning Management Systems (LMS), so that double -entry is eliminated and both systems have access to the same synchronized data. The most comprehensive SISs can be integrated with any LMS and offers an extensive API that lets external applications access and manipulate the data stored by the SIS.



### FLEXIBLE EMAIL AND REPORTING

Teachers and other staff members often need to use email templates when communicating with students, so users dynamically create, edit and use templates in an intuitive, user-friendly interface. A good SIS should fully support HTML templates.

Users should also be able to create their own customized reports using a report builder. SIS systems can access data instantly to build required reports with a few clicks saving precious time. Imagine automating many repetitive tasks by sending dynamic emails to students who match a certain filter based on customized criteria. An SIS should provide a number of existing reports, including completion reports, and users should be able to create and save new reports.



### ADMINISTRATION

The system administration can easily set-up new users, configure their access, track logs, edit school parameters, edit dynamic lists and much more.



### SECURITY AND ACCESS

The system administrator should be able to easily configure the SIS so that only certain users have access to specific pages. For instance, the administrator could specify that only the Finance Director has access to the student financial information, or that only admission reps can view applications.entity, with each sub-division having its own branding and access to their data and their students.



# TRADITIONAL VERSUS ONLINE SIS COMPARISON

	TRADITIONAL SIS	GENIUS SIS
ENROLLMENTS AND PACING	All students start and finish at the same time, and go through the course at the same pace	Each student may have a different start date (rolling enrollment) and can go through the course at a different pace (self-pacing). This requires a more granular tracking of enrollment dates and progress
ADMISSION AND REGISTRATION	Students are typically created by an administrator or registrar, and enrolled automatically in courses based on their grade level	Students may apply online and go through an admission process or get created through an automated integration. Students can also request individual courses and pay for them, which requires a course catalog and integration with eCommerce platforms
STUDENT TYPES	Students are typically full-time within a district	Students can be either full-time or part-time, often outside a single district, and can be grouped dynamically based on similar characteristics and needs using affiliations and flags
STUDENT PERFORMANCE TRACKING	Students' performance is typically tracked through grades	Students' performance is composed of multiple factors, including grades, engagement (activity) and progress in the course (pacing), requiring the use of robust filters and dashboards
COMMUNICATIONS	There is less emphasis on asynchronous communications, since teachers interact with students face-to-face	Communication tools are essential to create a channel between teachers and students, and ensure students are engaged and performing well. Automated messaging can be setup by teachers using dynamic filters to focus on specific audiences, and automated emails keep all stakeholders aware of important events (such as course registration) and concerns (such as student inactivity)
TEACHER PERFORMANCE	Teacher Performance Teachers' performance is harder to assess and often only done after the end of the semester	Teachers' performance can be easily assessed using a variety of metrics, including average grades, overall pacing, completion rates and communication metrics
INTEGRATIONS	Integration with other platforms such as LMS is limited in scope and typically restricted to a single LMS	Schools can use multiple providers at the same time and integrate with their platforms, ensuring data is kept centralized and normalized in one place and making students' access to the platforms easy through Single Sign-On. The integration with LMS is robust and comprehensive, synchronizing classes, users, enrollments and progress (grades, activity)
ACCESS TO DATA	Grades are updated periodically, often requiring manual input from teachers which is labor-intensive and error prone. Data is only shared with stakeholders periodically (such as in weekly progress reports)	Grades are updated continuously based on the LMS gradebook, giving students and parents access to up-to-date grades and progress, and detailed view into individual assignments.
CAPACITY AND ALLOCATION	Teacher allocation to classes is typically done in the beginning of the semester and is static	Given the dynamic nature of online learning, teachers are dynamically assigned to classes and their capacity is constantly tracked to optimize teacher-to-student ratios. Waiting lists can be used to track students who are interested in courses that may be full or unavailable
BRANDING AND HIERARCHY	SIS is typically deployed within a single district or school, and branding is limited	SIS is often deployed across multiple districts or partners, allowing individualized branding and providing a hierarchy of access where authorized users can easily view only a subset of the data or aggregate data across multiple schools / districts (program within a program)
REPORTS	Reporting is often geared towards state requirements, is static and not actionable	Dashboards and reports provide real-time access to all data tracked, and provide actionable insights around performance, activity and trends. Reports and dashboards can be tailored by users based on their needs and provide access to longitudinal data about students and their performance over time
USERS AND ACCESS	Typically have a small number of stakeholders who need to access the SIS	Allows administrators to create and configure as many custom roles as needed, recognizing the different needs and profiles of users who need to engage with the SIS and providing granular management of their access and rights
LEGACY FEATURES	Provide modules that cater to the needs of bricks-and-mortar schools, including locker management, cafeteria and facility management	By focusing on online learning needs, Genius SIS reduces the bloating that comes with over-architected platforms that try to do everything, and focuses on the complexity of operating online programs based on best practices from dozens of successful implementations
CONFIGURATION AND CUSTOMIZATION	Provide a reduced opportunity to change workflows, reports and business rules	Can be tailored to meet each individual program needs, based on business needs and requirements that may evolve over time



## FAQ:

### **Q: Why does your school or institution need a Student Information System (SIS)?**

**A:** A good SIS can significantly improve your organization efficiency and effectiveness. K-12 schools are data-driven when it comes to managing student records, enrollments, grades and financial information. School administrators need a way to efficiently manage this important data to benefit the students and the school, and a SIS provides this service.

### **Q: What if we already have a traditional SIS for our organization?**

#### **Do we also need an SIS for our online courses and instruction?**

**A:** The simple answer is Yes. There are different SIS needs for traditional and online learning. The good news is that a quality online SIS can integrate with existing traditional systems.

### **Q: Do SIS's integrate with LMS's?**

**A:** Good SIS platforms will integrate seamlessly with all major LMS's.

### **Q: Do SIS's have the ability to limit access to specific sensitive information?**

**A:** Yes, SIS's have separate modules for different categories of users. Access and changes to the system are tracked and logged, and should use SSL encryption to ensure data is kept safe.

### **Q: Is an SIS expensive?**

**A:** Some SIS systems can be costly, but often the cost is recovered by efficiency savings from automating tasks that take extensive people hours to complete.

### **Q: How do I choose a good SIS for my organization?**

**A:** Most SIS providers are happy to share a demo of their system. If you schedule a demo, come prepared with a list of questions to ask about your specific SIS needs. A good SIS provider should be able to address your specific situation, either with their core software or through customization.

### **Q: We already have an SIS in place, but it is not meeting all our needs.**

#### **Is it hard to switch to a new SIS provider?**

**A:** This happens quite frequently, especially as many schools needed to accelerate SIS system decisions during the pandemic. A good provider should meet you where you are on your online education journey and integrate their SIS into your current system.



## ABOUT GENIUS

Education is changing rapidly and the management of online education and training systems can be complex. That's why we designed a different kind of software and complemented it with unmatched service. Genius does more than just provide a data-centric, intuitive, user-friendly platform. We integrate learning management and content software so it works together seamlessly. It's the intelligent way to improve learning.



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**Want to learn more? Contact us at [GeniusSIS.com](https://www.geniusclass.com) to learn more about Genius Class, the leading SIS for online education.**