

KNIGHTS NOURISHING KNIGHTS

Powered by alumni volunteers and the Food Bank of Lincoln, the after school Food Market fights stigma, supports families, and helps ensure no Knight has to wonder what’s for dinner

London Lambrecht | *Staff Writer*

A crackle comes over the announcements, snapping students out of the seventh period daze of imagining what their plans are after school. “Students and staff please excuse the interruption: the LSE Food Market will be held after school today from 2:45 p.m.-3:15 p.m....”

Most LPS students have heard this announcement or a similar one time after time again. For some it’s just background noise, for others, it means another meal, and signifies something beyond just a bag of food.

The LSE Food Market, sponsored by the Food Bank of Lincoln, was established shortly after Lincoln High School launched the district’s first food market in 2011. Inspired by that success, LPS social worker Gretchen Baker partnered with former LSE principal Brent Toalson to bring that program to Southeast.

“At that time, only Lincoln High had a Food Market. Mr. Toalson and I went over there and visited it, and luckily he said ‘Yes, we can try this at Southeast,’” Baker said.

Today, the market is run by dedicated volunteers - many of them proud LSE alumni - and is designed to serve Knights with dignity and ease. Participants are able to walk through a line and grab different food items such as cereal, fresh fruit, canned food, ramen, bread and deserts. The only requirements are a student ID* and for a participant to disclose the number of people in their household. There are no checks on income level. Having alumni distribute the food adds a layer of anonymity that can help students feel more comfortable seeking support.

Julie Smith, a previous Lincoln Food Bank board member and head of the LSE Alumni group who serve Food Market, said they aim to remove any barriers or stereotypes that may be associated with food insecurity.

“[For] high school kids, I think there is a stigma about needing something like that. And I think it’s natural that it’s part of their age,” Smith said.

“Being a teenager is hard already,” Baker said. She noted the difficulty of students juggling social lives, homework, jobs, family matters, sports and properly focusing on school, while also hearing their stomachs growl, and wondering “what’s for dinner tonight?”

This is what programs like the Food Market hope to address. According to the Lincoln Food Bank, it costs about \$125 per student each school year, or about \$15 per month, for one student to come through the line. In addition to stipends that are donated by local vendors, the Food Bank is reducing families’ grocery bills, but there may not be enough between this and what a family can obtain.

“I think that it is probably happening more than the typical person realizes. [F]amilies aren’t advertising that they’re in need,” Baker said. “People might be surprised at how many people it impacts, especially if people are losing jobs or have some kind of illness or accident happen. You can get behind really quickly.”

It is not just the LPS families that are affected. Across Nebraska, approximately 287,240 individuals are facing hunger, according to the organization Feeding America, and it would take an estimated \$182 million to meet the current food need in the state.

Additionally, cuts to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the government shutdown have made people more prone to food insecurity.**

“We always have a concern about increased need and [if] are we meeting [the need] and how [we can provide for people’s needs better]. We’re at a point where people are having a hard time just going to the store and getting milk and eggs,” said John Mulbert, Chief Relationship Officer at the Food Bank of Lincoln. “[W]e just need to be there for folks and be there for our neighbors.”

For more than four decades, the Food Bank of Lincoln has worked to combat hunger across 16 counties. In addition to food distribution, the organization offers classes on the effects of poverty and strategies for long-term stability. Community partners, like Matt Talbot Kitchen & Outreach and other local organizations, continue to expand those efforts.

The City of Lincoln is also investing in solutions. Mayor Leirion Gaylor Baird introduced a Local Food System Plan back in 2023, which aims to strengthen food access and address food related issues throughout Lincoln.

“Lincoln’s new Local Food System Plan will position our community to reap the benefits of a thriving local food system,” Baird said. “Supporting local farmers, expanding markets, creating jobs, increasing food security, improving health outcomes, reducing carbon emissions, and instilling a sense of pride in our community.”

LSE and LPS are expected to benefit from a stronger pipeline connecting local food systems directly to students. Combined with Free and Reduced Lunch programs, these initiatives help families save hundreds of dollars each year^.

“We look forward to continuing to show up at Lincoln Southeast,” Mulbert said. “We’re going to continue to find ways to show up and be consistent for [our] neighbors so that they can rely on us when they need us most.”

*The IDs are not tracked and only numbers are given to the LSE Food Bank to see how many students they serve.
**See more on SNAP benefits being cut and how Lincoln responded Dec. 2025 by Baran Safa Dec. 2025 The Power of Lincoln Love on the Clarion website.
^ A traditional high school lunch costs \$2.85 and can be reduced down to \$.40 or free.

MEET THE FACES BEHIND THE LSE FOOD MARKET



GRETCHEN BAKER
“*[Students may] need a little extra help. We don’t question it. They are all welcome.*”



DOUG GANZ
“*My wife, Pam, and I grew up with Julie, and eventually came to Southeast, graduating in 1976. So to be able to help with the food market [is] very meaningful for those of us who grew up around this area and went Southeast.*”



JULIE SMITH
“*We believe every household can benefit from a little extra food support at times. It’s not just about income” Smith said. “[I]t’s about making sure there’s enough for everyone, whether that’s immediate family, neighbors, or friends.*”



EQUAL ACCESS FOR ALL

New ADA Digital Accessibility updates change how teachers present and create online material

Eleanor Spady | *Staff Writer*

Nearly one in three people live with some form of vision difficulty, yet many online school materials remain difficult for them to access. Design choices such as poor color contrast, hard-to-read fonts, unclear links and missing captions can prevent students with vision or hearing disabilities from fully engaging with assignments. For students who are blind, the absence of alt-text can make essential resources completely unusable. As classrooms become increasingly digital, accessible design is critical to ensuring every student has equal access to learning.

Updates to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), announced in April 2024, now require schools across the country to make their online documents and web content accessible to all users. These changes will start going into effect by April of this year, with librarians leading the training efforts to help teachers understand and apply the

new regulations.

These changes will impact those who are visually impaired.

“Blind students will be able to compete at the same time with their sighted colleagues,” said Executive Director of the Nebraska Commission for the Blind Carlos Servan.

At LSE the training for this will start with a representative from each department. Librarian Sara Friest will teach these individuals how to understand and implement these changes using several planning periods in February and March. Then, the representative from each department will teach the rest of their department.

Friest said that there are six main things teachers can focus on when making sure all documents follow the new ADA regulations. These include using clear and descriptive links for text, providing alt-text for images, using clear and descriptive headings, providing video captions, having strong color contrast and a comprehensive and structured reading order.

Services, Chris Haeffner. “Everyone panics when they first learn about it, but eventually as they learn the steps towards updating resources to be compliant, they realize it’s not such an impossible thing to do. It will take time and new learning, and we can do it.”

Several tools are available to help streamline the process, including Grackle Docs. The program scans documents to ensure that headers are in the correct order, verifies that images use alt-text and checks that all links make sense even out of context.

Despite the challenge these changes pose, Friest emphasized that these changes are necessary as they ensure equitable access for students and families. Not only that, but accessible design benefits everyone, not just those with

“**IN LPS WE BELIEVE THAT ALL MEANS ALL. THAT’S NOT JUST A SLOGAN; WE LIVE BY IT AND WE MAKE MANY DECISIONS IN SERVICE TO THAT MOTTO.**

– CHRIS HAEFFNER



The example on the left does not follow ADA compliance. The font is hard to read. The example on the right does follow ADA requirements for accessibility. Graphic made with Canva by: Eleanor Spady

Six Accessibility Needs For ADD

- Descriptive Headlines
- Links to all text
- Alt-text for all images
- Video Captions
- Color Contrast
- Easy to read font

“Sometimes it’s just hard to find a link,” Servan said.

For many educators, the challenge is not understanding the guidelines but finding the time to revise years’ worth of existing materials to meet the new standards.

“Most of us that have taught for a long time have tons of digital materials, and we’re being told that we have to update every single one of them, which is a huge task,” Friest said.

Although this task is considerable, time will be given to teachers to complete it.

“I don’t think anyone expects that everything will be ADA compliant by April of 2026, but we should have changes in place that lead to better habits and practices,” said LPS Director of Library