

# Learning After School

Lincoln Public Schools, Lincoln, Neb.



## PROGRAM

Lincoln Community Learning Centers

## PROGRAM OBJECTIVE

To create partnerships that provide services to support improved student learning and development, stronger families, and healthier neighborhoods

## SCHOOL BOARD PRESIDENT

Kathy Danek

## SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

Barbara Baier  
Doug Evans  
Lillie Larsen  
Don Mayhew  
Keith Prettyman  
Ed Zimmer

## SUPERINTENDENT

Susan Gourley

Life is rarely dull after school in Lincoln, Neb. In any given week, preteen girls discuss boys, self-defense, and growing up female at their “Chicken Soup for Girls” group at Lefler Middle School. A little over two miles away at Elliott Elementary School, students of Middle Eastern descent study Arabic writing so they won’t lose touch with their roots.

These are only two examples of programs operating under the Lincoln Community Learning Centers project. Started in 2001, the program was founded by a school board that views education as a community-wide responsibility. Its many components are founded on shared governance and collaboration.

Lincoln’s initiative began in part to close the district’s achievement gap. Superintendent Susan Gourley said the board’s initiative “brings community partners, neighborhoods, and families together, all focused on helping children succeed academically, socially, and physically.

“The shared sense of ownership, not only for the CLC Initiative, but also for the education of our community’s children, has served to deepen and strengthen the district’s relationship with families, neighborhoods, and community partners,” Gourley said.

Society’s complex needs, combined with a national education agenda that calls for increasing the amount of time students spend learning, make education everyone’s responsibility, according to Lincoln school leaders.

“The increased learning time needed to sustain our nation’s economy must be met by a stronger connection between schools, families and communities,” said Cathie Petsch, co-coordinator for Lincoln Community Learning Centers.

“Schools can’t do it alone,” she said. “As the world continues to become more complex, it is more important than ever to strategically bring together the assets of school, family, and community.”

Lincoln, which enrolls 32,227 students, has followed that model in its new project. School Neighborhood Advisory Committees, formed in neighborhoods surrounding 19 low-income schools, analyze services missing in their areas and create an annual plan to meet those needs.

The leadership council then helps find the resources that ensure the community learning centers can become a fundamental part of the community’s fabric. Serving on the leadership council are school board members, the superintendent, the mayor, the publisher of the local newspaper, and others. Kathy Danek, board president, said the community and school district have backed the project because both “view education as a major player in the economic development of our city.”

“High academic expectations, improved test scores, student achievement, and citizen involvement underscore the value our community places on our school district,” Danek said. “The partnerships within our CLCs broaden public discussion, increase accountability, and strengthen the connections between parents, schools, and the community.”

For more information, contact Cathie Petsch, co-coordinator for Lincoln Community Learning Centers, at (402) 436-1965, or by e-mail at [cpetsch@lps.org](mailto:cpetsch@lps.org). The district’s website is [www.lps.org](http://www.lps.org).



After-school programs give children additional learning opportunities and enrichment.