Pana Pack — Panthers Feeding Panthers

Program Overview, Community Need, Student Leadership, Media Coverage, and Distribution Report

Pana High School | Pana, Illinois
Reporting Period: August 28 – October 16, 2026

Program Background

Pana Pack — Panthers Feeding Panthers is a student-led, community-supported food assistance program established at Pana High School in Pana, Illinois, during the spring of 2026. The program began its regular Friday food distributions on August 28, 2026.

Founded by Jeremy Nihiser, a Family and Consumer Sciences teacher and yearbook adviser at Pana High School, the program developed through classroom discussions with Foods students about food insecurity, the challenges facing families, and the importance of helping others within their community.

What began as a classroom conversation developed into a student-led initiative designed to address food insecurity while providing students with meaningful opportunities to demonstrate leadership, compassion, civic responsibility, and community service.

Mission and Purpose

Pana Pack's mission is to help ensure that Pana High School students and their families have access to food when they need it.

Operating under the motto “Panthers Feeding Panthers,” the program focuses on reducing food insecurity, supporting students and families, and strengthening community connections.

Pana Pack recognizes that food insecurity can affect students' health, well-being, academic performance, and ability to participate fully in school. By providing food assistance in a discreet and accessible manner, the program seeks to remove barriers while preserving students' dignity.

Community Need and Economic Conditions

The importance of Pana Pack is reinforced by economic indicators reported by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) and the U.S. Census Bureau.

Economic Indicator| Reported Rate| Source
Pana High School students classified as low-income| 48%| Illinois State Board of Education

Pana CUSD #8 students classified as low-income| 58%| Illinois State Board of Education
Pana residents living below the federal poverty threshold| 13.3%| U.S. Census Bureau, 2020–2024 ACS
Christian County residents living below the federal poverty threshold| 10.2%| U.S. Census Bureau, 2020–2024 ACS

According to the Illinois State Board of Education figures, 48% of students at Pana High School and 58% of students throughout Pana Community Unit School District #8 are classified as low-income.

Additionally, the U.S. Census Bureau's 2020–2024 American Community Survey estimates that 13.3% of Pana residents live below the federal poverty threshold, compared with approximately 10.2% across Christian County.

These figures measure different populations and use different eligibility criteria. However, together they indicate substantial economic hardship affecting both the community and its schools. Pana's poverty rate is higher than the Christian County average, while the school and district low-income classifications indicate that financial hardship affects a significant proportion of students and families.

Although these statistics do not directly measure food insecurity, they provide important context for understanding the need for programs such as Pana Pack.

Sources:

Illinois State Board of Education — Illinois Report Card:
https://www.illinoisreportcard.com/

U.S. Census Bureau — Pana, Illinois:
https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/panacityillinois/PST045225

Program Operations

Pana Pack collects and distributes shelf-stable food items to students who may need additional food assistance.

Food distributions take place on Fridays after school, helping provide food for weekends when students do not have access to regular school meals.

Students may collect food packs for themselves and, when necessary, additional packs to help support siblings or other family members.

The program emphasizes accessibility, confidentiality, and respect. Students can receive assistance discreetly without publicly identifying themselves as needing help.

Pana Pack operates through existing school resources, student participation, and community donations.

Pana Pack Distribution Report

August 28 – October 16, 2026

Pana Pack began its weekly Friday distributions on August 28, 2026, with an initial inventory of 21 prepared food packs.

The program generally maintains a starting inventory of 21 packs each Friday. Students prepare replacement packs based on the number distributed the previous week, allowing the program to replenish its inventory while tracking weekly demand.

Weekly Food Pack Preparation and Distribution

Distribution Date| Packs Prepared| Packs Taken| Packs Remaining
August 28, 2026| 21| 12| 9
September 4, 2026| 12| 12| 9
September 11, 2026| 12| 15| 6
September 18, 2026| 15| 8| 13
September 25, 2026| 8| 12| 9
October 2, 2026| 12| 3| 18
October 9, 2026| 3| 9| 12
October 16, 2026| 9| 7| 14
Total| 92| 78| 14 currently

Packs prepared includes the initial 21 packs on August 28 and all subsequent replenishment. Remaining inventory is a running balance, not a column to be totaled.

Distribution Summary

- Total food packs prepared: 92
- Total food packs distributed: 78
- Total distribution Fridays: 8
- Average packs distributed weekly: 9.75
- Highest weekly distribution: 15 packs on September 11, 2026
- Lowest weekly distribution: 3 packs on October 2, 2026
- Current prepared inventory: 14 packs

As of October 16, 2026, Pana Pack has prepared 92 food packs and distributed 78 packs over eight consecutive Fridays.

This represents an average distribution of approximately 10 food packs per week.

Weekly Distribution Trend

Date	Packs Distributed	Cumulative Packs Distributed
August 28	12	12
September 4	12	24
September 11	15	39
September 18	8	47
September 25	12	59
October 2	3	62
October 9	9	71
October 16	7	78

Distribution Trends and Observations

During the first eight weeks, Pana Pack distributed between 3 and 15 food packs per Friday.

The highest weekly distribution occurred on September 11, when 15 packs were taken. The lowest occurred on October 2, when 3 packs were taken.

During the first four weeks, 47 packs were distributed, compared with 31 packs during the following four weeks. This represents a decrease of approximately 34% between those two periods.

Weekly distribution has fluctuated rather than showing a consistent upward or downward trend. The available numbers establish how many packs were taken, but they do not establish why demand changed from week to week.

The cumulative figures demonstrate the program's continued distribution of food assistance since its August 28 launch.

The 78 packs distributed represent 78 instances of food-pack assistance, not necessarily 78 different students or families. Because individuals may return in multiple weeks or collect additional packs for family members, the number of unique participants cannot be calculated from distribution totals alone.

Program Impact Through October 16, 2026

During its first eight distribution weeks, Pana Pack has established a consistent Friday food assistance opportunity for students at Pana High School.

Students involved in operating the program have prepared 92 food packs, while 78 packs have been taken for student and family use.

The program has maintained a replenishment process that restores inventory to 21 packs before each weekly distribution. This system allows students to monitor supplies, track usage, and respond to changing weekly distribution levels.

These initial results document both the program's operational activity and the continued use of the food assistance it provides.

Student Leadership and Educational Impact

One of Pana Pack's defining characteristics is its integration of classroom learning with meaningful community service.

Students participate in collecting and organizing food donations, maintaining inventory, preparing food packs, assisting with distribution, and coordinating program activities.

Through these responsibilities, students develop teamwork, communication, leadership, organization, resource management, and problem-solving skills.

The program reinforces Family and Consumer Sciences concepts, including nutrition, food security, family well-being, responsible decision-making, and civic responsibility.

The weekly distribution records also provide opportunities for students to apply mathematics and data analysis. Students can calculate inventory needs, evaluate weekly distribution patterns, monitor supplies, and use actual program data to make decisions.

Rather than simply learning about challenges affecting their community, students actively participate in developing and maintaining a practical response.

Community Support and Partnerships

Pana Pack relies on support from local businesses, churches, community organizations, and individual donors.

Community members can contribute shelf-stable food items or monetary donations that help purchase additional food supplies.

Food donations may be delivered to the Pana High School office, while financial contributions can be directed to the program through the school.

This community-supported approach strengthens relationships among students, families, educators, businesses, and local organizations while providing a direct way for the community to help address food insecurity.

Media Coverage and Public Recognition

Pana Pack received coverage from three identified news organizations during September 2026.

September 14, 2026 — WAND News

Article: “Pana teacher, students start weekly food program for students in need”

WAND News reported on the creation of Pana Pack, highlighting Jeremy Nihiser's involvement, student participation, the program's origins, and its efforts to provide food assistance to students and families.

Article: https://www.wandtv.com/2026/09/14/pana-teacher-students-start-weekly-food-program-students-need/

September 16, 2026 — Taylorville Daily News

Article: “Panther Pack Helps Provide Weekend Food to Pana High School Students”

Reporter: Dylan Clark

The article describes the program's origins, Friday food distributions, student involvement, and the importance of community contributions in sustaining the initiative.

Article: https://www.taylorvilledailynews.com/panther-pack-helps-provide-weekend-food-to-pana-high-school-students/

September 23, 2026 — The Kenbridge-Victoria Dispatch

Article: “Nihiser helps students fight hunger”

Reporter: Jeff Moore
Publication: Kenbridge, Virginia
Volume: 104, Issue 40
Placement: Front page, continued on page 2

Program Significance and Long-Term Vision

Pana Pack demonstrates how a school-based initiative can connect education, student leadership, and community engagement to address a genuine need.

Its significance extends beyond the food distributed each week.

For students receiving assistance, the program provides an additional source of food and support. For students operating the program, it offers hands-on experience in service, organization, leadership, and responsibility.

For the community, Pana Pack creates opportunities for individuals, businesses, churches, and organizations to work together toward a shared purpose.

The program also demonstrates how Family and Consumer Sciences education can extend beyond the classroom, allowing students to apply academic knowledge and practical skills to issues affecting their peers and families.

As the program continues, weekly distribution records can help students identify patterns, monitor inventory, and evaluate the resources needed to sustain food assistance.

Conclusion

Pana Pack began in spring 2026 as a classroom discussion about food insecurity and developed into a student-centered, community-supported food assistance program at Pana High School. Its first regular Friday distribution took place on August 28, 2026.

The program operates in a community where economic hardship is a significant concern. With 48% of Pana High School students and 58% of Pana CUSD #8 students classified as low-income, along with a federally reported poverty rate of 13.3% in Pana, the available statistics underscore the importance of initiatives that help address food insecurity among students and families.

During its first eight weeks of distribution, Pana Pack prepared 92 food packs and distributed 78, averaging nearly 10 packs per Friday. These figures provide an initial measure of the program's activity and demonstrate that students are making regular use of the food assistance available.

Through weekly food distribution, student leadership, community partnerships, and a commitment to helping fellow Panthers, Pana Pack brings together education and service to make a practical difference.

Its recognition by WAND News, Taylorville Daily News, and The Kenbridge-Victoria Dispatch further documents the development of and interest in the initiative and the role students are playing in addressing community needs.

At its core, Pana Pack is built on a simple principle: Panthers Feeding Panthers. It represents the belief that students can make a meaningful difference when education, compassion, and community service come together.