

Editorial Writing

District Meet • 2019



You are a reporter for the Leaguetown **Press**, the student newspaper of Leaguetown High School. From the given information, write an **editorial** as you would for the high school newspaper. Remember that as an editorial writer you should support or oppose **policy or action**; you should not sermonize.

You have
45 minutes.

Do not write your name or the name of your school on this sheet or your entry.

Put your number NOT YOUR NAME on your paper.

Leaguetown High School has 2,400 students enrolled in grades 9-12. This year, three parents requested that their children be allowed to bring an emotional support animal (ESA), often called “comfort animals,” to school to help with anxiety. Two requests were for dogs, and one request was for a rabbit. The school district denied all three requests, citing potential issues with safety and allergies.

According to the Americans with Disabilities Act, a person with a disability can bring a service dog to school if the dog helps expand his or her independence. Schools must permit the dogs to have appropriate access to facilities along with the student. However, the school is not responsible for providing care, food or relief areas for the dog.

However, none of the requests from these three parents were for a certified service animal for a student with a certified disability. All of the dogs had some type of training but were not certified service animals, and the students were not receiving services for a disability under a 504 or special education plan.

After receiving three requests in one year for ESAs, administrators have decided that a written policy for the district is needed regarding comfort animals. Certified service animals are allowed per district policy. A junior who is visually impaired has a service dog with him every day. Two school board members have weighed in and said they believe students should be allowed to have comfort animals if the animals help the students be successful in school.

A committee will study the matter and recommend a plan. Two parents, two community members and four district administrators have been appointed to the committee.

The superintendent has requested a recommendation from the committee by April 15. You are writing for the issue of the Press to be distributed Monday, April 1.

SUPPORTING COMFORT ANIMALS

Several studies have shown that animals, dogs in particular, increase dopamine and other neurochemicals associated with love and bonding. Animals make people feel less depressed and less anxious. Plus, the district already has a policy that allows service animals. Extending that policy to ESAs would be easy and beneficial to students who need the support.

OPPOSING COMFORT ANIMALS

ESAs are not certified like service animals and, apparently, an ESA can be any animal. Last month a woman tried to take a peacock on a plane as a comfort animal. Also, service animals receive 120 hours of training to become certified. No such rigorous program exists for ESAs.

■ BRUCE BANNER, superintendent

"I agree that an animal can help a person who suffers from depression or anxiety, but that doesn't mean we need a school filled with uncertified animals. We have to consider the entire student body. We have more than 50 students at the high school who are allergic to animal dander. What happens to them when they are in a class with five ESA dogs? That is unfair to the student with allergies. Also, we have to think about safety. These animals have not been certified as service animals, and the training varies. We don't want a situation where a student gets bit or hurt by an ESA. Plus, how do we figure out who gets an ESA? Any student could say they are anxious just so they can bring their dog to school.

"The committee will research all of these issues and more before making its recommendation. Frankly, I am biased, which is why we have a committee looking at this issue. Personally, I believe we are coddling our youth too much."

■ NATASHA ROMANOFF, parent

"Almost 20 percent of the U.S. population suffers from anxiety or depression. If we can help our teens who suffer from this without using drugs, why wouldn't we? My son, who graduated three years ago, suffered from depression. We tried all different types of anti-depressants, and finally on the advice of his therapist, we got him a dog. The dog changed everything for him. He even stopped taking his medication. Now, he's just one semester away from graduating with an engineering degree from Texas A&M University. Of course, he has his dog with him at college. I agree we need guidelines on who can bring a therapy animal to school, but if a therapist recommends it, the school should support it."

■ DIANA PRINCE, school counselor who is on the committee

"It's true ESAs can help a person with depression or anxiety, but it's also true that we have a few students who are seriously afraid of animals — especially dogs. This is a hard issue, and there are many sides. As the representative of the high school on the committee, I promise I will consider all points of view."

■ PETER PARKER, junior

"I am highly allergic to animal dander — dogs in particular. If I have a class with a student who gets to bring a dog to school, I will be sneezing and coughing constantly. If the dog touches me, I will break out in hives. Students need to keep their animals at home."

■ ARTHUR CURRY, sophomore

"I'm one of the students who requested an ESA. My ESA is a Golden Retriever named Buggy, and he's been with me for two years. I suffer from anxiety and depression. My dad and little brother were killed in a car accident three years ago. I was in the car, but I survived. My mom got me Buggy after my therapist suggested it, and he's been a lifesaver. The problem is, he's not with me the majority of the day. If I were able to take him to school, then I know I would be a better student. He relaxes me and helps with my anxiety.

"I know people are worried that Buggy would cause problems at school, but he won't. He is trained and doesn't interact with other people unless I give him the command. He's also the gentlest dog I've ever met. I think he might actually help other students, too."

■ ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Southside Independent School District, 50 miles west of Leaguetown, allows students to bring ESAs to school if they have a note from a doctor. SISD currently has 10 students with ESAs — all dogs. They have reported no negative incidents with the animals, according to the superintendent.

DO NOT PASS OUT TO STUDENTS BEFORE OR DURING THE CONTEST

DISTRICT • 2019

EDITORIAL WRITING CONTEST TIPS AND SAMPLE EDITORIALS

Contest Director: Give one copy to each judge to use during critique/judging. Also, staple one copy of the contest and one copy of the contest tips to each student's returned entry. The purpose of the tips is to provide immediate feedback to students. However, it is not meant to replace written comments from the judge.

1. Lead with a statement of the situation and then take a clear, definite staff stance. The situation is about supporting or opposing emotional support animals at school. Do you support this or not?
2. As a general rule, use third person. If you must use a pronoun, use first person plural ("we," meaning "we, the newspaper staff"). Do not use first person singular (I, me, mine) or second person (you). Avoid unnecessary use of pronouns. Rather than "We believe the committee should..." write instead, "The committee should."
3. Don't waddle into the editorial. Get right to the point. Your purpose is to make thoughtful, logical arguments in support of your position, not to engage in a tirade. The editorial should not be long — 450 words at the most. Although it's not recommended all the time, sometimes a writer could use a feature opening to grab the reader's attention.
4. Don't ask rhetorical questions. It is permissible to ask legitimate questions.
5. Look for the future angle. Your paper comes out before the committee makes its recommendation. Make sure you put the time element in the editorial — as high as possible.
6. Once you've stated your stance, the body of the editorial should support your stance and refute the opposing stance.
7. After the body of your editorial, complete it with a solution (call to action).
8. Avoid direct quotes unless the quote adds substantially to the editorial. You can pull information from these quotes, as has been done here, but it's not necessary to attribute that information unless the person has considerable credibility toward the editorial itself.
8. Watch for factual errors. Pay attention to minor details. Stay focused.
9. Don't clutter up the editorial with trite phrases. Also, edit out the name of the school unless it is necessary for clarity. It isn't necessary to say "Leaguetown Independent School District" or "Leaguetown High School." Students know the name of the school. They don't need to be reminded.

SAMPLE EDITORIAL/SUPPORTING

Two facts: 1) Almost 20 percent of the U.S. population suffers from anxiety or depression, and 2) Animals increase dopamine and other neurochemicals, which can make people feel less depressed and less anxious.

These facts should convince the newly-formed committee that will make a recommendation to the superintendent about emotional support animals (ESAs) later this month to support ESAs in schools.

This year, three parents asked that their children be allowed to bring an emotional support animal (ESA), often called “comfort animals,” to school to help with anxiety. Two requests were for dogs, and one request was for a rabbit. The school district denied all three requests.

If a therapist recommends a student have an ESA with him or her at school, then the district should listen. Therapists are trained to know what will help their clients, and schools shouldn't impede that student progress.

Students struggle to learn when they are anxious and depressed. If having an ESA with them decreases that anxiety and depression and allows them to learn, then it seems logical for the district to approve ESAs. After all, the school should create an environment that is conducive for learning.

Plus, the district already has a policy to allow certified service animals in school, so it would not be hard to include ESAs in that policy. Southside Independent School District allows its students to bring ESAs to school. Currently, 10 students have animals in that district, and not a single negative issue has been reported because of the animals.

Those who oppose ESAs talk about students with allergies and fear of animals. A solution would be to keep the students with ESAs in one half of the classroom, and the students with allergies and fears in the other half. Or the ESAs could be allowed only in classrooms with students with no allergies.

If the committee focuses on the facts and not the fears, then its recommendation should be clear — allow ESAs for students who need the help. This is the right choice for the students and the district.

SAMPLE EDITORIAL/OPPOSING

A parent-led initiative to allow emotional support animals (ESAs) in school is drawing concern from students and administration alike. Their concerns are valid.

Following three separate requests for ESAs in one year, the district formed a committee to recommend later this month whether ESAs should be allowed in schools.

The answer is clear: No.

ESAs are not certified service animals. They are there for exactly what their names says — emotional support. If the committee recommends the district allow students to bring ESAs to school, there's nothing to stop students from bringing pet dogs and cats and hamsters along to school because the students say they are having a bad day. Any student could say they have anxiety and bring whatever animal they want to school. This is a slippery slope.

Current district policy allows for certified service animals. ESAs are not certified like service animals, who must receive 120 hours of training. Some ESAs receive special training, but there's not a standard they have to meet.

ESAs also don't have to be dogs. One of the requests this year was for an emotional support rabbit. Just last month a woman tried bringing an emotional support peacock on an airplane. Who's to say that wouldn't happen here? Classroom distractions would be inevitable.

Depression and anxiety are a reality for many students, and research suggests that animals can help with that. But so can counseling and meditation and yoga.

The committee needs to consider the needs and safety of all 2,400 students and not just three. More than 50 students at the school have animal dander allergies. Also, because these animals haven't received proper training, there could be an incident where a student is attacked.

And if this initiative passes, at what point can the district deny a request? It's far too open-ended.

The recommendation to make is clear. Don't allow emotional support animals. School may be a zoo metaphorically. It should not be one literally.



Yippee!! You're the director of the journalism contests. To make your life a little easier...

WE HAVE ENCLOSED:

- The contests
- Judging criteria
- A statement to the judges
- A statement to the contestants
- Contest Tips. (Provides examples of how stories/heads should have been written and a sample story. Clip a copy to each entry to provide immediate feedback.)

NOW, YOU NEED TO:

- Make certain you have read the journalism section of the *UIL Journalism Handbook*. You can download it free from the UIL website at: http://www.uiltexas.org/files/academics/Journalism_Handbook_2018-19.pdf.
- Inventory the contest packet. Hopefully, there won't be any problems. If you find one, please call it to my attention. Call me at work at 512/232-4924, home at 512/740-3463 or e-mail me at jacton@uiltexas.org.
- **READ THE ENCLOSED STATEMENT TO YOUR JUDGES.**
Discuss the judging criteria and clarifications with the judges.
- **Do not give the tips to students.**
- Share the "Tips" with the judges (**BEFORE** they judge) and clip one copy to each contestant's entry **AFTER JUDGING**. Judges should write directly on EVERY student's entry and then attach one copy of the Contest Tips to each entry.
- Thanks and good luck!

Statement to Judges

JOURNALISM CONTEST DIRECTOR

Please copy and distribute the following statement to the judges

1. Divide papers among the judges.
2. Every paper **MUST** be read and edited by at least one judge. *No paper should EVER be returned without written comments.*
3. Every judge does not have to read every paper. Strive for two readings for each paper. A third reading may be necessary for papers that contend for placing in the top six.
4. Avoid sarcasm or unduly harsh criticism. Remember: these are high school students, not professionals.
5. Please review the “Tips” for each contest. This sheet is consistent with the contest manual and what has been taught at conferences.
6. Realize that the UIL style may differ slightly from what you have been taught, what you practice or your newspaper’s style. If you have serious disagreement, please take them up with the UIL office, not the contestants or the meet director. For example, in the news, feature and editorial writing contests, it is not necessary to identify the school, Leaguetown High School. We create this contest as if students attend Leaguetown High School. Therefore, we assume high school students know the name of their school. Also, since AP style constantly changes, watch simply for writers to follow a consistent style. Some students (and newspapers) prefer addressing people with Mr./Mrs./Ms. title on second and subsequent uses.
7. In the Feature Writing contest, students have the freedom to develop scenes as they feel the scenes *may* have existed. The scenes must be a natural extension of the story. Please read “Contest tips” before judging.
8. In the editorial writing contest, students have the freedom to propose solutions or suggest answers they feel might resolve the problem. They do not have to be those proposed on the fact sheet. Also, they are urged to write in third person, but they may use first person plural on occasion.
9. In the headline writing contest: the main deck of a main/secondary headline combination may contain but does not need a verb. For example:

Out of Air

Statement to the Contestants

JOURNALISM CONTEST DIRECTOR

Please read the following statement to contestants

1. Place your number in the upper right hand corner of each page of your entry. Do not put your name or your school's name on any part of the contest entry. If you do, you may be disqualified.
2. Write on one side of the paper only. Write legibly. This is a request, not a requirement.
3. It is suggested that you double space so judges may edit and write comments more extensively on your entry. This is a request, not a requirement.
4. You may use a dictionary and/or a thesaurus (bound or electronic) during News, Editorial, Feature and Headline contest. You may also use an AP stylebook. You may not use a journalism text or other textbook. No resources are allowed during the Copy Editing contest.
5. You may not talk during the contest. If you have a question, raise your hand and the contest monitor will come to you.
6. If you use a computer, you are responsible should it malfunction. You will have the remaining time to complete the contest in longhand, but you will not be given extra time. You must complete the print command before the monitor asks everyone to quit writing. If the computer malfunctions do not make noise trying to fix it. The monitor will ask you to leave if you are causing too much commotion. You may not use a computer in the Headline Writing contest or the Copy Editing contest.
7. Make sure all of your electronic devices (cell phones, ipods, etc.) are turned off. You may be disqualified for disrupting the contest if your devices go off.
8. When you are finished, please turn in your paper and quietly exit.

Good luck.



JUDGING CRITERIA

SPRING MEET JOURNALISM CONTESTS

In an effort to standardize judging procedures statewide, the League office has compiled a list of journalism contest judging guidelines. This list of guidelines will be included in each district and regional contest packet and will be available to State Meet contest judges. It is the responsibility of each journalism contest director to see that all contest judges are familiar with and adhere to these guidelines.

■ HEADLINE WRITING (30 minutes) NEW TIME FOR 2019!

1. Within count. **Note:** All letters, digits, punctuation marks, spaces, grammatical marks count as one (1).
2. Wording specific, accurate; unnecessary wording omitted.
3. Verb needed in main, secondary or both decks. At times, though, a verb is not necessary in both the main and secondary head.
4. Emphasis on active verbs.
5. Past tense avoided.
6. Split phrases (modifiers, verbs) avoided.
7. Redundancy in wording avoided.
8. Does not sacrifice accuracy for creativity or cuteness.
9. Main headlines not dependent on secondary headlines.
10. Secondary headlines emphasize significant aspect of news.
11. Grammar, spelling, punctuation correct.
 - A. It is permissible to use upstyle (ALL CAPS) or downstyle headlines.
 - B. Students need not complete all six headlines to win. It is possible that five good headlines will win over six mediocre ones, or four excellent heads will win over six poor headlines. The final decision rests with the judges, but no contestants shall be disqualified solely on the basis of not completing all six headlines.

■ EDITORIAL WRITING (45 minutes)

1. Introduction presents problem, provides staff stance.
2. Lead grabs reader's attention.
3. Evidence provided to support stance taken.
4. Direct quotes avoided unless absolutely necessary.
5. Writing tight. Wording active, precise.
6. Other viewpoints presented and evidence is shown to refute those viewpoints.
7. Conclusion recaps staff position and contains call to action and/or solution.
8. Third person emphasized, although first person plural may be used occasionally.
9. Editorial tone fair, mature.
10. Secondary consideration given to:
 - A. Grammar
 - B. Spelling
 - C. Neatness

■ FEATURE WRITING (60 minutes)

1. Lead grabs reader's attention and fits mood of story. It is permissible for students to set a scene for the feature prompt. The scene may include details that are not in the prompt.
2. Writing tight. Wording active, precise.
3. Slang, cliches, jargon avoided.
4. Facts presented in logical sequence.
5. Smooth transitions.
6. Quotes, paraphrasing used effectively.
7. Persons identified fully, accurately.
8. Feature theme fully developed.
9. Utilizes time peg (if necessary)
10. Secondary consideration given to:
 - A. Grammar
 - B. Spelling
 - C. Neatness

■ NEWS WRITING (45 minutes)

1. Sound news judgment in lead selection.
2. Facts presented in descending order of importance.
3. Information flows. Smooth transitions.
4. People identified fully, accurately.
5. Quotes, paraphrasing used effectively.
6. Extraneous information omitted; writing tight.
7. Wording active.
8. All news questions answered. Newspaper style incorporated.
9. Editorialization avoided.
10. Secondary consideration given to:
 - A. Grammar
 - B. Spelling
 - C. Neatness

■ STYLE/TITLES

- ✓ Newspaper style includes the option of using titles of Mr./Mrs./Miss/Ms. with names of adults. Students should be identified fully at first mention and by last name thereafter (1st use - senior Jeanne Acton; second and subsequent uses - Acton or Ms. Acton). It is permissible to use first names only on the second reference in feature stories. AP style calls for adults to be identified by full name at first mention, and then with appropriate title and last name thereafter. Be aware of deviations from AP style. If a contestant is consistent in the use of their style, it is not recommended you penalize the contestant for not following strict AP style. We ask that you look for consistency and understandability in the use of a contestant's style.

■ SECONDARY CONSIDERATIONS

- ✓ Journalistic proficiency shall be the standard by which entries are judged. In papers of similar journalistic quality, secondary considerations of grammar, spelling and neatness may be used to determine contest results. The contest does not intend, however, to test grammar or spelling skills, and each entry should be judged on its journalistic merit before other considerations come into play.

■ COPY EDITING (15 minutes) NEW CONTEST FOR 2019

- ✓ A key to the Copy Editing Contest will be included with your material. Part III is graded only to break ties.