

Editorial Writing

Region 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 3,200 students enrolled in grades 9-12. For the past 10 years, the district has allowed students who participate in extracurricular activities a 10-point waiver for advanced placement (AP) classes and pre-AP classes for eligibility purposes under the No-Pass, No-Play law. For example, if a student receives a 66 in AP biology, that student remains eligible for extracurricular activities, including sports. The Texas Education Agency (TEA) calls these waivers “exemptions” and allows districts to exempt students from grade requirements for these classes, regardless of the actual grade.

The district, however, has chosen to limit students to no more than a 10-point waiver. If a student receives a 59 in an AP class, then he or she is ineligible.

So far this year, more than 20 varsity athletes have lost their eligibility for receiving a 59 or below in an AP or Pre-AP course. This month, athletic director Victor Mortenson proposed that the district adopt TEA’s broader exemption policy. Superintendent Yalitza Apericia supports Mortenson’s proposal and has asked the school board to review it.

The Parent-Teacher Association and about 80 percent of the faculty oppose the proposal. The school board will consider the proposal at its next meeting, Thursday, April 18. You are writing for the issue of the Press to be distributed Tuesday, April 16.

SUPPORTING THE PROPOSAL

TEA sets the standards for Texas. The district does not need to be more rigorous than TEA. Some athletes and students involved in extracurricular activities avoid AP courses because they worry about the rigor of the course and losing their eligibility. This proposal would eliminate those concerns.

OPPOSING THE PROPOSAL

The district should not lower standards simply to increase participation in extracurriculars, specifically athletics. Allowing students to fail courses — courses they need to graduate — does not serve in the best interest of students. Students will not receive a “free pass” in college. The district should not give them one now.

■ YALITZA APERICIA, superintendent

“The waiver policy was adopted well before I arrived in the district. Had I been here, I would have counseled the board to follow the state exemption policy. Students who participate in extracurricular activities and athletics should not be held to a higher standard than what TEA sets. Plus, several surrounding districts use the state exemption policy. That disadvantages our teams and competitive activities.

■ YALITZA APERICIA (cont.)

“The majority of our faculty oppose this proposal because they think we are giving some students a free pass. They are wrong. We are giving our students a chance to thrive in the thing they love most. Students still must pass classes to advance to the next grade and graduate. This policy doesn’t change that. What it does change, though, is the chance for a student to participate. Research shows that students who are involved in activities in school stay in school. We should do everything possible to see that they do.”

■ REGINA KINGSTON, senior English teacher

“I was stumped when I heard the superintendent supports this proposal. She always has appeared to support higher standards for our students. Basically, this policy would allow a student who received a 10 in AP English to play football on Friday night. How in the world is that in a student’s best interest? Maybe it’s in the best interest of our football team, but I thought our district put academics first.

“One thing the superintendent and athletic director do have right is that our AP classes would explode. Athletes and students in extracurricular activities would take the courses in droves. Why wouldn’t they? They wouldn’t have to pass them.”

■ VICTOR MORTENSON, athletic director

“This proposal would be a positive step for all competitors. First, it would level the playing field. Five of the seven schools in our district conference use the state exemption policy. Last fall, we lost four starting linemen because they all failed AP English with 50s. That devastated our season.

“Second, it would give our students incentives to take advanced courses. Many of our athletes avoid those courses because they fear failing. This move could increase our numbers in our advanced courses.”

■ GLENN CLOSER, junior

“I missed three football games this season because I got a 59 in AP Biology II. I had a 76 until the last week before grades were due. Then, I bombed a test. My buddy at Southside High School had a 48 in his AP Biology II class and never missed a game. How is that fair? The teachers think athletes will stop trying in AP classes if the proposal passes, but why would we do that? We still need to pass our classes to get our credits to graduate. I am going to college, like most of my teammates. That can’t happen if we don’t graduate. This proposal just cuts us some slack if we have a tough six weeks.”

■ BRANDI COOPER, parent of an athlete and band student

“I can’t believe the board is considering this policy. Our district has always prided itself on its high standards and rigorous curriculum. In fact, we moved here 10 years ago because of the district’s academic reputation. If the board wants to consider a new policy, then it should consider eliminating the 10-point waiver, not expanding it.”

■ ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

TEA states that an activity is deemed an extracurricular activity if any one of the following criteria applies: the activity is competitive; the activity is held in conjunction with another activity that is considered to be extracurricular; the activity is held off campus; the general public is invited; or an admission is charged.

Principal Ladia Gagan declined to comment on the proposal until the board votes.

DO NOT PASS OUT TO STUDENTS BEFORE OR DURING THE CONTEST

REGION • 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 the situation and take a clear, definite staff stance. The situation is about supporting or opposing a proposal to change the grade waiver system. Do you support the proposal 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 board should...", write instead, "The board should."
3. Don't waddle into the editorial. Get 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 generally, sometimes a writer may 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 board meeting.
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 or 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's credibility adds considerable weight.
8. Watch for factual errors. Pay attention to minor details. Stay focused.
9. Don't clutter up the editorial with trite phrases such as "the proposal is stupid" or any variation thereof. Also, edit out the name of the school unless it is necessary for clarity. It is unnecessary 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

Frustrated after 20-plus athletes lost their eligibility due to grades in advanced placement (AP) courses, athletic director Victor Mortenson has proposed a new district policy that would broaden the grade exemption policy for students in extracurricular activities who fall under the No-Pass, No-Play law.

The school board will consider his proposal Thursday, and the decision should be an easy one — give students a break and adopt the proposal.

Mortenson proposed the district use the Texas Education Agency's broader exemption policy for AP and pre-AP classes instead of the district's plan, which states that students who fall below a 60 in an AP or pre-AP class will lose eligibility.

TEA's policy does not have a grade requirement for AP and pre-AP classes to maintain eligibility. In other words, an athlete who receives a 59 for a class won't lose eligibility.

Five of the seven school districts in our conference adhere to the state standards. This proposal isn't a matter of giving students an easy way out. It's a matter of equalizing the competition. With looser grade requirements, those districts can field more athletes, more musicians, more actors, more competitors.

The state standards are in place for a reason. The district shouldn't take it upon itself to create stricter standards for students. The district follows other state standards, like 70 and higher is a passing grade. The district didn't raise the minimum passing grade to be 80. It shouldn't inflate this standard, either.

The proposed policy also would encourage athletes and students in extracurricular activities to take AP courses. Right now, some students shy away from these classes because they know how rigorous they are. If the students knew the state exemption policy was being used, they would be more willing to take a chance and push themselves.

Opponents of Mortenson's proposal say that the district would be giving students a "free pass," but students still need to pass these classes to graduate. There is no free pass.

Extracurricular activities keep students in schools. They help students find their passions. The district should do everything in its power to keep students involved rather than boot them out of their activities. This should be an easy "yes" for the school board.

SAMPLE EDITORIAL/OPPOSING

If it's not broke, don't fix it.

Athletic director Victor Mortenson's proposal to ditch the 10-point waiver policy for advanced placement classes and replace it with the state's exemption policy will lower the standards for students who participate in extracurricular activities.

Essentially, Mortenson wants the district to adopt a policy that would allow a student who receives any failing grade, even a 10, in an AP class to maintain his or her eligibility under the No-Pass, No-Play law. After all, he argues, it's the Texas Education Agency's (TEA) approved policy.

That's a weak argument and the school board shouldn't fall for it when it reviews Mortenson's proposal Thursday. The board should show that rigor and high standards are the No. 1 priority for this district and reject the proposal.

The proposal places athletics and all extracurricular activities over academics. It's no surprise that the proposal came from the athletic department. For them, this is a simple solution for getting more athletes on the field. But simple isn't always right.

The proposal not only allows students to participate in their activities if they fail, but it also almost guarantees a few other messes.

First, students who are failing with a grade lower than a 60 should not participate in activities that take time away from their studies. They need that time to improve their grade, not their physical prowess.

Second, if the board accepts the proposal, then students who are not equipped for AP classes would flock to them. Why not? They can fail them and still maintain their eligibility.

And then there's the problem with credits. Students can recover from a 60. Think about it. If a student gets a 10 for a six weeks, it's pretty hard to bring that grade up to a 70 for the semester or even the year. The current policy gives students an extra incentive to strive for at least a 60.

Mortenson and other supporters of this proposal say the district is disadvantaged because several surrounding districts follow TEA standards. And perhaps they are correct. But that is not a strong enough argument to adopt the policy. Odds are most of the varsity athletes won't go on to play in college, but they will need to get into college — and that's not easy to do if you don't graduate.

While other schools may have an advantage in athletics and other extracurricular activities, they certainly won't have the upper hand on graduation rates and college acceptance. The district has a reputation for academic excellence because of its rigorous standards. The school board has set the bar high. It should keep it there.



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.