

Editorial Writing

State 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 1,200 students enrolled in grades 9-12. Last week, junior Hayden Dean wore a National Rifle Association (NRA) T-shirt with the group's official logo and the words "I study triggnometry" printed on the back. Pictures of various guns, including assault weapons, were under the words. On Dean's way to first period, Principal Pedro Cabera stopped him and told him he needed to change his shirt. When Dean refused, Cabera contacted Dean's parents and suspended Dean for the day. By that afternoon, the local and national media were calling the school for comments about the suspension.

Cabera and Superintendent Becca Pollar explained to the media that the school district dress code prohibits clothing or articles displaying obscenities, suggestive slogans and/or images, nudity, gangs, crime, violence, occult worship, beer/alcohol, tobacco, marijuana or other drug references. They both believed Dean's shirt displayed violence and would have caused a substantial disruption in school.

Howard Dean claims the district violated his son's First Amendment rights. He is demanding that the school board expunge the suspension from his son's record, publicly apologize to his son and allow his son, and any other student, to wear NRA shirts to school.

Several student organizations, including the Student Council and National Honor Society, support Cabera's decision. The school board will discuss the issue at its next board meeting Thursday, May 9. You are writing for an issue of the Press to be distributed Tuesday, May 7.

SUPPORTING THE RIGHT TO WEAR THE SHIRT

It is hard to see how such an image or a play on words would disrupt the educational process or encourage violent activities. It is simply a T-shirt, not a call to action. In the 1969 landmark Supreme Court case *Tinker v. Des Moines*, the court ruled that students do not lose their First Amendment rights to freedom of speech when they step on to school property.

OPPOSING THE RIGHT TO WEAR THE SHIRT

The *Tinker* case does protect First Amendment rights, but it does not give students carte blanche to say or promote whatever they want. In the *Tinker* case, the Supreme Court said if the clothing in question would "materially and substantially interfere" with the operation of the school, the school could prohibit it. This shirt would do that. The images could incite violence. That fact alone gives the principal the right to ban the shirt.

■ HOWARD DEAN, father of Hayden

“The principal and superintendent are incorrect on both of their arguments about the shirt. First, the shirt does not encourage violence. It’s just a funny play on words. Second, in no way did Hayden’s shirt disrupt the school day. Heck, he didn’t even get to class in the shirt, and not a single student said anything to him about his shirt when he arrived at school.

“Frankly, we could have taken a different stance on this situation. We could have lawyered up and sued the school district. Trust me, we had several lawyers knocking on our door, letting us know that we had a great case against the district. But we don’t want to do that. We want to give the school board a chance to make this right. Hayden has never been suspended. In fact, he’s never been sent to the office before. We don’t want this blemish on his record.”

■ BECCA POLLAR, superintendent

“The courts have given schools the power to regulate student appearance if it is deemed vulgar, indecent, obscene, insulting or is likely to encourage inappropriate behavior. We believe ‘triggernometry’ coupled with images of assault weapons is inappropriate. Let’s be honest. Students live in a very different world from the 1970s when I was in school. In 2018, 24 school shootings with injuries or deaths occurred in the United States, and 114 people were killed or injured during those incidents. Schools are no longer the safe havens they once were, but we are doing everything in our power to create that safe haven for our students.

“I appreciate the fact that this incident is allowing us to give our students a lesson on the First Amendment. Free speech isn’t limitless. You can’t yell fire in a crowded theater when there is no fire, and you can’t wear items to school that would incite violence. It’s as simple as that.”

■ PEDRO CABERA, principal

“While students have the right to free speech, it’s our job to teach students that they can’t infringe on someone else’s rights. Since the shootings at Parkland, Florida, and Santa Fe, which is less than an hour from us, our students have expressed anxiety about coming to school. Students are fearful. That T-shirt would have heightened students’ anxiety. The reason I saw Hayden last week was because two teachers told me about the shirt. They were uncomfortable and concerned about school safety. In the Tinker case, the court also noted that the black armbands did not implicate the ‘rights of other students to be secure and to be let alone.’ This shirt, however, would.”

■ CARL COX, sophomore

“After the Santa Fe shooting, I was afraid to come to school. The open discussions and changes in safety after that shooting made me feel much better. I do feel safe here. And I would still feel safe if I saw that student wearing an NRA shirt in our hallways. A shirt can’t hurt me, and I don’t think anyone would feel compelled to bring a gun to school because some shirt showed a picture of a gun.”

■ EDDIE LARSON, junior and editor of the school newspaper

“We need to be careful here. We are talking about freedom of speech. If the administration stifles this, what’s next? I don’t buy that the shirt would have disrupted the school. They banned the shirt because of the pictures of guns. The dress code does not say pictures of weapons cannot be on clothing. What if we want to run a photo of guns to illustrate a story? Can we do that?”

■ ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On May 18, 2018, eight students and two faculty members were killed in the Santa Fe High School shooting. On February 14, 2018, three faculty members and 14 students were killed in the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting in Parkland, Florida.

DO NOT PASS OUT TO STUDENTS BEFORE OR DURING THE CONTEST

STATE • 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 the administration's choice to suspend a student for wearing a T-shirt with pictures of weapons on it. 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 suspension was 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

Administrators and teachers may not have liked the National Rifle Association (NRA) T-shirt that junior Hayden Dean wore to school last week, but that doesn't give them the right to suspend him.

But's that what happened. When Dean refused to change his shirt, which depicted images of various assault weapons along with the words "I study triggernometry," the principal sent him home. Now, Dean's parents want the school to expunge the suspension from Dean's record and change the school's stance on NRA shirts.

When the school board meets on Thursday, it should do just that. It also should thank the Deans for not hiring a roomful of lawyers and making this bad situation also an expensive one for the school district.

Students do not shed their rights — or their shirts — at the schoolhouse gate. In fact, the Supreme Court ruling in the *Tinker vs. Des Moines* case specifically says that. It also says that the administrators can step in only if the item could "substantially" disrupt the school day. Since Dean didn't make it to first period, no one will know if the shirt would have disrupted the day.

The principal and superintendent claim that Dean's shirt would have caused a disruption and could have incited violence in the school, and that gave them the right to ban the shirt. Dean's T-shirt wasn't a disruption. It wasn't a call to violence. The NRA is a national organization, not a terrorist group. Dean did nothing wrong by showing his support for the organization.

The T-shirt also did not violate the dress code. The dress code prohibits clothing displaying obscenities, suggestive slogans and/or images, nudity, gangs, crime, violence, occult worship, beer/alcohol, tobacco, marijuana or other drug references. The NRA shirt doesn't fall under any of these categories. The phrase on the shirt is a play on words, not a call to arms.

Those who support the T-shirt ban say that the atmosphere at school is different now in the wake of school shootings like those at Sante Fe and Parkland high schools. The shirt would make students uncomfortable and heighten anxiety. But the NRA isn't responsible for the deaths of those high school students. Supporting the NRA is not equivalent to supporting mass shootings.

This is a slippery slope. If the administration is quick to penalize a student for wearing a shirt with guns on it, what's to stop them from censoring editorials and other things they don't agree with? The administration needs to understand that students need to learn to deal with uncomfortable situations instead of trying to push away what they don't agree with.

Dean was not a threat, and neither was his shirt. The administration needs to stop being so "triggered" and meet the Dean family's demands.

SAMPLE EDITORIAL/OPPOSING

Columbine. Parkland. Sante Fe.

School shootings, unfortunately, are on the rise. In 2018 alone, 114 people were killed or injured in 24 separate school shooting.

That's the reality students are living in. So, Principal Pedro Cabera suspended junior Hayden Dean for wearing a National Rifle Association T-shirt that displayed various images of guns, including assault rifles, underneath the phrase "I study triggernometry." He made the right choice. The superintendant agreed, and now it's the school board's turn.

Dean's parents are demanding that Cabera expunge the suspension from their son's record and allow him to wear the shirt to school.

When the board meets Thursday, it needs to back its administrators and let the Deans, and every other parent and student, know clothing that violates the dress code and could disrupt the school is not OK.

The courts are on the district's side. While the Tinker vs. Des Moines court case protects students' First Amendment rights, free speech has its limits. The case states if the clothing in question would "materially and substantially interfere" with the school day, the administration can prohibit it. Both the principal and superintendent believe this would have happened, and this is an administrative decision. It's their job.

Let's face it. School is different today. It's no longer the safe haven it once was. This generation of students has grown up practicing lockdown drills and active shooter scenarios. Showing up to school and facing a gunman is a genuine fear many students have. Had Dean worn the shirt to school 10 years ago, maybe it wouldn't have been an issue, but in today's climate, it has a different meaning. Last year, eight students and two faculty members were killed in the Santa Fe High School shooting less than an hour away from Leaguetown.

Even without the Tinker ruling, the shirt violates the district dress code. The dress code prohibits clothing displaying obscenities, suggestive slogans and/or images, nudity, gangs, crime, violence, occult worship, beer/alcohol, tobacco, marijuana or other drug designs. Assault weapons are violent. The words "I study triggernometry" are intentionally incendiary.

Dean's parents say the shirt doesn't promote violence, and maybe it's not a call to arms, but it did make two teachers feel uncomfortable enough to point it out to the principal. And remember, in the Tinker case, the Supreme Court also looked at the rights of others and how they could be affected. Dean's shirt could cause anxiety and fear in other students.

This isn't an easy situation, but the solution is easy. Students need to feel safe while they are at school, and the school needs to do everything in its power to make that happen, including banning shirts that could incite violence.

2019 Editorial Writing CHAMPIONS

1A Champion

TOPS IN TEXAS

Cristina Dyck, Grady High School

A recent dress code violation peaked the interest of national media when junior Hayden Dean was suspended for refusing to change his National Rifle Association (NRA) shirt. The shirt read “I study triggerometry” with several pictures of guns and assault weapons. Dean’s parents have claimed the school violated his First Amendment rights and have asked the school board to clear his record, apologize, and allow the shirt. The board will discuss the situation this Thursday.

The school board doesn’t need to allow students to wear NRA shirts to school, as it is against school dress code and would cause many disruptions.

The school dress code clearly prohibits clothing that display suggestive slogans and/or images, crime and violence. Principal Pedro Cabera was simply enforcing the rules that all students are expected to follow when he suspended Dean for refusing to change.

After several school shootings have taken place, it’s understandable that a shirt like the one Dean wore would cause a disruption throughout the school. Several students and teachers would be concerned for their safety at school if these types of shirts weren’t against dress code.

It’s the school’s job to ensure a safe environment for all students, and with all of the recent shootings, some of which were nearby, it’s more important than ever to protect the students and allow them to feel safe. Allowing students to parade around in shirts with assault weapons all over them is the exact opposite of ensuring a safe environment.

Those who support Dean in wearing the NRA shirt state that the *Tinker v. Des Moines* case ruled that students don’t lose their First Amendment rights on school property. However the case also stated that if the clothing in question would substantially interfere with the operation of the school, the school can rightfully prohibit it. The school isn’t violating Dean’s First Amendment rights. They were simply doing what was in the best intentions of the school and its students.

One possible solution to this situation is to allow the student body and staff to vote on whether or not the NRA shirts should be allowed. This way, everyone gets an opportunity to voice their concern with the shirt if it makes them feel uncomfortable or if they are unbothered.

When reviewing the situation, the school board needs to keep in mind that the students’ safety should come first. Principal Cabera did the right thing when he enforced the dress code, and the school board needs to support his actions.

2A Champion

Catherine Perez, San Isidro High School

After junior Hayden Dean wore a National Rifle Association (NRA) T-shirt with group’s official logo and the words “I study triggerometry” on the back, Principal Pedro Cabera requested he change his shirt. When he refused, Cabera contacted Dean’s parents and suspended him. Shortly after, his father demanded the school lift Dean’s suspension, publicly apologize to his son and allow his son, and other students to wear NRA shirts to school. The board will vote on the issue Thursday.

The shirt promotes violence and infringes other students’ rights. The suspension must stand to ensure students are guaranteed a safe learning environment.

Although the *Tinker* case does protect First Amendment rights, it does not give students an open environment to say or promote whatever they want. In 2018, 24 school shootings with injuries or deaths occurred in the United States, and 114 people were killed or injured during those incidents. Students have to realize free speech is not limitless. Allowing this shirt in school would only encourage violence and insult those affected by these tragedies.

Additionally, in the *Tinker* case, the Supreme Court ruled that if the clothing would “materially and substantially interfere” with the operation of the school, the school had the right to prohibit it. This shirt does that. Two teachers raised complaints about the shirt because they were uncomfortable and concerned about school safety. Some students have said they are afraid to come to school and the shirt would heighten their anxiety. This alone should be reason enough to uphold the suspension.

Moreover, the images on the shirts incite violence. While some have said the weapons and saying on the shirt does not refer to anything other than promoting the organization in a funny way, weapons on a T-shirt only translate to one meaning: violence. This is unacceptable. The district claims they are doing everything in their power to provide a safe haven for students, but allowing shirts like this to remain on campus is a step in the wrong direction.

Proponents of the right to wear the shirt claim the dress code is too broad and does not specifically say pictures of weapons cannot be on clothing. However, dress code strictly prohibits articles of clothing that display violence, gangs or crime. Weapons are directly associated with each of these fields and therefore, does indeed break dress code.

As a solution, the district could only allow students to wear NRA T-shirts if there are no weapons, phrases, other images that suggest

violence or other inappropriate behaviors on them.

The shirt has already been deemed by the school as insulting and encourages inappropriate behavior; there is no reason it should be allowed. Let the board know the suspension must remain in place to provide students with the safe learning environment they deserve.

3A Champion

Blair Phillips, Coleman High School

Junior Hayden Dean was suspended for the day after refusing to change out of his NRA shirt. Dean's father claims the district violated his son's First Amendment rights and has demanded that the school board expunge the suspension, publicly apologize and allow students to wear NRA shirts to school. The school board will discuss the issue at its Thursday meeting.

The school board should not meet Dean's request and should prohibit students from wearing NRA shirts in school.

The school district dress code prohibits clothing or articles displaying obscenities, suggestive slogans and/or images of nudity, gangs, crime, violence, occult worship, beer/alcohol, tobacco, marijuana or other drug references. An NRA logo shirt with the words "I study trigggernometry" with images of various guns and assault weapons directly violates the dress code. The shirt displays violence and is inappropriate school attire.

After recent school shootings, students and teachers have voiced their fear of the possibility of a shooting in their own school. This shirt suggests gun violence, which could have been triggering for some. Two teachers told Principal Cabera about the shirt, voicing their concern. Principal Cabera asked Dean to change out of respect of these teachers and to encourage a safe environment.

There have been 24 school shootings in which 114 people were killed or injured in 2018 alone. This has made gun violence and the NRA a very controversial subject. Allowing students to show their support for the NRA through clothing could raise controversy between students and faculty. To avoid possible issues for the district and educational disruptions, the district should not allow students to wear NRA shirts to school.

The Dean family feels that the suspension has violated Hayden's First Amendment rights, but courts have allowed schools the power to regulate student appearance if deemed obscene or likely to encourage inappropriate behavior. Dean may wear the shirt outside of school as he pleases, but school is not the place for a shirt that is subject to this level of controversy.

Parents and community members should attend Thursday's school board meeting and voice their opinions to ensure the board decides to side with Principal Cabera to ban NRA shirts.

4A Champion

Preslee Quisenberry, Devine High School

After Principal Pedro Cabera sent junior Hayden Dean home for wearing a National Rifle Association (NRA) T-shirt to school, Hayden's father, Howard Dean, is claiming that the district violated his son's First Amendment rights. Howard is demanding that the school board apologize to his son, allow him and other students to wear NRA shirts to school, and expunge the suspension from Hayden's record at the school board meeting May 9.

The school board should support Cabera and Superintendent Becca Pollar's decision to suspend Hayden for the day.

Within the school district dress code, it clearly states that any clothing or articles displaying violence are not allowed. The shirt had numerous guns, including assault weapons, printed on it. Clearly, guns indicate violence. Obviously, Cabera and Pollar were simply following the dress code and just doing their jobs.

The Supreme Court Case Tinker vs. Des Moines did rule that students do not lose their First Amendment right of speech when they come to school, but the case also said that if the clothing would "materially and substantially interfere" with school operations that the school has the power to prohibit it. The bottom line is that free speech is not limitless. Just like somebody can't yell "bomb" at the airport, students cannot wear whatever they want to school. A strong learning environment is supposed to make students feel safe, and if more shirts like the NRA one are allowed, students will become uncomfortable.

With 114 people killed in the United States in 2018 alone because of school shootings, students are already anxious. Schools are no longer a safe place, and with Santa Fe being so close, students are fearful. Allowing T-shirts like Hayden's would constantly remind students of school shootings. Even if Hayden did not have a negative intent in wearing the NRA shirt, it should still not be allowed. School should feel like a safe place.

The school board should stand firm alongside Cabera's decision because he was simply doing his job. The dress code is clear, and Hayden's refusal to change his shirt left Cabera no choice but to suspend him. The reason the local and national media came in the first place is because they know what a sensitive subject guns in schools are: even if they are on a T-shirt. Cabera and Pollar both were doing the right thing when they suspended Hayden. Simply put, the T-Shirt promoting guns would leave students feeling anxious. The dress code already prohibits violent clothing, and freedom of speech is not limited.

For these reasons, the school board should stand firm with Cabera and Pollar's decision to suspend Hayden.

5A Champion

Kelsey Carroll, Lovejoy High School

After junior Hayden Dean received a one-day suspension from principal Pedro Cabera for wearing a National Rifle Association (NRA) T-shirt school last week, the school board will discuss the issue of Dean's right to wear the shirt at its next board meeting Thursday. Dean's father Howard Dean claims the district violated his son's First Amendment rights, and local and national media have called the school asking for comments on the suspension.

The school board should oppose the right to wear the shirt to school, as it poses the risk of inciting violence in the classroom.

In 2018, 24 school shootings with injuries or deaths occurred in the United States with 114 total deaths or injuries. The shootings in Parkland, Florida and Santa Fe High School, on February 14, 2018 and May 18, 2018 respectively, took place less than an hour away from the school. These events left some students with fear and anxiety toward coming to school. A shirt featuring the phrase "I study trigonometry" and various images of guns, including assault rifles, is a step in the opposite direction toward making schools a safe haven for students.

Cabera and superintendent Becca Pollar explained to the media that the school district dress code prohibits clothing or articles displaying obscenities, suggestive slogans or images, nudity, gangs, crime, violence, occult working, alcohol, tobacco, marijuana or other drug references. Dean's shirt displayed violence through its depiction of assault rifles, and for this reason alone should not be allowed on campus.

In the 1969 landmark Supreme Court case *Tinker vs. Des Moines*, the court ruled that students do not lose their First Amendment rights to freedom of speech when they step on to school property. Those supporting the right to wear the shirt say this ruling should allow Dean to wear his NRA T-shirt. However, the Supreme Court said if the clothing in question would "materially and substantially interfere" with the operation of the school, the school should prohibit it. Although the T-shirt in question did not impact learning in the classroom as Dean was stopped on his way to first period, the shirt still held the ability to spark fear among students who felt impacted by school shootings.

If the school board is to allow Dean's T-shirt, the district needs to enforce its teaching on the true meaning of the First Amendment and its restrictions. With the context of school shootings at hand, the First Amendment right to display and say controversial things needs to be further detailed in lessons so that students understand the risks they run depending on their word and clothing choice.

For the benefit of students' mentalities in a post-fear stricken school environment, the school board should vote not to allow T-shirts such as Dean's, as well as to keep Dean's suspension on record.

6A Champion

Alberto Perales, West Brook High School

Last week, junior Hayden Dean was suspended for wearing a National Rifle Association (NRA) shirt that depicted various guns, including assault rifles. Principal Pedro Cabera, who suspended Dean, justified his decision by citing school district dress code that prohibits clothing that displays or promotes violence. Howard Dean, Hayden's father, believes that the school district has violated his son's First Amendment rights and is now demanding that the suspension be reversed, as well as an apology from the district. The school board will decide whether to do so on Thursday, May 9.

The school board should back Cabera's decision and reject any demands for apology.

The most pressing issue is not that Dean wore an NRA shirt; it's the context he wore it in. At a gun range, nobody would bat an eye at a shirt that displayed guns. It is a place where guns are meant to be brought, so it is not disruptive. A school is not a shooting range, it is a place for learning. In the past, this may not have been an issue. In today's world, however, school shootings have become a serious threat to the safety of both students and teachers. The shirt presented the possibility of disruption, and was accordingly dealt with.

There is also the issue of consistency. If the school board allows this to slip by, what basis does it have for its dress code? A student wearing a shirt with cannabis leaves printed on it could argue that it is not promoting substance abuse, but rather displaying his interest in botany. It is not just what is displayed that is disruptive, but what it is commonly associated with as well. Cannabis is used to get high, accordingly, guns are used to shoot things, most often people. If a student wearing a shirt with guns doesn't get suspended, how can the district justify suspending a student wearing a marijuana shirt? The district must stay constant in its rulings, and cannot back down because of the threat of a lawsuit.

The issue of First Amendment rights has been raised many times, but this is heavily misguided. Though the *Tinker vs. Des Moines* case asserted the First Amendment rights of students at school, it still did not remove from schools the power of *in loco parentis*, or to act in place of the parent. Schools still have the power to prohibit clothing that interferes with its operations. In today's context, the shirt could be associated with violence. The school has acted within its jurisdiction. Dean was not obligated to wear the shirt.

This is not about stripping a student of his constitutional rights. It's about ensuring that schools continue to feel safe. With an exponential increase in gun violence at schools nationwide, that feeling is at risk more than ever. The shirt was a threat to that peace, the school district made the right decision.