

Feature Writing

District Meet • 2022



You are a reporter for the Leaguetown **Press**, the student newspaper of Leaguetown High School.

From the given information, write a **feature story** as you would for the high school newspaper. You may use statements attributed to individuals as **direct or indirect quotes**. You may not change the meaning of a statement. You have **one hour**.

Do not write your name or the name of your school on this sheet or your entry. **Put your number on your paper.**

Leaguetown High School has 800 students in grades 9-12. More than a third of the students at the school live in poverty, and that number continues to grow as the pandemic continues. Alena Vega has been the principal for 22 years and was a social studies teacher at the school for 15 years before going into administration. She has lived in Leaguetown all of her life. At the beginning of the school year, Vega met with the school counselors to brainstorm ideas to help students who live in poverty. In October, Vega and her administration began offering take-home family dinners three nights a week for students and backpacks filled with food for the weekend. More than 200 students regularly take advantage of these two programs.

In December, Vega was notified that the school only had enough money to fund the family dinner program through December. Two local churches fund the weekend backpack program. The dinners cost about \$1,000 a week to make for the students.

In December, Vega went to the Walmart in Southside and got a weekend night job. She restocks shelves on Friday and Saturday nights from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. She also works holidays. Vega gives her entire Walmart paycheck to fund the school dinners. If her Walmart paycheck doesn't cover the meals, she writes a personal check to cover the rest.

Vega's secret moonlighting went under the radar until two weeks ago when the school bookkeeper called a local news station to report on what her boss was doing. Last week, two local television news programs ran stories about Vega on their 10 p.m. broadcasts. On Monday, the Southside Walmart store donated \$50,000 to the school to support the dinner program, and the manager kindly asked Vega to resign. Her last day is this Friday, April 1.

You are writing for the issue of the *Press* to be distributed Wednesday, March 30.

■ ALENA VEGA, principal

"I am not sure what to say. I am a little upset with Kathleen Gunter, our bookkeeper, for spilling the beans. I know her heart was in the right place. I guess we've had an excellent outcome with the Walmart donation, but I didn't do this to gain fame or admiration, I did it for the kids.

"I've lived in Leaguetown all my life, and I've never seen this much poverty. We have kids coming to school hungry and leaving school not knowing if they will get another meal that day. That is unacceptable. Plus, it's not conducive for learning. It's pretty hard to study for an algebra test when your stomach is growling.

"I am grateful to Walmart for both giving me a job and for the incredible donation. It will fund the program for the rest of the year and part of next, and I've already had several other businesses contact me about helping for next year. I guess Ms. Gunter knew what was best.

■ ALENA VEGA (cont.)

“I was stunned when the manager asked me to resign. I had never missed a day of work, and I’ve never been fired from a job. I even teared up a bit. That’s when he told me about the donation and knowing who I was. Then, I really started crying and gave that manager the biggest hug. I wasn’t trying to hide my identity, but I also didn’t advertise it.

“I’ll miss working at Walmart. I worked with some great people, but I won’t miss staying up all night. At my age, that’s not an easy thing to do, but it was worth it if we could keep bellies full. My parents were not wealthy, but they always taught me to share what I have. And that’s what I did. I don’t think it’s some great achievement, and I would do it again in a heartbeat.”

■ KATHLEEN GUNTER, school bookkeeper

“When Ms. Vega got the Walmart job, she swore me to secrecy. She didn’t want anyone to ‘make a fuss’ — her words — about the job and her donation. But after three months, I had had enough. Someone needed to know what she was doing for the students at this school. Ms. Vega is the most selfless person I know, and she was wearing herself out. We need her to be 100% recharged for school, and that couldn’t happen with her working two night shifts over the weekend.

“I thought if I shared her story, others might step up and help. I begged her to ask the community for help, but she said they were already doing their part with the backpacks. She said working at Walmart was doing her part. Ms. Vega works about 60-70 hours a week at the school. I don’t know how she managed to work 16 more on the weekends.”

■ NISHA DEPAULI, junior

“When I saw the story on the news, I teared up a bit. Ms. Vega has always been a great principal, but working a second job and donating all of the money — that is mind-blowing. I didn’t know what to say. I take home the school dinners three times a week, and my parents are so grateful. Both of my parents lost their jobs during the pandemic. They are working now, but it’s retail and doesn’t pay much. It’s been a hard two years for them, and those dinners and the backpacks are a huge help.”

■ CASSI TRUITT, sophomore

“Ms. Vega is my hero. It’s such an inspiring story. If I donated my paycheck, I would want everyone to know. But that’s not Ms. Vega. During the pandemic, my dad’s car broke down, and we couldn’t afford to get it fixed. My dad was walking 6 miles to work every day. When Ms. Vega saw him walking to work one day, she gave him a ride. The next day, she had her brother, who is a mechanic, fix my dad’s car for free. Ms. Vega has the kindest, most giving heart. If everyone was as generous as her, our world would be a much better place.”

■ DUDLEY MOORE, Walmart manager

“We had no idea she was the Leaguetown High School principal. I was floored when the news reporter called me and asked for a comment. Donating \$50,000 is the least Walmart can do for Ms. Vega and her community.

“I just wish everyone could have seen Ms. Vega’s face when I asked her to resign. She didn’t know about the news story yet, nor did she know about the donation. She thought she was getting fired — for about two minutes. I didn’t have the heart to keep the ruse going for long. Ms. Vega was an A+ employee, and I would love to keep her, but her school needs her more. She’s proven that.”

DO NOT DISTRIBUTE TO STUDENTS BEFORE OR DURING THE CONTEST!

DISTRICT • 2022 FEATURE WRITING CONTEST TIPS AND SAMPLE STORY

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. Figure out what the story is about and its theme or focus. This story is about the principal who secretly worked a second job to fund a dinner program for the school.

2. The lead of a feature story must grab the reader's attention. It does not have to be a certain length or include the 5Ws and H. It should set a scene and get the reader into the story. Although you have freedom to describe the scene as you think it might have existed, try to stay as close to the prompt as you can. Some judges will not want you to wander off the subject too much.

When the Walmart manager asked Principal Alena Vega earlier this month to resign from her job as a weekend night stocker, she didn't understand.

"I've never been fired from a job," she said. "I even teared up a bit."

That's when the manager decided to call off the prank. He explained she didn't need her second job any more because he was donating \$50,000 to the school.

"Then, I really starting crying and gave that manager the biggest hug," she said.

3. Once you get past the lead, make sure you include a nut graph. It tells the reader what the story is going to be about. Follow the nut graph with a direct quote and then go into the transition/quote formula.

nut graph

Vega started her job at Walmart when a school take-home dinner program she and her administration started in October ran out of funds. She didn't tell anyone except the school bookkeeper about the second job. Vega secretly worked weekends and holidays and then used her paycheck to keep the program running.

direct quote

"I've lived in Leaguetown all my life, and I've never seen this much poverty," Vega said. "We had kids coming to school hungry and leaving school not knowing if they would get another meal that day. That is unacceptable."

4. After you get past the nut graph, the rest of the story can tell itself through the use of the transition/quote formula.

Be sure you attribute after the quote or at least after the first sentence. An attribution should be: subject of attribution followed by the verb of attribution ("Vega said," not "said Vega"). Avoid stacking quotes. Try to avoid putting two or more quotes together without placing some kind of transition between them. Also, make sure transitions provide information to help the action of the story and that the quote does not repeat information in the transition.

transition/story-telling

About 200 students participate in the dinner program, which provides take-home family dinners three nights a week. It costs about \$1,000 a week to fund. Vega donated her Walmart paychecks to the project's account, writing personal checks to cover costs anytime her paychecks weren't enough.

direct quote

"Ms. Vega is the most selfless person I know, and she was wearing herself out," bookkeeper Kathleen Gunter said. "We need her to be 100% recharged for school, and that couldn't happen working two night shifts over the weekend."

transition/story-telling

After several months of watching Vega work the extra 16-hour a week job, Gunter had had enough.

direct quote

"She didn't want anybody to 'make a fuss' — her words— about the job and her donation," Gunter said. "Someone needed to know what she was doing for the students at this school."

5. Always use third person. Don't say "our principal" or "our own Ms. Vega." Also, do not editorialize. For instance, you should not say "Vega is the best." These statements are personal opinions and should not be made in a feature story.

6. Always use the verb "said" as the verb of attribution. Don't say "says," "stated," "feels" or any other synonym for "said."

7. Finally, look for a strong quote to use as a closing statement or a statement that will bring the reader back to the beginning of the story. It should give the reader a sense of satisfaction or resolution.

Vega said she will miss working at Walmart, but she won't miss staying up all night.

"My parents were not wealthy, but they always taught me to share what I have," Vega said. "That's what I did, and I would do it again in a heartbeat."

SAMPLE STORY

When the Walmart manager asked Principal Alena Vega earlier this month to resign from her job as a weekend night stocker, she didn't understand.

"I've never been fired from a job," she said. "I even teared up a bit."

That's when the manager decided to call off the prank. He explained she didn't need her second job any more because he was donating \$50,000 to the school.

"Then, I really starting crying and gave that manager the biggest hug," she said.

Vega will wrap up her Walmart career as a weekend night stocker on Friday — a job she started last December to make extra money — extra money that wasn't for her. It was for the school, her students and her community.

Vega started her job at Walmart when a school take-home dinner program she and her administration started in October ran out of funds. She didn't tell anyone except the school bookkeeper about the second job. Vega worked weekends and holidays and then used her paycheck to keep the program running.

"I've lived in Leaguetown all my life, and I've never seen this much poverty," Vega said. "We had kids coming to school hungry and leaving school not knowing if they would get another meal that day. That is unacceptable."

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"Ms. Vega is the most selfless person I know, and she was wearing herself out," bookkeeper Kathleen Gunter said. "We need her to be 100% recharged for school, and that couldn't happen working two night shifts over the weekend."

After several months of watching Vega work the extra 16-hour a week job, Gunter had had enough.

"She didn't want anybody to 'make a fuss' — her words— about the job and her donation," Gunter said. "Someone needed to know what she was doing for the students at this school."

After Gunter called the local news station to report what her boss was doing, two local news stations ran stories about Vega on the 10 p.m. news.

"I am a little upset with Kathleen Gunter for spilling the beans," Vega said. "I guess we had an excellent outcome with the Walmart donation, but I didn't do this to gain notoriety or anything. I did it for the kids."

Vega said she is grateful to Walmart for the job and the "incredible" donation.

"The donation will fund the program for the rest of the year and part of next, and I've already had several other businesses contact me about helping for next year," she said.

Junior Nisha Depauli said she participates in the dinner program and in the weekend food backpack program, which Vega also started this year.

"Both of my parents lost their jobs during the pandemic," she said. "It's been a hard two years for them, and those dinners and the backpacks are a huge help."

Walmart store manager Dudley Moore said he had no idea Vega was the Leaguetown High School principal.

"Ms. Vega was an A+ employee, and I would love to keep her, but her school needs her more," he said. "She's proven that."

Vega said she will miss working at Walmart, but she won't miss staying up all night.

"My parents were not wealthy, but they always taught me to share what I have," Vega said. "That's what I did, and I would do it again in a heartbeat."