

News Writing

Invitational A Meet • 2024



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

From the given information, write a **news 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 **45 minutes**.

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 1,431 students enrolled in grades 9-12. District and school staff are paid regularly on a biweekly schedule, receiving checks or deposits on the first and the 15th of every month or the Friday prior if the district has a holiday. On Jan. 12, the Friday before Martin Luther King Day, administrators, teachers and staff discovered that the district had not deposited their regular pay checks into their bank accounts. Staff members who typically receive printed checks did not receive payment either.

The district received dozens of emails and phone calls from concerned staff. Superintendent Shawn Hiergarten sent an email to staff apologizing for the delay in payment. Several members of the business staff had been busy processing new hires for the spring semester and another was out with an illness through much of December, causing a backup and a delay in processing payroll.

One group of high school teachers is circulating a petition among high school, middle school and elementary teachers, which has 120 signatures so far, asking the district for a spring bonus of \$1,000 to make up for the hardships endured throughout the payment delay.

After waiting 10 days to be paid, Hiergarten announced that district employees will receive full payment owed from the last pay period Tuesday, Jan. 23. You are writing for the issue of the press to be distributed that day.

■ SHAWN HIERGARTEN, superintendent

“It is unfortunate that the staff has experienced a delay in receiving their regular payments. We understand that when you sign a contract and you sign up to do a job, you expect to be paid for that work.

“Educating young people is not easy, and we apologize for the inconvenience this mistake has caused the Leaguetown family. This summer, we raised pay for teachers across the board and for many administrators and other staff, as well. I hope our valued staff members are able to remember that this district cares about them, despite this error.

“At this time, we are working on a new process for automating our payroll system to prevent a problem like this from occurring ever again. I understand that there is a petition going around where staff members are asking the district for extra money. If the district had any extra money laying around, I can promise you it would go directly to teachers and staff. Unfortunately, we just don’t have it available at this time. I wish we could do that. I wish we could give our staff everything they’re asking for. We just can’t.”

■ **ROBYN DENENA, physics teacher**

“When I checked my bank account on pay day, I panicked. I couldn’t believe what I was seeing. This is an embarrassing topic to share with others, but as a second-year teacher, I basically live paycheck-to-paycheck. Having to wait 10 days for one of my paychecks was not just an inconvenience, it was painful for me. I was already behind on one credit card payment after buying Christmas presents for family and having a holiday party for my students. I actually had to call my mom in Dallas and ask her to buy me groceries last week so I could pay my rent.

“I started the petition with a few of my teacher friends who struggled as well. I know it may not go anywhere because the district has had so many financial problems, but we had to ask for something. We had to take some type of action.

“I love my students, but it was so hard to come to school for those 10 days for free, wondering when I would ever see that money.”

■ **WES SCANLAN, French teacher**

“I’ve been teaching here for 18 years, and I’ve never seen anything like this. Luckily, I don’t have kids. I’ve saved enough money every month in case of emergencies, but I know many of my colleagues have been struggling with this. There’s a lot of anger among the staff. I hope it doesn’t run people off.”

■ **PENELOPE CHANDLER, director of human resources**

“It is absolutely unacceptable that this payroll error was made. Believe me when I tell you that we are doing everything we can to get our teachers and staff the money they are owed as quickly as possible. We gave teachers the raise last summer to try and keep them in the district. We respect our employees so much. Now I’m worried we’ll be back to another teacher shortage because they won’t want to put up with this type of thing.”

■ **BRANDON McMANUS, sophomore**

“It sucks that teachers didn’t get paid, but I’m really impressed that they kept coming to school and doing the work. I’m not sure I could do it. I did actually have one teacher who took off all last week. I’m not sure what he was doing – if he was on vacation or if he was skipping work in protest, but if he was protesting, I wouldn’t blame him.”

■ **ALLISON STONE, senior**

“I have wanted to be an elementary school teacher for as long as I can remember. I’m highly involved in the Texas Association of Future Educators. After this incident and listening to so many of my teachers talk about how they are struggling to pay rent this week, I’m wondering whether this will be a good career for me. I respect all my teachers so much. They don’t deserve this. I think the district knows they made a huge mistake, but I can’t believe they can’t do anything else to make it right.”

■ **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

Last summer, the district gave teachers and support staff a 5% raise for all experience levels and a 7% raise for all administrators.

DO NOT DISTRIBUTE TO STUDENTS BEFORE OR DURING THE CONTEST!

Invitational A • 2024 News Writing Contest Tips and Sample Story

Contest Director: Give one copy to each judge to use during critiquing/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. Open with a future lead under the present circumstances. In this instance, the story will be published the same day staff members will receive their paychecks after a delay.

After a week of working without wages, district employees will receive their full paychecks today, Superintendent Shawn Hiergarten said.

The business department delayed payroll processing because it was understaffed and overwhelmed with onboarding new hires. This deprived staff, teachers and administrators of their regular paychecks Jan. 12.

2. Use direct quotes and use those quotes early in the story. After you introduce quotes, use the transition/quote formula. Be sure you attribute the quote. An attribution should be: subject of attribution followed by the verb of attribution ("Hiergarten said," not "said Hiergarten.") Avoid stacking quotes. Avoid putting two or more quotes from different people together without placing a transition between them. Also, make sure transitions provide information to help the action of the story, and the quote does not repeat information revealed in the transition.

transition

One group of teachers launched a petition requesting the district pay employees a \$1,000 spring bonus to make up for hardships the delay caused. The petition has received 270 signatures as of this morning.

direct quote

"If the district had any extra money laying around, I can promise you it would go directly to teachers and staff," Hiergarten said. "Unfortunately, we just don't have it available at this time. I wish we could do that. I wish we could give our staff everything they're asking for. We just can't."

transition

Physics teacher Robyn Denena, one of the teachers who initiated the petition, said she lives paycheck-to-paycheck and the delay forced her to choose between buying groceries and paying rent. She had to call her mother to finance her groceries, she said.

direct quote

"Having to wait 10 days for one of my paychecks was not just an inconvenience, it was painful for me," Denena said. "I love my students, but it was so hard to come

to school for those 10 days for free, wondering when I would ever see that money.”

3. Use third person. Don't say “our students” or “our principal” or “Some of our students.” Also, do not editorialize. For instance, you should not say “This idea probably won't work...” or “The district should ...” without attributing that quote to someone. These statements are personal opinions and cannot be made in a news story.

4. Note how in the earlier example of transition/quote, each quote is its own paragraph. Journalistic writing consists mostly of one- and two-sentence paragraphs.

SAMPLE STORY

After a week of working without wages, district employees will receive their full paychecks today, Superintendent Shawn Hiergarten said.

The business department delayed payroll processing because it was understaffed and overwhelmed with onboarding new hires. This deprived staff, teachers and administrators of their regular paychecks Jan. 12.

“Educating young people is not easy, and we apologize for the inconvenience this mistake has caused the Leaguetown family,” Hiergarten said. “At this time, we are working on a new process for automating our payroll system to prevent a problem like this from occurring ever again.”

One group of teachers launched a petition requesting the district pay employees a \$1,000 spring bonus to make up for hardships the delay caused. The petition has received 270 signatures as of this morning.

“If the district had any extra money laying around, I can promise you it would go directly to teachers and staff,” Hiergarten said. “Unfortunately, we just don’t have it available at this time. I wish we could do that. I wish we could give our staff everything they’re asking for. We just can’t.”

Physics teacher Robyn Denena, one of the teachers who initiated the petition, said she lives paycheck-to-paycheck and the delay forced her to choose between buying groceries and paying rent. She had to call her mother to finance her groceries, she said.

“Having to wait 10 days for one of my paychecks was not just an inconvenience, it was painful for me,” Denena said. “I love my students, but it was so hard to come to school for those 10 days for free, wondering when I would ever see that money.”

Denena said she felt she had to take action in response to the delay.

“I know [the petition] may not go anywhere because the district has had so many financial problems,” she said, “but we had to ask for something.”

French teacher Wes Scanlan said he has taught here for 18 years but had never seen anything like this delay.

“There’s a lot of anger among the staff,” Scanlan said. “I hope it doesn’t run people off.”

Last summer, the district gave teachers and support staff 5% raises and administrators 7% raises in hopes of keeping them on the job, human resources director Penelope Chandler said.

“We respect our employees so much,” Chandler said. “Now I’m worried we’ll be back to another teacher shortage because they won’t want to put up with this type of thing.”

Senior Alison Stone said she has wanted to be an elementary teacher for as long as she can remember but now questions that career choice.

“After this incident and listening to so many of my teachers talk about how they are struggling to pay rent this week, I’m wondering whether this will be a good career for me,” Stone said. “I respect all my teachers so much. They don’t deserve this. I think the district knows they made a huge mistake, but I can’t believe they can’t do anything else to make it right.”