

News Writing

District 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, located in North Texas, has 3,910 students enrolled in grades 9-12. For the last 20 years, high school juniors and seniors with perfect attendance for the year have spent a day at Six Flags Over Texas in Arlington. The district typically pays for tickets as well as bus transportation for about 80 to 100 students who all have no absences for the year.

Last week, the district announced that this year's Six Flags day, scheduled for May 3, would be canceled because of a new district policy that prohibits all field trips during the last month of school. Superintendent Linyang Lee said he would not make an exception for the trip.

A group of seven seniors who have not missed a day of school this year are scheduled to speak at the school board meeting Monday, April 8, to appeal Lee's decision. They said they canceled family trips, college visits and other things that would have caused them to be absent from school to be eligible for Six Flags day, which they said has become a tradition. Some students have even said they will go to Six Flags, regardless of the decision.

The school board will vote on whether to make an exception to the field trip policy following a discussion at the conclusion of the students' presentation.

You are writing for the issue of the press to be distributed Friday, April 5.

■ LINYANG LEE, superintendent

"Last year, we had students missing almost the entire last month of school because of all the class field trips, AP testing, UIL events and family trips. I know students and parents don't always want us to consider finances when we make decisions, but our records show that when some students were out at Six Flags having a good time, the majority of the junior and senior class would not attend school either. Our average daily attendance for that day has been below 55% for the past five years.

"The state of Texas funds our schools based on keeping that attendance rate as high as possible. It's no longer prudent to send a message to students that being present in class and ready to learn is important every day of the year except this particular day. Learning is important every day. And that's the message we're sending by enforcing this policy.

"I know some students see the Six Flags day as a tradition, but not all traditions can last forever. They grow and change with the times. We look forward to any new traditions that the class of 2024 may choose to begin this year as a replacement. I know they will come up with something fun and memorable that also keeps the majority of students in the classroom."

■ LAUREN DAWSON, senior

“I’m going to Six Flags on May 3. I’ve been planning it for three years. My parents have even said they would pay for a limo or charter bus to take me and my friends, depending on how many are willing to skip school. After 150 days of not missing one day, coming to school with headaches and sniffles, missing my cousin’s graduation in December, I deserve the reward I earned.

“Without Six Flags day, what’s the point of coming every day and striving to earn an award for perfect attendance? I plan to let the school board know that my friends and I, and as many people who want to go with us, are having our Six Flags day. There’s nothing they can do to prevent us from going.”

■ JOSH HARTNETT, principal

“It was hard to tell the juniors and seniors who have worked so hard for perfect attendance that Six Flags was no longer an option. After the school board passed the ‘no field trip’ policy, it became clear that we would probably break some hearts. But we can’t make an exception for this event when we don’t make exceptions for events that have educational value.

“We know some students plan to speak at the school board meeting. We understand some students plan to go to Six Flags and even bring along some of their friends who never had perfect attendance in the first place. But we expect students to follow district policy and come to school on May 3. Any student who doesn’t attend will receive an unexcused absence. If students do not meet the minimum attendance requirements for the semester, they could lose credit for some classes. The district also will automatically file truancy when appropriate.”

■ NEIL ZHANG, junior

“I’ve accomplished a lot this year: straight A’s, No. 1 in the junior class and yearbook editor. I’ve come to school on days when I knew I should have stayed home sick because it’s a badge of honor to earn Six Flags day. I’m so disappointed that the district did not make an exception to its field trip policy to allow us to continue this time-honored tradition. I will ask my parents if I can attend with the group that plans to skip on May 3. I don’t believe they will allow it, but it can’t hurt to try. Either way, I plan to attend the school board meeting and let them know how valuable the experience would be for those who have earned it.”

■ WILL KONGARA, AP Environmental Science teacher

“The program that allowed perfect attendance students to go to Six Flags was working well. Students weren’t as plagued by senioritis because they wanted to earn that day off. I didn’t see a huge drop-off in attendance in the last quarter of the year. I’m worried that all of that will change.

“I understand the intent behind the field trip policy, but I’m afraid this change will cause a lot of problems. I had to cancel my yearly field trip to the zoo after our AP test. That was a tradition for me and my students, and it was a huge disappointment to cancel it. I’ve heard students say they plan to go to Six Flags anyway. I hope the district’s plan doesn’t backfire.”

■ ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

In Texas, students must be present in each class at least 90% of the time to receive credit for the class. Leaguetown ISD students attend school 182 days per year. Last year, average daily attendance on Six Flags day was below 55% even though only 100 students attended the Six Flags trip. The state of Texas funds each school based on its average daily attendance rate.

DO NOT DISTRIBUTE TO STUDENTS BEFORE OR DURING THE CONTEST!

District Meet • 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 three days before a school board meeting where students will ask the board to reverse the district's cancellation of their Six Flags trip.

Seven seniors with perfect attendance hope to convince the school board Monday to make an exception to their "no field trips in May" policy so they can have their annual Six Flags field trip.

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 ("Lee said," not "said Lee.") 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

They plan to speak at the school board meeting to make their case, with some saying they plan to go to Six Flags May 3 regardless of the board's decision.

direct quote

"I know some students see the Six Flags day as a tradition, but not all traditions are made to last forever," superintendent Linyang Lee said. "We look forward to any new traditions that the class of 2024 may choose to begin this year as a replacement."

transition

For the past 20 years, Six Flags day has been a reward for juniors and seniors with perfect attendance for the year.

direct quote

"After 150 days of not missing one day, coming to school with headaches and sniffles, missing my cousin's graduation in December, I deserve the reward I earned," senior Lauren Dawson said. "I plan to let the school board know that my friends and I and as many people who want to go with us are having our Six Flags day. There's nothing they can do to prevent us from going."

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

Seven seniors with perfect attendance hope to convince the school board Monday to make an exception to their “no field trips in May” policy so they can have their annual Six Flags field trip.

They plan to speak at the school board meeting to make their case, with some saying they plan to go to Six Flags May 3 regardless of the board’s decision.

“I know some students see the Six Flags day as a tradition, but not all traditions are made to last forever,” superintendent Linyang Lee said. “We look forward to any new traditions that the class of 2024 may choose to begin this year as a replacement.”

For the past 20 years, Six Flags day has been a reward for juniors and seniors with perfect attendance for the year.

“After 150 days of not missing one day, coming to school with headaches and sniffles, missing my cousin’s graduation in December, I deserve the reward I earned,” senior Lauren Dawson said. “I plan to let the school board know that my friends and I, and as many people who want to go with us, are having our Six Flags day. There’s nothing they can do to prevent us from going.”

Texas schools are funded based on their average daily attendance rate. According to Lee, students historically have missed too much school in the spring.

“After the school board passed the ‘no field trip policy,’ it became clear that we would probably break some hearts,” Hartnett said. “We can’t make an exception for this event when we don’t make exceptions for events that have educational value.”

Lee said the school’s average daily attendance rate has dipped below 55% on Six Flags day for the past five years even though only 100 students went on the trip.

“It’s no longer prudent to send a message to students that being present in class and ready to learn is important every day of the year except this particular day,” he said. “Learning is important every day. And that’s the message we’re sending by enforcing this policy.”

Dawson said her parents would pay for a limo or charter bus, despite the attendance policy, depending on how many students are willing to skip school. Junior Neil Zhang said he plans to join her.

“I will ask my parents if I can attend with the group who plans to skip on May 3,” junior Neil Zhang said. “I don’t believe they will allow it, but it can’t hurt to try. Either way, I plan to attend the school board meeting and let them know how valuable the experience would be for those who have earned it.”