

News Writing

District Meet • 2018



You are a reporter for the League-town **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 (NOT YOUR NAME) on your paper.**

Leaguetown High School, located in South Texas, has 500 students enrolled in grades 9-12. In early March, Principal Joan Eastern and yearbook adviser Libby Mills selected a photographer to take the senior portraits for the 2018-19 school year. Last week, the contract was sent to the new superintendent for approval. After reviewing the contract, Superintendent John Healy, who was hired in January, made one modification — inserting a clause about the dress code. The addendum to the contract states: “All students must be in school dress code when taking senior portraits for the yearbook. Students may not have bare shoulders.”

This clause poses a problem for the photographer because she uses an off-the-shoulder wrap for female senior portraits. The photographer, Mary Goldsmith, shared her concerns with the principal and the yearbook adviser. When questioned, the superintendent said he wanted his amendment added to the contract and said the photographer could either find different wraps to cover the girls’ shoulders, or the yearbook could use a different photograph for the yearbook. Goldsmith said she would not purchase new wraps for the seniors. The wrap portrait is the traditional photo used in the yearbook.

The editors for the 2018-19 yearbook, frustrated with the clause, circulated a petition asking the school board to overturn the superintendent’s decision. Every junior, including male students, signed the petition. The editors will present the petition to the school board at its next meeting Thursday, March 29. You are writing for the issue of the Press to be distributed Tuesday, March 27.

■ JOHN HEALY, superintendent

“In my last school district, our photographer had no problem supplying a wrap that covered our female students’ shoulders. I fail to see what the big deal is. Our dress code is very clear that all students, not just female students, may not wear off-the-shoulder shirts or even spaghetti-strap shirts. Why would we allow and even encourage every female senior to violate that dress code in the yearbook? It makes no sense. If we are going to have a dress code, then it needs to be followed. The female students could simply wear one of their own nice dresses for the yearbook portrait. That is a simple solution.

“If the board feels our dress code is outdated, I am happy to look into it. But revamping a dress code does not happen overnight. We would need to get input from all stakeholders. Then, we would need to share recommendations with the community and students. It takes time to do it right.”

■ GRACE ORTIZ, junior and editor for the 2018-19 yearbook

“I’ve spent my entire high school career wondering exactly why shoulders are so offensive. I never understood why we couldn’t wear spaghetti-strap shirts or a shirt with the shoulders cut out — the ones that are so popular now. Even

■ **GRACE ORTIZ, (cont.)**

my mom wears those.

“I went back and looked at old yearbooks. Seniors started wearing the wraps in the early 1990s. That’s two and a half decades. The wraps and the tuxedo jackets for the guys create uniformity in the yearbook. If we let people wear whatever they want, the book will look sloppy, and that could hurt us with competitions.

“Plus, it’s not like we are running the halls in the wraps or even coming to school in them. Senior portraits are taken at the photographer’s studio over the summer. We started the petition because Dr. Healy refuses to budge. He even refused to meet with the yearbook editors. Needless to say, we didn’t have any problem getting the signatures. Within two days, we had every signature. I hope the board overturns the superintendent’s decision. If it doesn’t, I don’t know what we will do for senior portraits for the yearbook.”

■ **LIBBY MILLS, yearbook adviser**

“We were all a little surprised by Dr. Healy’s change to the contract. We’ve used those type of wraps since I was in high school. Most schools across the state use those wraps. I reached out to our journalism organization, and not a single yearbook teacher has ever had a problem like this. I know Leaguetown is a conservative town, but this is a bit ridiculous.

“I am very proud of next year’s editors. Rather than whine and complain about the decision, they took action and created the petition. I’ve had several parents ask if they could sign the petition, but the editors wanted the petition to be from students only. We are encouraging parents to attend the board meeting to support the editors.”

■ **SUSAN SIVER, parent of a junior**

“I was flabbergasted when my daughter told me about the situation. Who bans senior wraps? It’s a senior tradition. Hasn’t the superintendent looked at a yearbook, from anywhere, for the last three decades? I asked to sign the petition as did several of my friends. Junior parents support the students, and we are going to prove it by showing up to the school board meeting. In fact, we are having a sign-making party at my house Wednesday night. We don’t want to be disruptive, but we want the board to notice us. So far, 20 parents have said they are coming to the sign party. I expect many more at the school board meeting. The board usually listens to the community. I hope they do this time, too.”

■ **MARY GOLDSMITH, photographer**

“Those wraps are not cheap. I spent \$500 last year buying new ones. I can’t afford to buy more this year just for Leaguetown. I take senior portraits for several area high schools, and no one has asked for a different wrap.

“We can do senior portraits without the wraps. Female students could bring a nice dress or something. The yearbook would lose its uniformity with the photos, though. Senior sections in the yearbook look so much classier when the seniors are in formal wear.”

■ **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

The school board members declined to comment for the story.

The yearbook is entered in both state and national journalism competitions annually.

DO NOT DISTRIBUTE TO STUDENTS BEFORE OR DURING THE CONTEST!

DISTRICT • 2018

NEWS 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. Open with the newest information. In this instance, the board meeting is Thursday.

Superintendent John Healy's decision to prohibit off-the-shoulder wraps for senior portraits is not sitting well with students or parents. On Thursday, the yearbook editors will present a petition, signed by every junior, to the school board requesting it overturn the superintendent's decision.

2. Use direct quotes and get those quotes high in the story. After you introduce quotes, use 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 ("Healy said," not "said Healy.") Avoid stacking quotes. Avoid putting two or more quotes together without placing a transition between them. Also, make sure transitions tell information to help the action of the story and the quote does not repeat information revealed in the transition.

transition

Parents of juniors support the petition, said parent Susan Siver. In fact, Siver is hosting a sign-making party the night before the meeting.

direct quote

"Who bans senior wraps?" Siver asked. "It's a senior tradition. Hasn't the superintendent looked at a yearbook, from anywhere, for the last three decades?"

transition

Healy said he banned the wraps because off-the-shoulder tops violate the student dress code.

direct quote

"If we are going to have a dress code, then it needs to be followed," he said.

3. Use third person. Don't say "our student" or "John Healy, our superintendent" or "Some of our students..." Also, do not editorialize. For instance, you should not say "Healy is awful..." without attributing that quote to someone. These statements are personal opinion and cannot be made in a news story.

4. Note how in the earlier example of transition/quote each quote is its own paragraph. Don't be frightened away from using one- and two-sentence paragraphs. Journalistic writing consists mostly of brief paragraphs.

SAMPLE STORY

Superintendent John Healy's decision to prohibit off-the-shoulder wraps for senior portraits is not sitting well with students or parents. On Thursday, the yearbook editors will present a petition, signed by every junior, to the school board requesting it overturn the superintendent.

Parents of juniors support the petition, said parent Susan Siver. In fact, Siver is hosting a sign-making party the night before the meeting.

"Who bans senior wraps?" Siver asked. "It's a senior tradition. Hasn't the superintendent looked at a yearbook, from anywhere, for the last three decades?"

Healy said he banned the wraps because off-the-shoulder tops violate the student dress code.

"If we are going to have a dress code, then it needs to be followed," he said.

However, seniors have worn the wraps for their yearbook portraits for more than two decades.

"I went back and looked at old yearbooks," junior Grace Ortiz, the 2018-19 yearbook editor, said. "Seniors started wearing the wraps in the early 1990s."

The yearbook editors started the petition because Healy "wouldn't budge" or even meet with the editors, Ortiz said.

"Needless to say, we didn't have any problem getting the signatures," she said. "Within two days, we had every signature."

Although parents asked to sign the petition, the editors said they wanted it to be from students.

"We support the students, and we are going to show it by showing up to the school board meeting," Siver said.

Siver said she hopes the board will allow the traditional wraps.

"The board usually listens to the community," she said. "I hope they do this time, too."

Yearbook adviser Libby Mills said most schools across the state use off-the-shoulder wraps for senior portraits.

"I reached out to our journalism organization, and not a single yearbook teacher has ever had a problem like this," Mills said. "I know Leaguetown is a conservative town, but this is a bit ridiculous."

Healy offered Mills two solutions: 1) female students could wear their own "nice" dresses or 2) the photographer could buy new wraps that covered shoulders.

The photographer, Mary Goldsmith, refused option two.

"Those wraps are not cheap," she said. "I spent \$500 last year buying new ones. I take senior portraits for several high schools in the area, and no one has asked for a different wrap."

The other option could hurt the yearbook in state and national journalism competitions, Ortiz said.

"The wraps and the tuxedo jackets for the guys create uniformity in the yearbook," she said. "If we let people wear whatever they want, the book will look sloppy."

Ortiz said she hopes the school board overturns Healy's decision.

"If it doesn't, I don't know what we will do for senior portraits for the yearbook," she said.