

Editorial Writing

District Meet • 2021



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 on your paper.**

Leaguetown High School has 1,200 students enrolled in grades 9-12. At the faculty meeting last week, Principal Rapheal Wanick announced he would eliminate in-school suspension as a disciplinary option on April 1. Wanick said he discovered the school's ISS program was more detrimental than helpful. He cited the following issues: 1) The failure rate for students who have been to ISS more than one time was twice that of other students. 2) More than 80% of the students who have been to ISS are repeaters. More than 50% had been assigned ISS at least five times this year. 3) While only 12% of the student body is in the special education program, 50% of the students assigned to ISS are in the special education program. 4) The average number of students in ISS each day is 10 — a number Wanick says is too high.

Students can be assigned to ISS for a one- to three-day stint, depending on the infraction and previous infractions.

Instead of ISS, Wanick said assistant principals will utilize after-school and before-school detentions and offer more counseling options for students.

After the faculty meeting, several faculty members met with Wanick and asked that he reconsider his decision. Their concern is that student behavior will get worse when students know ISS has been eliminated. The teachers don't believe detentions and counseling will deter students from inappropriate behavior and actions. You are writing for the issue of the Press to be distributed Tuesday, March 30.

THOSE SUPPORTING WANICK'S DECISION

Students who are assigned ISS are placed at an educational disadvantage. Half of the students already have learning issues. They need to be in class getting instruction. Also, ISS clearly isn't modifying behavior. Too many students are repeat offenders.

THOSE OPPOSING WANICK'S DECISION

When students misbehave in class, they must face the consequences for their behavior. A detention is not a strong enough consequence when a student breaks a rule or disrespects a teacher. Also, this decision blindsided teachers. They had no idea it was coming and were offered no chance to give input.

■ RAPHEAL WANICK, principal

"I expected some resistance from teachers, but I did extensive research before making this decision. ISS is not good for our students. We have to look at alternative punishments that don't hinder learning. I understand that some teachers are disgruntled with this decision, but we must do what is best for our students.

■ **RAPHEAL WANICK (cont.)**

“We are not only going to utilize detentions. Our counselors are going to step in and see if they can help figure out the root of the problem when a student acts out. Often our students misbehave because something is happening at home or someone is bothering them at school. Their behavior can be a cry for help, and putting students in ISS is not helping them.

“Also, we are not eliminating school suspension for extreme behavior like fighting or drug use, and we still have the option to send students to the alternative school for persistent serious infractions.”

■ **KELSEY LEFFLER, English teacher**

“I don’t send students to the office very often, but when I do, it’s because they have been disruptive and/or disrespectful. That impacts the learning of every student in my class. If the assistant principal simply gives the student a detention, then nothing will be solved. These students are choosing to be disruptive. They are choosing to be disrespectful. They need stronger consequences. I like the idea of the counselors working with these students, but that is not enough.”

■ **BRAYDEN RAFFBURGER, math teacher**

“While I appreciate the research Mr. Wanick has conducted on ISS, some of his conclusions are wrong. Yes, students who are sent to ISS have a higher failure rate, but that may have nothing to do with ISS. These students are the disruptive students — the students who are not paying attention in class, so of course, their grades would be lower. And yes, students repeat ISS because they don’t learn their lesson. If ISS isn’t teaching them to modify their behavior, I don’t know how a detention will.

“Teachers need to be supported when they have discipline issues. A detention and a talk with a counselor may solve a few issues for students, but it won’t solve the majority of them. Mr. Wanick needs to rethink his decision and support his teachers. He should have asked for our input. After all, we are the ones who deal with behavior issues on the front lines.”

■ **JOSE OSSOS, junior**

“I’ve only been to ISS once for skipping a class. It was awful. Only half of my teachers sent work, so I had half of the day to do nothing. I don’t think skipping one class was worth serving a day of ISS, so I guess it worked for me. I have not been back.”

■ **GEORGIA STASSIO, sophomore**

“I’ve never been to ISS, but the school should have it. I have a few boys in my math class who are super disrespectful to the teacher, who is so nice. Usually, they are pretty good for a little while after they get sent to ISS. Detentions won’t have the same effect.”

■ **DANIEL PARDUN, counselor**

“Mr. Wanick’s plan is progressive and in the best interest of students. I love that the counselors are going to be brought in to talk with the students. We can work with them to develop behavior plans and better ways to deal with their issues. Students need this help, and we haven’t been giving it to them.”

■ **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

After meeting with several teachers, Wanick agreed that students who are sent to the office for behavior issues in the classroom will not return to the class that day. After meeting with their assistant principal and counselor, they will spend the rest of the period in the administration offices.

DO NOT PASS OUT TO STUDENTS BEFORE OR DURING THE CONTEST**EDITORIAL WRITING DISTRICT • 2021
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 a statement of the situation and then take a clear, definite staff stance. The situation is the principal will eliminate in-school suspension on April 1.
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 principal should...", write instead, "The principal should."
3. Don't waddle into the editorial. Get right to the point and, as a general rule, don't ask a lot of questions. An editorial should answer questions, not ask them. Above all, remember that 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 all the time, sometimes a writer could use a feature opening to grab the readers' attention and get them into the story.
4. Look for the future angle. Your paper comes out before ISS ends.
5. Once you've stated your position/stance, the body of the story should support your stance and refute the opposition.
6. After the body of your editorial, complete the editorial with a specific solution.
7. 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 has a lot of credibility toward the story itself.
8. Watch for factual errors. Pay attention to minor details. Also, stay focused.
9. Don't clutter up the editorial with clichés or trite phrases such as "the principal is stupid" or any variation thereof. Also, edit out the name of the school unless it is necessary for clarity. It isn't necessary 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/OPPOSING WANICK'S DECISION

Students know actions have consequences. Good choices mean good consequences, and bad choices end with bad consequences.

That's no longer the case at the school starting April 1 when Principal Rapheal Wanick eliminates in-school suspension as a disciplinary option.

Wanick needs to rethink his decision and realize some student misbehavior needs a stricter punishment than a detention and a meeting with a counselor.

Wanick based his decision to end ISS on flawed reasoning. He told teachers that the failure rate for students who have been in ISS is more than twice that of other students. The failure rate is not disputable, but why students are failing is. ISS may not be the culprit. These students are acting out in class and, therefore, could be missing vital instruction or not doing important work. That has nothing to do with their removal from class to ISS. Being in ISS actually gives them quiet time to do their work and catch up, if they choose to do it.

The principal's research also showed that more than 80% of the students who have been to ISS are repeaters. Wanick concluded from that data that ISS isn't working, and that might be true. But instead of getting rid of ISS, he should change ISS so students don't want to return. He could even use ISS time for the counseling that he believes these students need.

The bottom line is teachers need support when students act out in their classes. Handing out before-school and after-school detentions and a little counseling is not a strong enough consequence for serious student misbehavior. A disruptive student needs to be removed from the class for a few days both to give the teacher a break and to give the student a serious consequence.

Wanick says students who are sent to the office won't return to that class for that period. That's really only a win for the student. They get out of the class and have no consequences other than a little detention and a meeting with a counselor.

Eliminating ISS is a bad plan for students, for teachers and for the school. Wanick should rescind his decision and instead add a counseling component to ISS. That makes the most sense for everyone.

SAMPLE EDITORIAL/SUPPORTING WANICK

When something doesn't work in education and hurts students, it makes sense to eliminate it. And that is exactly what Principal Rafael Wanick is doing.

In-school suspension is not doing its job. In fact, it's negatively impacting students, so Wanick is ending it on April 1.

While teachers may not agree with this decision, it is one Wanick should stand by. He's done the research and knows what is best for students.

The failure rate for students who have been to ISS more than once is twice that of other students. That alone is a good enough reason to end ISS. Schools should educate students, not take them away from instruction. A student in ISS misses at least a full day of instruction for his or her classes. It makes sense that they struggle in their classes.

More than 80% of the students who have been to ISS return. In fact, more than 50% of those students have been in ISS five times that year. That means those students have missed anywhere from five to 15 days of instruction. Obviously, ISS isn't working if students don't mind going again and again. Furthermore, half of the students assigned to ISS are those with special needs. Those are the students who need to be in the classroom getting instruction the most. Instead, they are in ISS.

Those who oppose Wanick say students need consequences for misbehavior. Wanick isn't eliminating ISS without a plan. Students who misbehave will have consequences. They will receive before-school or after-school detentions and counseling to help them determine why they are acting out. The counseling piece is critical for improving behavior. Sitting in ISS for a day or two doesn't help students understand their behavior.

Wanick's plan has a better chance of actually improving student behavior. Teachers need to trust Wanick and support him. His goal is to solve problems, not hide them in a room for a day or two.