

Editorial Writing

State 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 2,200 students enrolled in grades 9-12. In March, Texas Gov. Greg Abbott lifted the state's mask mandate. Following Abbott's announcement, the Texas Education Agency gave local school boards full authority to determine their local mask policies. Previously, every Leaguetown student, teacher or staff member was mandated to wear a mask over the nose and mouth when inside a school building, a facility used for school activities or an outdoor space on school property when it is not feasible to maintain 6 feet of social distancing.

TEA also encouraged districts to require 14-day quarantines for positive-tested students. TEA acknowledged that national health experts, including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the American Academy of Pediatrics, have found little risk of widespread infection and death among children in schools. "While children do get infected by COVID-19 and some severe outcomes have been reported in children, relatively few children with COVID-19 are hospitalized or have severe symptoms," according to TEA.

So far this school year, 65 students and 19 staff members have tested positive for the virus. As of last week, every staff member who chose to get vaccinated has been fully vaccinated. Approximately 5% of district staff chose not to receive the vaccine. Approximately 10% of the students have been vaccinated because of underlying medical conditions.

New COVID-19 cases have steadily declined in the county for the past two months. The seven-day average for new cases in the county is 10, and the hospitalization rate is less than 2%.

On May 6, the school board will decide whether to end the mask mandate and make masks optional for students and staff for the rest of the school year and summer school. You are writing for the issue of the Press to be distributed Tuesday, May 4.

THOSE SUPPORTING AN END TO THE MASK MANDATE

Every teacher and staff member who wanted the vaccine has had access to it. They are safe. More and more students are being vaccinated, too. The virus is in decline in the county, and masks are no longer needed.

THOSE OPPOSING AN END TO THE MASK MANDATE

Safety should be the No. 1 priority, not convenience. The virus has not been defeated. Relaxing the mask mandate will put the students at greater risk of contracting the virus. Wearing a mask is not too much to ask.

■ **CARRIE HSU, superintendent**

“If the governor is allowing Texans to choose whether they want to wear a mask, then I believe our schools should do the same. The virus is waning in our county, and we should get back to some normalcy in our schools. We haven’t had a positive case in our schools in a month.

“If the school board lifts the mask mandate, we will continue daily health screenings, social distancing and good hygiene practices. That will keep our students and staff safe. And if the board eliminates the mandate, I would bet that at least 50% of our students will continue to wear masks.”

■ **CHESTER TATE, assistant principal**

“I would prefer the board lift the mask mandate. The other assistant principals and I spend a good portion of the day acting as the ‘mask police.’ It’s exhausting and time-consuming. I want to focus on learning, but it’s hard to do right now.”

■ **CHRISSEY BROWN, parent**

“The district has done an amazing job navigating through this pandemic. We have not had mass quarantines, nor have we had to shut down completely. We’ve had a few cases here and there. That’s because everyone wore masks. That’s what has made the difference. We’ve come so far. We do not need to let our guard down now and have a resurgence of the virus. Asking students and staff to continue to wear masks through the end of the school year and summer is the responsible thing to do. The CDC recommends masks in schools. We should follow its advice.”

■ **CHUCK WEIKART, parent**

“Our governor has given us a choice because he believes in our freedom. We need to do the same with our students — give them a choice. If they want to wear a mask, then wear one. If they don’t, they should not be forced to do so. I know the virus is real. My own family has been affected by it, but our choices and freedoms should also be real.”

■ **CASSIUS SANTOS, math teacher**

“I have been fully vaccinated, but I will continue to wear my mask. We don’t know all of the science behind the virus yet, and it may be possible for me to spread the virus. I don’t want to take that chance of spreading it to any of my students. The school board should keep the mask mandate intact for the rest of the school year and make it optional for summer school. Students have a choice about summer school. They don’t have a choice about school right now.”

■ **CHIP RODMAN, junior**

“I hope the school board ends the mask mandate. I am tired of wearing them. I have asthma, and it’s difficult to wear a mask all day. I often miss important information in class because I am focused on my breathing and the mask. I hate it, and I have friends who have the same problem.

“It also is hard to understand some of my teachers because of the masks. We don’t wear masks at lunch, and we don’t wear masks during sports. It seems contradictory to wear the masks part of the day.

“Plus, so many students don’t even wear their masks properly. Their noses are not covered. No one even says anything to them anymore.”

■ **COOPER CALDERON, sophomore**

“I won’t feel safe at school if the board lifts the mask mandate. Since we don’t have a virtual option for school, I am not sure what I will do. I know I will continue to wear my mask.”

DO NOT PASS OUT TO STUDENTS BEFORE OR DURING THE CONTEST**EDITORIAL WRITING STATE • 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 school board will decide whether to lift the mask mandate.
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 board should..." write instead, "The board 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 the board meeting.
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 cliches or trite phrases such as "the mask mandate 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 THE MASK MANDATE

The COVID-19 virus is on the decline in the county. All teachers who wanted vaccines have received them. Even students are getting the vaccine.

These three facts make it clear that the mask mandate is no longer needed, and the school board should vote to make masks optional at its meeting Thursday.

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott lifted the state mask mandate in March, and it's time the school district falls in line. Even the Texas Education Agency reported that national health experts, including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the American Academy of Pediatrics, found little risk of widespread infection and death among children in schools. If the risk isn't there, then masks don't need to be mandated.

Plus, every teacher and staff member who wanted a vaccine got one, and 10% of the students have already been vaccinated. This certainly helps create an environment that is safe to make masks a choice.

Lifting the mask mandate also helps the school get back to its No. 1 priority — educating students. Lifting the mandate will allow teachers and administrators to stop being the “mask police” and allow them to focus on what really matters. And it will allow teachers to be more effective teachers. It's not always easy to understand teachers who are wearing masks.

And it's not just teachers who struggle to be effective while wearing masks. Some students, like those with asthma, find it hard to concentrate on school while wearing a mask. Making masks optional would certainly help those students.

Those who want the mandate to continue say making masks optional would risk student safety. But let's be clear. The board is not voting to prevent anyone from wearing a mask. It is only voting to end the mandate. Students and staff can continue to wear a mask. It's their choice — choice being the optimal word here.

The board needs to follow the governor's lead and make masks optional. Everyone deserves a choice.

SAMPLE EDITORIAL/SUPPORTING THE MASK MANDATE

It's true that every staff member who wanted the COVID-19 vaccine has gotten it, and it's true that 10% of the students also have received their vaccinations.

But do the math. That means almost 2,000 students have not.

Those students have one major protection against the virus — the mask.

When the school board meets Thursday, it must vote to continue the mask mandate in school to protect students and keep the virus on the decline.

In March, the governor did eliminate the mask mandate for the state, but just because the governor makes a bad decision doesn't mean the school district has to follow suit. The Texas Education Agency gave the school board the power to keep the mask mandate, so obviously the agency isn't 100% on board with the governor. The board needs to do what is best for this community and keep the mandate.

While the virus is on the decline in the county, that decline may not last if the school lifts the mandate. Think about it. If 2,200 students stop wearing their masks and congregate in a small classrooms all day, the virus is bound to spread more. It's too big of a risk.

Students no longer have the option of virtual school; so if the mask mandated is lifted, students who don't feel safe will have no choice but to come to school. It is unfair for the district to ask students to put themselves in harm's way to get their education.

Mandating that students and staff wear a mask during the school day is not too much to ask. Those who oppose the mask mandate clamor on about freedom and choices, but that's a weak defense. America mandates all kinds of things — from seat belts to drinking ages. Rules and laws ensure an orderly society.

When the board meets on Thursday, it needs to keep the mask mandate for the rest of the school year and summer. It can re-evaluate for the 2021-2022 school year, but let's make the choice to keep everyone safe right now.