

Editorial Writing

Invitational B Meet • 2024



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 4,087 students enrolled in grades 9-12. Beginning in January, Principal David Truffle implemented a new policy where during regular class time, students are required to leave all backpacks and purses against a designated wall in the classroom. Students are allowed to keep writing utensils, books, calculators, water bottles and any other classroom materials under their desks until needed. To access bags during class time, students must obtain permission from the teacher. Students who do not follow these directives receive disciplinary action in accordance with insubordination consequences outlined in the student code of conduct, including in-school suspension.

The policy was put in place to prevent students from accessing their phones and other devices during the school day. Students caught with their phones without permission automatically receive in-school suspension.

Since implementing the policy, administrators say they have seen a decrease in cyberbullying reports, fights and students caught with vaping devices and other controlled substances during the school day.

Junior Jailyn Serrano is circulating a petition asking the school board to override the policy and allow students to have bags at their desks to access materials for class, maintain student privacy and prevent classroom disruption. Her petition has more than 2,500 signatures. She will present her petition at the school board meeting on Feb. 12.

You are writing for the issue of the Press to be distributed Friday, Feb. 9.

THOSE SUPPORTING THE BACKPACK POLICY

Administrators have seen a significant decrease in cyberbullying reports, vaping incidents and fights during the school day since the policy was implemented in January. Without the constant attention being paid to these ongoing issues, administrators and teachers are free to use their time during the school day doing what they should be doing — educating students. In addition to freeing time for school staff, the policy has created a safer learning environment for all students.

THOSE OPPOSING THE BACKPACK POLICY

Students are entitled to have access to their belongings during the school day, including phones. Whether it's to get lip balm, a different writing utensil or feminine hygiene products, students need unfettered regular access to their personal bags, and they shouldn't have to ask a teacher for permission to access these things. This policy also disrupts classroom teachers when students have to interrupt lessons to access their bags. If the school wants to ban phones, it should ban phones — not access to backpacks.

■ DAVID TRUFFLE, principal

“The fact is that phones have become a debilitating distraction when it comes to student learning. I realize that students want to access their phones to message their friends, do social media and call their moms to bring them Chipotle during the school day. But it’s not my job to facilitate those activities. It’s my job to make sure students can learn calculus and world history and Spanish and how to play basketball. That’s why I’m here. Ask any teacher at school, and they’ll agree.

“What I did not intend or expect was the precipitous decline in fighting at school and students caught with vapes or drugs. It seems phones were causing more problems than we even realized. I understand that there is a petition going around and that many students believe it is their right to access their backpacks whenever they like. That’s their right, and I will read the petition and attend the school board meeting when they present it to the board.

“For years, we have maintained a controlled environment during state testing where students are not allowed to access their bags. This controlled environment leads to focused and engaged students. We want that same energy every single day. It’s my hope that the policy stands.”

■ JAILYN SERRANO, junior

“For the past month, I have had to ask for permission to switch to a different pen and get a tampon from my own backpack. And each time I do, my teachers have to stop what they’re doing, consider my request and then decide whether or not to allow me to access my own belongings. This interrupts an entire class. It’s embarrassing and insulting that a human being, who is nearly an adult, has to feel like a child asking to get out of bed at night for a drink of water. I get why Mr. Truffle doesn’t want us on our phones all day. That’s fine. But there’s no reason to ban us from our personal belongings. I plan to speak at the board meeting when I present my petition. We have rights as students, and I plan to exercise those rights.”

■ LORY BERRY, AP human geography teacher

“I agree that phones have made teaching a real challenge. Typically, when I tell students that phones need to go away, they go away. But there’s always that one kid who asks to go to the restroom and takes a solid half hour to go and come back. They’re on their phones, Facetimeing friends or scrolling TikTok. It’s exhausting to have to teach a student AP level content when they’re in that mode.

“I haven’t gotten too much push-back on the backpack policy, but it does make the floor look messy when there are bags across the front of the room, and I have to step over them to get to the board to teach. I’m not sure this is the best system, but I’m glad it’s working for now.”

■ JEREMY HUSTON, senior

“I don’t even bring a backpack to school anymore, so I don’t care about that. But I do need my phone. Last week, I left my phone in my glove box in my car because I didn’t want to get ISS. My mom was calling me all morning to tell me my grandmother had died. She finally had to come up to the school and check me out, but I felt so bad that she couldn’t get ahold of me when she needed me.”

DO NOT PASS OUT TO STUDENTS BEFORE OR DURING THE CONTEST

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Editorial Writing Contest Tips and Sample Stories

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. Lead with a statement of the situation and then take a clear, definitive staff stance. The situation is whether or not the district should reverse the new policy that requires backpacks be kept at the front of the classroom.
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 district should..." write instead, "The district should."
3. Don't waddle into the editorial. Get right to the point and, as a general rule, don't ask 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 reader's attention and draw them into the story.
4. Look for the future angle. Your paper comes out before the school board meeting.
5. Once you've stated your position/stance, the body of the editorial 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 substantial credibility.
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 "adults don't understand teens" 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/SUPPORTING

Principal David Truffle implemented a policy requiring all students to leave their backpacks and purses against the classroom wall during instruction time. Fearing consequences of insubordination, junior Jaily Serrano will present a petition against the policy at Monday's school board meeting.

The school board should uphold Principal Truffle's policy to ensure an active learning environment that is safe for students.

When students have unlimited access to their bags during regular class time, they are distracted by their phones, including messages and social media platforms. A classroom must be prioritized as a learning environment, rather than a social one. Just as it is policy to restrict student access to their bags during state testing, daily restriction encourages an engaged classroom.

The policy has resulted in decreased cyberbullying reports, fights and student use of vaping devices and other controlled substances. With fewer behavioral issues, administrators and teachers can use their time to educate students.

The positive results of the policy confirm that students perform better with limited access to their personal devices and non-school related belongings.

Those who oppose the policy are students frustrated by the required adjustment to increasingly engage in their education. Students are still allowed to access their bags with teacher permission and maintain the right to their belongings during non-instructional time. The policy only controls the appropriate time to do so. Others argue that the policy has created frequent interruptions during instruction. However, the interruption of asking to visit a student's bag is no more time-consuming than requesting to visit the restroom.

Truffle's policy ensures that students receive exemplary instruction and prioritizes school security. If the school board values the education and well-being of its students, they should dismiss the student petition and keep the policy in place.

SAMPLE EDITORIAL/OPPOSING

Principal David Truffle implemented a less than well-received policy in January, restricting students from accessing their personal belongings during instructional time. Junior Jailyn Serrano will present a petition with more than 2,500 signatures at Monday's school board meeting to ask that the policy be revoked.

The school board should reverse the policy in the interest of individual rights and student safety.

Though students are allowed to keep learning materials beneath their desks, this does not ensure they have access to everything they need. For menstruating students, they must gather their hygiene products in front of the class rather than in the privacy of their desk area. More frequently, students must disrupt class to replace a broken pen or to gather extra paper. The permission needed to perform such tasks inhibits the learning environment in a similar manner to allowing unfettered access to their backpacks and purses.

Moreover, the policy's requirement to leave belongings on a designated side of the room has created a physical obstacle for teachers and students. There must be a better system to ensure that students engage in the classroom that doesn't cause interruptions during instructional time.

Those who support the policy believe students should have limited access to their personal devices. It is not necessary to remove a student's right to their belongings to ban these devices in the classroom. If students were to keep their backpacks or purses at their desks, with the exception of their devices, instructional time would become more efficient and substantive.

The policy is highly ineffective in reducing classroom interruptions and promotes a lack of privacy and common courtesy toward students. The school board should consider reconstructing Truffle's policy to better fit the needs and rights of the student body.