

Editorial Writing

State 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 1,062 students enrolled in grades 9-12. To comply with a 2023 state law requiring at least one armed security guard on every school campus in Texas, the district hired retired police officers to serve as school marshals for the 2023-2024 school year. However, in March, Superintendent Alberto Fedrigotti proposed creating a district police department to replace the armed school marshal program and comply with the state law by employing licensed police officers in this role. Currently, when an arrest happens on campus or an investigation begins, the district collaborates with three different municipal law enforcement agencies since parts of Leaguetown ISD extend into both Springfield and Travis City.

The proposal includes hiring a district police chief, dispatcher and one officer for each of the two high school campuses and the three middle school campuses for the next two school years. The district would hire officers for elementary schools starting with the 2026-2027 school year. Fedrigotti estimated the cost of creating the department would top \$1.2 million for infrastructure, equipment, facilities and police vehicles, in addition to the new employee salaries. On a 228-day schedule, the police chief would be paid \$120,000, and the campus officers would start at \$60,000.

The school board will vote Thursday, May 16, on whether to approve Fedrigotti's proposal and establish the Leaguetown ISD Police. You are writing for the issue of the Press to be distributed Tuesday, May 14.

THOSE SUPPORTING THE PROPOSAL

If the district cares about safety, a district police department is the best way to meet the requirements of the state law. School marshals can't do all the things a police force can do, like make arrests or investigate crimes. If a major incident were to happen on a campus, having police already on-site would bring peace of mind to parents and students. In addition, the relationship between the school district and local police departments is complicated as administrators have to work with three different departments. Forming a district department simplifies the process and makes safety more efficient.

THOSE OPPOSING THE PROPOSAL

If the district hires its own police department, who is responsible for ensuring the district itself is following the law? The fact is, sometimes school districts do things that are illegal or unsafe. Citizens depend on police to enforce laws for everyone. If the district is paying police salaries, it would become too easy for police to help the district sweep unethical or illegal activities under the rug rather than sharing information with the public. Furthermore, the cost of the department could be better used to hire additional teachers to improve students' educations.

■ ALBERTO FEDRIGOTTI, superintendent

“We moved enough money around last year to comply with the new state law and employ an armed marshal on every campus in the district. The cost isn’t that much more to take the next step and create a district police department. No additional tax increase would be required for the community.

“When we have a safety incident on a campus and need law enforcement, it takes time to contact municipal police and get someone there. They do a wonderful job, but they have so much more going on than just keeping an eye on the schools. There’s another level of efficiency in that a campus officer can build relationships with the students on campus. They can have access to records and schedules. They know where to go and where things are. Simply having a positive police presence on a school campus goes a long way to promoting safety and preventing crimes.

“On top of everything else, you can’t put a price tag on safety. If you ask any parent in the district, they’ll tell you they will feel safer having police officers right here on campus. It’s as simple as that.”

■ SOPHIE MINSON, English teacher

“The last school I worked at had its own district police department. If you’ve ever heard of the ‘school to prison pipeline,’ this is where it begins. We saw a huge increase in student arrests, suspensions and expulsions for incidents that happened outside of school. These outcomes were definitely more prevalent among students of color and students with disabilities. They even had a student who accused a basketball coach of pushing him against a wall during practice. The kid had a concussion. Instead of an arrest, the coach was transferred to a middle school at the end of the year and was never investigated or arrested. These are the things we can look forward to when we have a permanent police presence.”

■ JARAH RICHARDSON, junior

“It’s weird having the school marshals on campus. We know they aren’t real police. They look a little like regular security guards, but they carry a gun on their belts. Having real police on campus is a good idea. In the worst case scenario, they can break up or even prevent fights in the halls. In the best case, they can help keep us safe and enforce the laws. For example, last year someone stole my wallet out of the locker room. The assistant principal checked the security cameras, and we saw who it was, but two days went by before they could bring the kid in and ask him about it. He got in trouble, but by that time, he had already spent all my cash. I got nothing back. Having police right there could’ve made a difference. I know my parents are happy about the proposal, and they hope the school board passes it.”

■ JENNY SANCHEZ, parent

“Not only would having police on campus make me feel better sending my kids to school, these police officers will set a good example for the young people on campus. Students should develop positive relationships with police officers while they’re young. I love the idea of having police in the community doing positive work to prevent crime rather than just responding to it when it happens.”

■ DAN RYDELL, senior

“It’s sad that we can’t even have school anymore without cops or security around. Seeing police at school would make me feel uncomfortable, like I’m about to get in trouble. I definitely don’t need that kind of distraction when I’m trying to take a test or work on a project. If we have more than \$1 million to spend on police, we could hire additional teachers with that money instead and make a real positive impact on students. This is huge a waste.”

■ ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

A study by the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights showed that schools with police officers on campus have 30% fewer fights and threats and a 150% increase in weapon detection on campuses. The same study also showed an increase in student suspensions, expulsions and arrests.

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 establish its own police force.
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 THE PROPOSAL

The district could end the school marshal program and establish its own police department if the school board approves Superintendent Alberto Fedrigotti's proposal at its meeting Thursday.

If the school district values the safety of its students, the board will vote in favor of a proposal seeking to improve an inadequate program.

The school marshal program was created to comply with the 2023 state law requiring an armed security guard on every school campus in Texas. Unlike a police officer, a school marshal cannot make arrests or investigate crimes. One student compared the marshals to the likes of a glorified security guard. In the case of one student's stolen wallet, the perpetrator was found on security camera, but two days passed before he was brought in for questioning — during which time all the student's money was spent. A district police department offers necessary and valuable services on-site to students and faculty.

When a safety incident occurs on campus, administrators contact municipal police for assistance. In serving the district, which includes three different municipalities, the system of communication and collaboration with those law enforcement agencies is clunky. Placing designated police on campus will encourage efficiency and preventative operations. A study by the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights found that campus' police reduced fighting by 30% and increased weapon detection by 150%.

Yet, those in opposition of the proposal are concerned a police presence will encourage arrests, suspensions and unethical behavior. A positive police presence will deter this demand. A campus officer will build relationships with students, set an example of positive behavior and prevent crime rather than respond to it. A small scope of their responsibilities is to break up and prevent fights, but a police officer's mission is to ensure safety and to enforce the laws that protect students.

The district must recognize that the proposal for a district police department encourages an environment where threats are quickly assessed and prevented. If the school board considers student safety a priority, they will vote in favor of the superintendent's proposal.

SAMPLE EDITORIAL/OPPOSING THE PROPOSAL

The district could spend an extra \$1.2 million to establish its own police department and remove the school marshal program if the school board approves Superintendent Alberto Fedrigotti's proposal at its meeting Thursday.

If the school board cares about justice, they should reject the superintendent's proposal.

If police are paid employees of the school district, what happens when someone who works for the district breaks the law? Public relations is important to a school organization. The reputation of a school affects real estate values in a community. With police on the district's payroll, what's to keep police from sweeping bad news under the rug rather than sharing it out in the open? One teacher recalled working for a different district with its own police department. An employee pushed a student against a wall and gave him a concussion and rather than pressing charges and removing the employee, administrators moved the employee to another campus to save face. That's not the environment our students deserve.

Fedrigotti said the expense of having a police department isn't much. While \$1.2 million may not be a lot in terms of a school budget, it could be better spent on 15 additional teacher salaries — something that would actually improve students' educational experiences.

It's true that a U.S. Department of Education Study found fewer fights and threats on campuses with real police, but that same study also showed an increase in suspensions, expulsions and arrests. There's a good chance those consequences are for activities that don't even occur on school grounds. Students do not want police to bring their regular business into the school building. An increased police presence makes some students feel even more nervous and uneasy, not less. Students should be focused on assignments and classwork, not worried about what the police are up to out in the halls.

Those supporting the proposal believe the district having its own police department will make them safer. But the school marshal program is already fulfilling the state requirement. These marshals may not be licensed police officers, but they have done their jobs in keeping our school safe this year.

The district should not waste money by establishing its own police department, and the district should reject Fedrigotti's proposal. The school district and law enforcement should continue to operate independently to ensure equal justice under the law — for students and for the district.