

Editorial Writing

Invitational A Meet • 2018



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 700 students enrolled in grades 9-12. For the past 51 years, the high school has held a beauty pageant in April for female teens between the ages 14 and 17. The winner is titled “Miss Leaguetown High” for that year. Once a student wins the contest, she cannot participate again. Freshman Octavia Eulesse won the 2017 contest. She was 14 years old.

Last week, in a joint press conference Superintendent Paula Harrison and Mayor Riki O’Hara announced the beauty pageant had been cancelled because they believe the contest objectified female students.

Members of the community, PTA and faculty were shocked and upset by the announcement. A group of parents are gathering signatures of support. So far, more than 500 parents and community members have signed the petition requesting that the pageant be reinstated. The group will present the petition to the school board at its meeting Monday, Feb. 5, and ask for the board to rescind the superintendent’s decision.

In the past, applications for the pageant were due Feb. 1. Wayna Rolster, the pageant director, said if the community wanted the pageants to be held in April, the school board would need to act by Feb. 15 so the venue could be reserved and the contestants could have enough time to prepare. You are writing for the issue of the Press to be distributed Thursday, Feb. 1.

THOSE SUPPORTING THE PAGEANT

This pageant is a part of the town’s and school’s history. It’s a 51-year tradition, and it’s popular. The winner of the pageant receives a \$1,000 scholarship. The superintendent and mayor blindsided the town and school.

THOSE OPPOSING THE PAGEANT

The pageant objectifies female students — plain and simple. It judges the contestants on their looks in a formal gown and bathing suit. The talent portion was eliminated years ago. This contest is about looks only.

■ PAULA HARRISON, superintendent

“When I moved to Leaguetown last year, I was appalled by the pageant. I couldn’t believe we were parading around young teen girls in bathing suits on a huge stage and asking a group of middle-aged men and women to judge them. I was sitting near the judges, and I couldn’t believe the comments they were making.

“This contest promotes the message that looks matter most for our female students — no matter the cost. Last year, two of the contestants fainted back stage because they hadn’t eaten in two days. Girls struggle with body image enough in life. We don’t need to magnify it. To be successful in our society, girls need more than a good body. Girls need to be smart and talented.

“I know some in the community and schools are upset by our decision, but I can’t sit by and watch this pageant for another year. It was too degrading. If someone wanted to organize a contest based on talent or intelligence, I could definitely get on board with that.”

■ **OCTAVIA EULESS, sophomore and the 2017 Miss Leaguetown winner**

“By cancelling the pageant, the superintendent and mayor are saying my crown is worthless. I worked hard to win that pageant. Sure, I had to look good in my dress and bathing suit, but it takes smarts to find the right clothes and to know how to present yourself during the contest. I am not some dumb, pretty girl. I am taking three Advanced Placement classes, and I am third in my class.”

■ **CHENEL MORRIS, freshman**

“I am finally old enough to participate in the pageant, and they cancel it. I am so mad. My older sister won when she was in high school, and my mom was first runner-up when she was in high school. It’s a family tradition, and now I don’t even get to walk on the stage. What gets me is that Dr. Harrison didn’t even bother to ask any of the girls if they felt objectified. It’s all choice. Just because she doesn’t want to be in front of an audience in a bathing suit doesn’t mean we all don’t. I’ve worked out for the past year to tone my body for the contest. I am proud of it and want to show it off. My mom already bought me my dress and bathing suit.

“Plus, our parents have to sign a permission form to allow us to participate. It’s parental choice. If parents are OK with the contest, shouldn’t that be enough?”

■ **MICHELE SANDERS, English teacher**

“I applaud Dr. Harrison and the mayor. I loathe that pageant. I’ve taught here for 27 years, and I’ve only been to the pageant once. That is all it took for me to see how offensive the contest is. This is the 21st Century. We should not be judging girls only on how they look.”

■ **PERRY RICHARD, judge and community member**

“Those women have no business cancelling the pageant. Our pageant promotes fitness and discipline, and the winner gets a scholarship. How on earth is that bad? If we can’t change their minds, I might just start my own pageant.”

■ **WAYNA ROLSTER, pageant director**

“To say I am shocked is an understatement. I had no idea these women had plans to cancel the pageant. They never once spoke to me. If they did, I would have told them what a great experience it is for our female students. These girls take pride in themselves and work hard for this pageant. I hope the community can show them that this is important to us, and we want it back.

“If Dr. Harrison was upset about the bathing suit portion, she should have eliminated that and replaced it with an interview or talent portion. We are flexible, but she didn’t even ask — not one conversation.”

■ **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

Only 25 female students can enter the pageant. In the past, the pageant fills up the first week of sign-ups. “Every year, we have to turn away many girls because we hit our max,” Rolster said. “If we allowed every girl to register, we would have more than 50 girls in the pageant each year, and it would last forever.”

DO NOT PASS OUT TO STUDENTS BEFORE OR DURING THE CONTEST**EDITORIAL WRITING/INVITATIONAL A • 2018**
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 whether the school board should overrule the superintendent and continue the pageant. Do you support this or not?
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 superintendent should..." write instead, "The superintendent 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 reader's 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 principal is mean" 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

Beauty is more than skin deep. That is the message Superintendent Paula Harrison and Mayor Ricki O'Hara are trying to emphasize to female students by cancelling the Miss Leaguetown High pageant.

And it is the right message to send.

At its Feb. 5 meeting, the school board should ignore the parents and community members who will request that the board override the superintendent's decision. Even if the entire community signed the petition, the pageant is unacceptable and offensive.

The lone attribute judged in this pageant is appearance. The only qualification that a female student has to meet is that she is 14 or older. And, oh yeah, she needs to be female. There is no talent section, no interview — nothing but standing around trying to look good. Focusing only on looks sends the wrong message to teen girls.

Further, girls aren't judged solely by their appearance in an evening gown. The girls are paraded around in swim suits for the community to see. These are high school girls, ages 14-17. It is disgusting for a group of women and men to judge a young girl's body like an object. It borders on perversion. If pageant supporters hold that this is a "beauty pageant," a swimsuit competition isn't necessary. Girls could be asked to dress in their favorite casual wear instead of swimsuits. That would allow girls to show their personality and style.

Last year, two contestants passed out backstage because they had not eaten in two days prepping for the contest. This alone is reason enough to cancel the pageant. It sends an unhealthy, overt message to young women. Thousands of teens struggle with eating disorders every day. The school does not need to add to those numbers by sponsoring and promoting this contest.

Supporters of the pageant say Harrison and O'Hara didn't speak to anyone before cancelling the pageant. What is there to talk about? When something is offensive and demeans students, it is logical and right to put an end to it. No talking is necessary.

The board needs to support Harrison. The pageant involves nothing more than judging high school girls by their looks and bodies. It's a tradition that, frankly, the school should be ashamed of.

SAMPLE EDITORIAL/SUPPORTING

A 54-year tradition is on the chopping block because two women don't like it. Superintendent Paula Harrison and Mayor Riki O'Hara cancelled the Miss Leaguetown High pageant, saying it objectified female students.

But parents and community members are trying to rescue the pageant and are asking the school board for help at its next meeting on Feb. 5.

The school board needs to act and reinstate the pageant. It's what the community wants. It's what the female students want. More than 500 people have already signed the petition asking the board to override the superintendent's decision.

For the past 54 years, the school has hosted this pageant and no one had a problem with it — not even the contestants. In fact, the pageant has to turn away students every year because the pageant fills so quickly. No one is forcing the girls to be in the pageant. The contestants choose to do the pageant. And parents have to give their consent. If the parents are OK with it, then that should be enough.

Cancelling the pageant this late in the game also is unacceptable. Harrison said she was offended by the pageant last year. She should have announced her plans then. Girls prepare for this pageant all year. Some girls have already bought dresses and bathing suits. If the school wanted to cancel the pageant, it should have done so sooner.

Harrison and O'Hara made this decision in isolation. They didn't bother to talk to pageant officials, former participants, judges or parents. They made the decision for everyone without any other input but their own. O'Hara isn't even a part of the school district, so giving her a say in this matter is ridiculous.

Opponents argue that the pageant is focused solely on appearance. However, these girls need confidence and self-esteem to know how to carry themselves on stage. And those qualities are important for success. Additionally, it is a scholarship pageant. The winner receives a \$1,000 scholarship to help pay for college.

Two people shouldn't have the power to destroy a 50-year tradition. And they certainly shouldn't have the power to do it so late in the game and without talking to anyone else. The board needs to listen to its community and bring back the pageant.