

Editorial Writing

District 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 NOT YOUR NAME on your paper.**

Leaguetown High School has 1,200 students enrolled in grades 9-12. This month, Superintendent Felix Unger proposed a new mandatory class, Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), for 2018-19 freshmen. Unger said upperclass students could take the class if they choose. The year-long class will focus on five components 1) self-awareness, 2) self-management, 3) social awareness, 4) relationship skills and 5) responsible decision-making. Unger said social and emotional factors affect academic engagement and achievement, and schools do not do enough to address these. The class would be for local credit and not offered during summer school. Currently, students take seven classes per year and need a minimum of 26 credits to graduate.

Enthusiasm for the new class is split. Teachers overwhelmingly support the initiative, citing a decrease in social-emotional learning, but parents and students question whether the class is necessary. Unger asked the Parent-Teacher Association to endorse the class, but the parents could not reach a consensus. The Student Council also failed to endorse the class.

To build support and answer questions, Unger has held three information sessions this month — one at each of the two middle schools during the day and one at the high school in the evening. All eighth grade students attended the information sessions, and more than 200 parents and students attended the evening session.

Unger will ask the school board to approve his proposal at its next meeting Thursday, March 29. You are writing for the issue of the Press to be distributed Tuesday, March 27.

SUPPORTING THE CLASS

Learning to control emotions leads to a better learning environment. With the rapid changes in the world, especially dealing with technology, students are losing the ability to communicate and build relationships with each other. To be successful in school and life after school, students must develop keen social and emotional learning skills.

OPPOSING THE CLASS

Students do not need one more mandate to their high school graduation plan — especially a touchy-feely class that isn't correlated to any of the core curriculum. Plus, students learn social-emotional skills every day through normal interactions with teachers and students. They don't need a 50-minute lecture on it every day for an entire year.

■ **FELIX UNGER, superintendent**

“A 2014 study of 200 school-based, universal social and emotional learning (SEL) programs involving 100,000 high school students showed SEL participants demonstrated significantly improved social and emotional skills, attitudes, behavior and academic performance, and showed a 10 percent gain in achievement. I know some parents and students have questioned whether we need this class. Trust me, we do. Students are losing their social-emotional skills. They live their lives on the internet, texting friends and family, rather than building real, face-to-face bonds with people. They lack the knowledge to deal with their emotions.

“The curriculum we would use will focus on goal setting, communication strategies, resilience strategies and other ways to reduce academic stress. Most important, perhaps, the coursework will include calming and focusing techniques and simple breathing and mindfulness exercises. This class is important. Our students need it. I am 100 percent sure of that.”

■ **FARAH HANG, English teacher**

“We need these classes. Our students lack simple communication skills like knowing how to answer a telephone and shake a hand. They also need help with larger issues like conflict resolution and dealing with stress. Some parents think we should cover these skills in class, but we don’t have time. The skills take time to learn, and we already are barreling through our curriculum as fast as we can. I can’t imagine adding one more component to our classes.”

■ **REGINA DOPPLER, counselor**

“The counseling staff is 100 percent behind this proposal. Our highest-achieving students are struggling the most. They don’t have the coping skills they need. Our students need help, and they don’t even know how to ask for it.”

■ **DANIKA LEWIS, freshman**

“Luckily, the class would not be a mandate for me. I am in band and debate. I don’t have time for an elective that won’t help my resumé. If the superintendent wants to offer the class, I think it’s fine, but he shouldn’t make it mandatory.”

■ **INDINA WOLFE, parent of incoming freshman**

“I went to Dr. Unger’s information session, and he hasn’t convinced me that we need this class. My son wants to be in choir and art next year, but because he’s also an athlete, he will have to choose between the two if this proposal passes. His other core classes are mandatory. I don’t want my son to lose an elective he wants just so the school can try out another education fad.”

■ **JOSUE LOPEZ, eighth grade student**

“The class sounds cool, but I don’t want to take it next year. I worked hard in middle school to take prerequisites for newspaper and debate at the high school. Not very many freshmen get to take those classes, but I did the work. If that proposal passes, I will have to choose between the two classes.”

■ **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

Two high school teachers, Ran Barrett and Dominique Mokoko, agreed to take the four-week training class this summer to become certified to teach the SEL classes.

A 2016 study published in the Journal of Vocational Behavior found emotional intelligence is linked to success in college and careers. The study states that people with high emotional intelligence have self-awareness and social awareness and can manage themselves and others.

DO NOT PASS OUT TO STUDENTS BEFORE OR DURING THE CONTEST

DISTRICT • 2018

EDITORIAL WRITING 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 about supporting or opposing a mandatory SEL class. Do you support the class 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 board should..." write instead, "The board should."
3. Don't waddle into the editorial. Get right to the point. 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.
4. Don't ask rhetorical questions. It is permissible to ask legitimate questions.
5. Look for the future angle. Your paper comes out before the board meeting.
6. Once you've stated your stance, the body of the editorial should support your stance and refute the opposing stance.
7. After the body of your editorial, complete it with a solution.
8. 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 considerable credibility toward the editorial itself.
8. Watch for factual errors. Pay attention to minor details. Stay focused.
9. Don't clutter up the editorial with trite phrases such as "the SEL class 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/SUPPORTING

Because students live in a virtual world — texting instead of talking and making friends online rather than in person — they are losing their social and emotional skills. Students struggle with simple social tasks like answering the phone properly.

Superintendent Felix Unger has a solution — a class that would teach students these skills. He's taking his proposal to the school board Thursday, asking for a thumbs-up.

He should get one.

The facts are on his side.

A 2014 study of 200 school-based, universal social and emotional learning (SEL) programs involving 100,000 high school students showed SEL participants demonstrated improved social and emotional skills, attitudes and behavior. Students even advanced in academic achievement, showing a 10-percent gain.

The class, which would be a mandatory elective for freshmen beginning next school year, would focus on five strands: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making. Teachers who work with students every day say students need these skills desperately, and teachers don't have the time to teach these things in regular classes. It's time to trust the teachers.

The need for emotional intelligence doesn't end after high school. Emotional intelligence is linked to success in both college and careers. Students need these skills to navigate relationships and manage themselves.

Those who oppose this class say it interferes with scheduling and shouldn't be mandatory. It is true that incoming freshmen would have to give up one elective to take this class, but these skills are important. And if the class were optional, the students who need it most wouldn't sign up for it because they are on the high-achieving academic track.

This should be an easy SEL for the school board. When the administrators, teachers and counselors agree, the board should, too. Pass this proposal and help the students thrive next year and for years to come.

SAMPLE EDITORIAL/OPPOSING

The administration's latest proposal to force all incoming freshmen to take a touchy-feely class about healthy emotions and social skills is drawing some not-so-kind and gentle emotions from students and parents. And they are right to be upset.

When Superintendent Felix Unger takes his proposal to the school board on Thursday, the board should reject it.

Unger's proposal claims students are losing their social-emotional skills because of the internet and technology.

But students are sharing their opinions, showing they know how to express emotions just fine. The simple fact is, students learn social-emotional skills every day through normal interactions with teachers, fellow students and family members. When students are at school, they are not glued to their phone or computers. Students are interacting with peers and adults through conversations. They deal with stress, conflict and complicated relationships. They don't need a class for that.

Besides, when did it become the school's responsibility to teach a student how to interact with other people and deal with their emotions? That is the parent's responsibility. SEL skills are skills children learn from birth. When Unger asked the parents to endorse the class, the PTA couldn't deliver that endorsement. Too many parents do not support the class. That's just one more reason for the board to reject it.

The world is competitive and students understand this. They don't have time in their schedule for this class. Right now, freshmen get approximately two electives after core classes and required classes. Students who are involved in multiple activities, like choir and debate, will have to drop one of their elective classes to take the SEL class. Classes like band and debate could lead students to their college majors and careers. A SEL class won't.

If Unger believes so much in the class and its benefits, then the district should offer it as an optional elective. If it's that great, students will take it.

But that is the only thing the school board should approve Thursday — a new, optional elective. Anything more than that might trigger a justified spike in emotions from parents and students who likely will have no trouble expressing their feelings.