

Editorial Writing

Region 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 3,200 students enrolled in grades 9-12. More than 60 percent of the students are labeled low socio-economic. In January, Superintendent Margie Wrapper proposed a new graduation requirement for the class of 2021 — high school seniors would have to present proof of a “post-secondary plan” to graduate. Seniors would need to show they have acceptance to college or a gap-year program, a trade apprenticeship, military enlistment or a job offer. Those who fail to do so would be denied a diploma unless they receive a waiver for “extenuating circumstances.”

Currently, 65 percent of seniors enroll in a two-year or four-year college after graduation. Approximately 5 percent enlist in the military. Wrapper said her plan intentionally focuses on the 30 percent who have no plan.

To help students, Wrapper’s proposal includes hiring a transition counselor whose sole focus would be helping seniors plan for life after high school.

Mayor Leland Hammer opposes the plan. The faculty and the Parent-Teacher Association support the plan. The school board will consider the proposal at its next meeting, Thursday, April 19. You are writing for the issue of the Press to be distributed Tuesday, April 17.

SUPPORTING THE PROPOSAL

The school district’s mission statement is “to educate, empower and enable all students to become caring, contributing citizens who can succeed in an ever-changing world.” Without a post-secondary plan, students can’t be contributing citizens. Plus, Wrapper has a plan to help students — hire a transition counselor. The proposal will motivate every senior to plan for life after high school.

OPPOSING THE PROPOSAL

High school is four years. It’s not four years plus. The school should prepare students for the future, but it should not interfere with students’ lives after high school. If students complete their coursework and pass the STAAR, the district has no right to deny students their diplomas.

■ MARGIE WRAPPER, superintendent

“High school cannot be the end. I don’t care whether students choose a four-year college, a technical school, the military or employment, but I want them to choose something. To be a contributing citizen in today’s world, you must have a plan after high school.

“What motivated me to propose this was looking at our unemployment rates among Leaguetown adults ages 19-23. It’s nearly 40 percent. Those are recent graduates who are doing nothing — well, nothing productive. The reality is, many of our recent graduates are making poor decisions for themselves and the

■ **MARGIE WRAPPER, cont.**

community. This plan will ensure that every student is prepared to succeed after high school.

“We also are building in a plan for students who have extenuating circumstances. For example, if a student is caring for a sick parent, we would grant that student a waiver. We will look at each case individually. We don’t want to punish students who are dealing with crises in their lives.

“Once the board approves the proposal, we will request the state to give us a thumbs up. I have no doubt it will be approved.”

■ **LELAND HAMMER, mayor**

“How in good conscience can we, as a community and school district, deny a student a diploma when he or she completes all of the state-mandated graduation requirements? And let’s not forget, the state-mandated requirements are no walk in the park.

“I can’t imagine doing all the work necessary to graduate and having your diploma withheld from you. I am 100 percent in support of requiring students to develop a plan for after high school, but making it a requirement for graduation is overstepping the school district’s bounds. Let’s help students plan, and let’s get that transition counselor. But let’s not punish an 18-year-old who can’t find a job or can’t decide on his or her plan. And wouldn’t this plan increase our drop-out rate? The district already has a high drop-out rate at 7.6 percent — a percentage point higher than the state average. We don’t want that to increase.”

■ **ALYSSA FISHER, counselor**

“Too many of our students have no plans after graduation. No one in their family is pushing them to college or a career. This plan would hold not only our students accountable for their future, but it will hold us, as a school, accountable, too. The transition counselor is a must. Frankly, our counseling staff has little time to help students plan for the future. We spend the majority of our days dealing with scheduling issues, student issues and graduation plans.”

■ **CHARLA POTTER, sophomore**

“The plan is stupid. There are too many holes. It would be too easy to play the system. Just because I am accepted to a college or hired by a company doesn’t mean I am going to go to that school or job. Anyone can get into the community college. Seniors can simply state they are going there.”

■ **REBECCA HARRIS, parent of a freshman**

“Dr. Wrapper’s heart is in the right place, but I doubt she has the authority to do this. Can she hold a diploma if a student completes all of the state requirements? I know a district has local control, but this is beyond the district. Plus, how do you hold the students accountable for their plan? My oldest daughter was accepted to both the University of Texas at Austin and Texas A&M University, and she didn’t go to either. An acceptance letter doesn’t mean the student will go to that institution. I guess the military is the only sure thing. It’s not easy to get out of that once you sign up.”

■ **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

No Texas school district has required a student to have a post-secondary plan to be eligible to graduate. Several school districts require students to perform community service hours for graduation. A spokeswoman for the Texas Education Agency said she could not comment on whether the proposal would be acceptable to the state.

DO NOT PASS OUT TO STUDENTS BEFORE OR DURING THE CONTEST

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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 student proof of a post-secondary plan for graduation. Do you support the proposal 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 proposal 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

The school district's mission states it wants to develop "contributing citizens who can succeed." If the district means that, then on Thursday the school board should approve Superintendent Margie Wrapper's new proposal, which would require seniors to show proof of a "post-secondary plan" to graduate.

When students are prepared for life after high school, they stand a much better chance of succeeding. The post-secondary plan would get them prepared and send them on the path to success.

For the proposal, starting with the class of 2021, seniors would need to show they have college acceptance, military enlistment or have a job offer to receive their diplomas.

On average, about 70 percent of seniors head to college or the military after high school. The administration can track this. That leaves 30 percent with no formal plan — maybe they have jobs, but maybe not. The unemployment rate among Leaguetown adults ages 19-23 is 40 percent, so that "maybe not" is probably closer to reality. This proposal directly targets those students.

And the proposal doesn't simply mandate something without giving students help to reach the new standard. Wrapper would hire a transition counselor whose sole focus would be to help seniors plan for life after high school — whether that is applying to college or looking for a job.

The students in this district aren't rich. In fact, more than 50 percent live below the poverty line. This proposal can help move students above that line with a clear plan for the future.

The plan also has provisions for students who have extenuating circumstances — like caring for a sick parent or relative. Those students can apply for a waiver from the requirement.

The nay-sayers say the plan has too many loopholes. Just because a student is accepted into college doesn't mean he or she will attend. That's true. Students could choose not to go to college after being accepted. But that isn't what this plan is about. It's not about tracking students down after they walk across the stage to make sure they attend college on day one. It's about ensuring that every — and "every" is the key word here — student has a plan after graduation.

Life changes rapidly, and sometimes plans have to change, too. But having a plan is step one. This proposal is a necessary step for the district. Without a doubt, the board should move forward with this proposal.

SAMPLE EDITORIAL/OPPOSING

Soon it may not be enough for seniors to pass all of their classes and the STAAR tests to graduate. If Superintendent Margie Wrapper has her way, starting with the class of 2021, seniors will be required to have a “post-secondary plan” if they want to walk across the stage in May.

High school is four years (at least for most). Not four years plus.

The school doesn't have authority over students after high school, so Wrapper's latest proposal is over-reaching. When the proposal comes before the school board on Thursday, the board should reject it.

For this proposed post-secondary plan, seniors would need to show college acceptance, military enlistment or have a job offer to receive their diplomas.

First and foremost, this district is above the state average in drop-outs. The district should not do anything that would make graduation even more difficult unless it is hoping for the state's high-score in dropouts. If students complete the state-mandated requirements for graduation, they should get their diploma. Helping students meet those requirements should be the district's focus, not adding an additional requirement.

No other district in the state has this graduation requirement. There's a reason for that. You can't hold students accountable for it. The district has no power over a student after graduation. If the student fails to show up for the first day of college or quits his or her job after one week, the district can't swoop in and take the diploma back.

Plus, this requirement may not even cut mustard with the state. Before proposing it, Wrapper should have received approval — not the other way around. She's wasting the board's time until the state OKs the graduation change.

Wrapper's heart is in the right place. She wants to help students have a plan for their future. She even wants to hire a transition counselor to work with students on their plans. These are great ideas. What isn't great is making that plan a requirement. Students can easily produce an acceptance letter to the community college since every graduate is welcome there. That letter doesn't guarantee the student will show up on the first day of class.

As is, the proposal is no-go. Pieces of it make sense. The district should hire a transition counselor to work with students. The district should help seniors develop a plan for life after graduation. But beyond that, the school board should say, “No, thank you.”