

# Editorial Writing

Invitational A Meet • 2023



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 4,400 students enrolled in grades 9-12. On Jan. 2, the district rolled out a new program that requires middle school and high school students to lock up their phones and other mobile devices during the school day in a “magnetically sealed pouch.” The program, known as UnDistractED, requires students to secure their mobile devices in the personal pouch provided by the school. When they leave the school building, students tap the pouch to an unlocking base, located at each door of the campus, to access their phones, smart watches and wireless earbuds.

Superintendent McIntyre made the decision to implement the new program with school board approval after visiting two other campuses that have been using UnDistractED since August.

Since the Jan. 2 roll-out, 2,386 students and 421 parents have signed an online petition requesting that the program be removed. Superintendent McIntyre said he has no intention of removing the program because schools are already seeing gains in academic performance and a decrease in discipline issues and cyberbullying, which he attributes to UnDistractED. So far, 78 students and parents have filled out the online form on the district’s website requesting to speak during the public comment section of the school board meeting on Monday, Jan. 23, to appeal to the board to have the program thrown out.

You are writing for the issue of the Press to be distributed Friday, Jan. 20.

## THOSE SUPPORTING THE PROGRAM

Academic performance is up. Administrators are reporting fewer students suspended, fewer fights in the hallways and fewer cyberbullying reports, which they attribute to UnDistractED. Now, students can actually pay attention to what’s happening in their classes instead of what’s happening on social media. The program has only been in place for a few weeks, and the community should give it more time to see results before throwing it out.

## THOSE OPPOSING THE PROGRAM

Students need to be able to contact their parents during the day if they need help or for emergencies. If a student forgets something at home, it saves time to be able to call a parent for help, rather than go through the office. Students also use their phones as a classroom resource. In the working world, phones are a tool for people to use. School policy should reflect the modern working world and show students how to use phones responsibly in class.

### ■ RICK McINTYRE, superintendent

“After visiting Southside ISD and Peacefield ISD, it was clear to me that as soon as they implemented the UnDistractedED phone storage program, discipline issues decreased. They had hardly any fights in the halls and fewer suspensions. This is because students don’t have access to their phones to get conflicts all stirred up on social media. Once we implemented the program in our district, the change was almost immediate for us, too. After the first progress reports of the semester, it looks like GPAs are on the rise. It’s because kids aren’t on their phones all day. Period. We are pleased with the results so far.”

### ■ DEVON LANE, senior

“I’m number two in the class. I play soccer. I’m editor of the yearbook. I am not a kid who gets in trouble all the time, but I need my phone. I need to manage messages from my select soccer team, do interviews for the yearbook, manage appointments with college recruiters. It’s not to goof around on TikTok. My phone is the best tool I have to help me accomplish all these tasks throughout the day. At the same time, I’m working to absorb lessons from all my AP classes and studying. I barely have time to hang out with my friends as it is, so sometimes I do rely on my phone for what little social life I’m able to have. Now all that has been taken away during the school day. I plan to speak at the school board meeting. This program is making life worse for students and does not prepare us for the real world.”

### ■ RONNIE LIGHT, parent of a sophomore

“I have signed up to speak at the school board meeting to address my concerns about the phone storage program. I expect my kid to be able to contact me at any time for any reason if she should ever need anything. I don’t care if she wants Chick-fil-a for lunch or if she needs me to bring her some Advil. I’m her mom, and it’s not right for the school to prevent her from contacting me. I don’t care what time of day it is.”

### ■ NITISH PATEL, AP Human Geography teacher

“Kids have been complaining about this phone thing since it went into effect, but I’m here to tell you, I don’t remember the last time I was able to hold kids’ attention for an entire class period without them looking down at their phones during my lecture. It has completely changed the way they do school, and I’m here for it. I hope they don’t fold on the complainers and keep the program. I think it might actually be working.”

### ■ JOHNNY HOBART, freshman

“My phone is a part of me. It’s what keeps me going throughout the day. Since we haven’t been able to use phones during school, I’ve just been bored. I don’t think it’s helped me. And as soon as I tag out at the end of the day, it’s like ‘bzz, bzz, bzz, bzz’ from all the notifications I miss. It’s hard to get caught up on all that.”

### ■ ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The board has not said whether it will address parent and student concerns at the meeting after public comment. The topic is not on the board agenda published on the district website.

**DO NOT PASS OUT TO STUDENTS BEFORE OR DURING THE CONTEST****Editorial Writing/Invitational A • 2023  
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 should continue the UnDistractED program.
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 principal should..." write instead, "The principal 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 school 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 "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 district rolled out UnDistractED, a program that locks students' electronic devices in a pouch during the school day, Jan. 2. Since then, 78 students and parents have signed up online to speak at the school board meeting on Jan. 23 to try to get the program thrown out.

The school board should keep the UnDistractED program in middle school and high school.

The program is being utilized by other school districts, and those districts are seeing positive results. Superintendent Rick McIntyre visited multiple campuses to see what outcomes the schools were experiencing as a result of the program. He found fewer disciplinary issues, fewer fights and fewer cyberbullying reports. Conflicts that cause bullying and fights typically begin on social media. Therefore, having kids off their phones during school leads to a safer learning environment for everyone.

Students can reach out to faculty members or go to the office if they want to get in touch with their families during the school day. While it may not be as convenient as texting, students and parents are able to get a hold of each other for emergencies.

While electronic devices may seem like a positive classroom resource, UnDistractED has received praise among teachers, saying the program keeps students focused during class time. According to Superintendent McIntyre, grades are already up in participating schools and teachers on this campus already see evidence of this.

Let's face it. Kids don't want their phones for safety or convenience reasons. They want their phones to make TikToks in the bathroom instead of paying attention in class. They want to communicate with their friends through Snapchat. They want to watch Netflix instead of doing their work. UnDistractED is here to keep students focused on school, and that's why it should stay in schools - to help create a more productive and safe learning environment.

## **SAMPLE EDITORIAL/OPPOSING**

Superintendent Rick McIntyre rolled out UnDistractED on Jan. 2. This program locks students' electronic devices in a pouch during the school day. Since then, 78 students and parents have signed up online to speak at the school board meeting on Jan. 23 to try to get the program thrown out.

The school board should listen to these concerns, remove the program from schools and embrace a new era of technology instead of running away from the problem.

Cell phones can be helpful classroom tools for research, digital creations and engaging classroom games. If teachers use cell phones as a learning tool, then students can absorb content while also improving their digital literacy – skills they will find useful in their futures as productive adults.

Additionally, open communication between students and parents throughout the school day should be a priority. A student's learning time is disrupted if they have to go down to the office every time they need to contact their parents. Cell phones allow parents and students to stay in touch throughout the day without taking away from class time.

Students use their phones for calendars or books, making cell phones a crucial part of their everyday lives. Promoting responsible and efficient cell phone use in schools today can be helpful for students when they enter the modern workforce.

Administrators and a few teachers say they like the results they are seeing from the program so far. But these individuals are only thinking of how to make their jobs easier, not what's best for students.

Cell phones are a part of the future, and the district should embrace them as a new learning opportunity for students and remove the UnDistractED program from schools.