

Editorial Writing

State 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 700 students enrolled in grades 9-12. In January, the Student Council presented the school board with a petition to change the school mascot from the Confederate Rebel to a lion. Approximately 600 students and more than 80 percent of the faculty and staff signed the petition. At that meeting, the school board discussed the petition and tabled the issue until it could receive feedback from the school district lawyer and community.

The current mascot, referred to as Ol' Reb, is an old Confederate soldier wearing a gray uniform and sporting a huge gray mustache. For years, the mascot carried a Rebel flag, but that practice ended in 2010. Students, though, still bring Rebel flags to sporting events and wear the symbol on their backpacks and jackets even though the administration has banned it.

Last week the board announced it would allow the community to vote on the mascot issue. Voting is set for May 11-12. The district will set up an online voting portal on its website for community members, ages 18 and older.

Since the announcement of the vote, Fred Willow, a local businessman, started a group called the Rebel Alliance. Willow, a 1987 Leaguetown graduate, created yard signs and wrote an editorial in the local newspaper about why the community should vote against the change. In response, the Student Council officers created their own signs.

You are writing for the issue of the Press to be distributed Tuesday, May 8.

SUPPORTING THE MASCOT CHANGE

The legacy of the Confederate Rebel soldier is white supremacy and slavery. It is a symbol of hate and division. The school is diverse, and the mascot should represent the students and their values. Ol' Reb does not do that. It was the students who asked for the change. They understand the need to eliminate vestiges of a racist past.

OPPOSING THE MASCOT CHANGE

Confederate Rebels are part of the country's history and the school's history. When the school opened in 1943, it opened with a Rebel mascot. Thousands of students have graduated as Rebels. It would be negating almost 80 years of school tradition to change the mascot. It also would be expensive.

■ JEWEL ALFRED, superintendent

"The Student Council worked hard to get the signatures for the petition, and I support the students. I may be unpopular with some of the community, but I want to stand on the right side of history. The mascot interferes with our students' ability to feel safe and included in our schools.

"If passed, changing to a new mascot will not be cheap. When I asked our

■ JEWEL ALFRED (cont.)

finance office to investigate the cost, the director reported it would be well over \$70,000. We would have to get new uniforms for most of our teams since the word ‘Rebels’ appears on most of the jerseys. We also would need to redo the gym floor, school letterhead, buy a new mascot costume and more. Our budget is tight. I am not sure where we would find the money. We would probably have to phase in the new mascot and spread the expenses out over a few years.”

■ FRED WILLOW, local businessman

“This whole thing bubbled up because of the events in Charlottesville, Virginia. Those white nationalists are causing this whole problem. But I am not a racist, and neither is the majority of this town. We are fighting this mascot change because the Leaguetown Rebels have always been a family. Ol’ Reb has been our mascot for 75 years. When I was a boy, I always wanted to grow up and be a Reb just like my dad and big brother. Rebs looked out for each other. We weren’t concerned about race or ethnicity. We were concerned about us.

“Changing the mascot isn’t going to solve any problems we have with race. But it will cause damage. It will hurt the spirit and pride of this town. Let’s not forget the Civil War was more about states’ rights than slavery.

“And who thinks about Confederate soldiers when they see our Leaguetown Rebels? No one. Instead you see a football player, a cheerleader, an academic champ. Those are our Rebels — proud and strong.”

■ SONIA DAVIS, Student Council president

“Yes, it was Charlottesville that made us stop and think. We can’t ignore the fact that our mascot represents something ugly in our country’s history. More and more of our students are recognizing the fact that our main school symbol represents white supremacy. I am mixed race. My mom is Hispanic, and my dad is black. The mascot makes me uncomfortable. It always has, but it hasn’t been until these last few months that I felt empowered enough to talk about it. When I finally did, I was shocked to see how many of my friends felt the same way — and many of them are white. If we keep the mascot, we send a wrong message.”

■ VINCENT IBARRA, sophomore

“I am not going to be popular for saying this, but this whole mascot thing is a knee-jerk reaction to what is going on in the country. Our mascot doesn’t make our student body racist. It does the exact opposite. Ol’ Reb makes us cheer and shout. Ol’ Reb shows us how to support each other. Ol’ Reb gives us pride in our school. If people are so up in arms about Ol’ Reb and his Confederate uniform, then let’s just get him a new outfit. Why can’t he just be a rebel? You know, someone who rebels against the system. Wouldn’t that be cheaper, anyway? And maybe our community could come back together. This division the mascot issue has caused is hurting our school and our town.

■ ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The high school ethnic makeup is currently 45 percent white, 35 percent Hispanic and 20 percent black.

DO NOT PASS OUT TO STUDENTS BEFORE OR DURING THE CONTEST

STATE • 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 whether to replace a Confederate Rebel mascot. Do you support the replacement 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 community should...,” write instead, “The community 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, such as “Where will the money come from?”
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 mascot change 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

Hey-hey. Ho-ho. The racist mascot has got to go.

While cheerleaders aren't chanting this yet, the community should be when it gets the chance this week to replace Ol' Reb as the school mascot.

The Student Council proposed the mascot change — from the Confederate Rebel mascot to a lion — to the school board. Rather than taking a stand and untethering the district of a racist symbol, the board decided to allow the community to vote through an online portal this Friday and Saturday.

And now the community must do what the board wouldn't — listen to the students and do the right thing. Replace the mascot.

This mascot change started with a petition from the Student Council. More than 80 percent of the student body and staff signed it. That alone is enough reason for the mascot to go. Students and staffers are the ones who must live with the mascot on a daily basis.

But that isn't the only reason, and not even the most important reason, to retire Ol' Reb. The principle legacy of the Confederate rebel soldier is white supremacy and slavery. The school mascot embodies this legacy. The mascot, an old man sporting the traditional blue and gray Confederate uniform, undeniably represents this. A mascot should represent the students and their values. Ol' Reb doesn't, and it needs to go.

Student Council president Sonia Davis admitted it was Charlottesville that spurred her to action. It doesn't matter what triggered the petition. It needed to be done. Students needed to find their voice and, thankfully, they did. More than half of the student population is Hispanic or black. Minority students can not and should not have to identify with a Confederate soldier as their school's symbol. Students should be proud to wear their mascot on their athletic jersey or academic T-shirt. They shouldn't feel uncomfortable or embarrassed.

Those who oppose the change say history is being erased by changing the mascot. In fact, history will be made by changing the mascot. It would show that the community is taking action to scrub the vestiges of a racist past. That doesn't imply or suggest that Ol' Reb supporters are racists. But the symbol of the Confederate soldier, who fought for a government that staunchly defended slavery, speaks for itself.

And it's time for it to be silenced.

SAMPLE EDITORIAL/OPPOSING

For 75 years, Ol' Reb has brought pride to this school and community. Cheerleaders have chanted cheers about him. Athletes have worn his face on their gear. And generations of students have donned the costume to rouse the fans and raise the spirits of the community.

And now because of the actions of a few white supremacists in another state, the students are in an uproar about the mascot, calling it a symbol of racism and division and asking for a new mascot.

The community has a chance to squelch this latest political correctness bandwagon and vote down the proposed mascot change. The online voting portal will be open Friday and Saturday.

The Student Council proposed the mascot change from Ol' Reb to a lion in January when it presented a petition to the school board. The school board didn't vote on the petition because it knows better. Instead, it is allowing the community to decide the issue.

Confederate rebels are a part of the country's history and, yes, the Confederacy stood for some despicable practices and beliefs. However, that's not all the Confederacy stood for. The Confederacy also stood for less federal governmental control and state rights.

Ol' Reb embodies more than just a Confederate rebel. The mascot embodies the spirit and pride of the school and this town. Ol' Reb shows students how to support each other and gives students pride in the school. Ol' Reb is part of the school's identity. To change the mascot would be to change the school and its character.

And if those facts don't sway the community to vote no to a mascot change, then they also know that a change would be expensive — too expensive for this district. Changing the mascot would cost well over \$70,000. Sports teams would need new uniforms. The gym floor would need to be redone. A new mascot costume would be necessary and more. The school simply can't afford that. So unless the taxpayers want to cough up that money, this is a simple no vote.

Those who support the change say the majority of students and staff want a different mascot. They want to end the association with the Confederacy. That's easy. Simply change the outfit. Get rid of the blue and gray army uniform and dress Ol' Reb in a leather jacket and cut-up jeans. Then, he can be a rebel. This is a much cheaper and simpler solution, and the town will not lose a 75-year tradition.

Ol' Reb has been a part of the school and community for a long time. There's no reason to run him off now.