

News Writing

Region Meet • 2021



You are a reporter for the Leaguetown **Press**, the student newspaper of Leaguetown High School. From the given information, write a **news story** as you would for the high school newspaper. You may use statements attributed to individuals as **direct or indirect quotes**. You may not change the meaning of a statement. 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 800 students enrolled in grades 9-12. In March, junior Tony Poletski was sent to in-school suspension for wearing polish on his fingernails. The student remained in ISS until he agreed to remove the nail polish. He was there for three days.

The student handbook prohibits males from wearing makeup or nail polish, noting that the penalty for violating the dress code is in-school suspension “until the violation is rectified.”

Two weeks ago, Poletski wrote a column in the high school newspaper, the Press, about his experience. In the column, Poletski said he was gay and regularly wore nail polish and makeup on the weekends. He wrote that he thought it was unfair that he couldn’t express his “true self” at school.

After the column was published, the Student Council officers proposed changes to the dress code. Their proposal would eliminate the ban on makeup, earrings and polish for male students.

The Student Council officers presented the proposed changes to Principal Larry Brewer, but he said the school board must approve dress code changes. The school board will address the proposal at its next meeting on Thursday, April 22. You are writing for the issue of the Press to be distributed Monday, April 19.

■ TONY POLETSKI, junior

“The reason I had the nail polish on was because I forgot to take it off on Sunday night. I honestly forgot. When Mr. Brewer first sent me to ISS, I planned to take off the polish as soon as I got home, but then I thought about it all day in ISS. I don’t think the dress code policy is fair. My nail polish is not keeping anyone from learning. In fact, I don’t think anyone noticed, except for my first period teacher. I would have kept the polish on longer, but my mom was worried about what staying in ISS would do to my grades. I am ranked No. 1 in the class right now. I want to stay there, so I removed it.

“I wrote the column so students and faculty would know why I was in ISS. I didn’t expect this much support. When I heard what the Student Council was doing, I was stunned. Not too many people have stood up for me over the years. In fact, I’ve dealt with my fair share of bullying because of who I am. I don’t hide anything. I support the Student Council 100% and hope to speak at the school board meeting. I know it won’t be easy to change this, but it’s way overdue.”

■ LARRY BREWER, principal

“Students have asked for dress code changes in the past, and the school board has denied them. Our dress code fits our community, and I think the board would agree with me on that. Students can wear what they want on the weekends. We want to create an environment without distractions. Our students need to focus on their education, not on whether Johnny is wearing eyeliner.”

■ VICTOR BERRY, senior and Student Council president

“Our dress code is so outdated it’s funny. I mean, seriously. This isn’t the 1950s. No student thinks it’s a big deal if a guy wears nail polish or an earring. My girlfriend painted my nails last month, and it was no big deal.

“The other officers and I fear the school board will oppose our changes, so we’ve started a petition for students to show their support for the dress code changes. We are trying to get every student to sign it before the board meeting. Right now, we have 482 signatures, so we have fewer than half to go. Students can sign the petition during lunch or they can go to Ms. [Julia] Castro’s room after school to sign it. We’ve even had 12 teachers sign the petition, but we are focused on students.”

■ JULIA CASTRO, social studies teacher and Student Council sponsor

“I am proud that the Student Council officers have taken on this issue even though it doesn’t directly affect any of them. They understand the absurdity of the current dress code. I signed the petition to show my support. It will be hard for the school board to ignore their proposal if every student in the school signs the petition. Even if 80% of the students sign it, that’s a powerful message.”

■ KADY SMITH, sophomore

“I haven’t signed the petition, but I will. I read Tony’s column, and it upset me. I wear nail polish every day. I don’t understand why boys can’t. It’s stupid. I think it’s bullying by the school. In his column, Tony talked about how he was bullied when he was younger. Thankfully, Tony said life is easier now, and students accept him. I don’t understand why the school won’t. He isn’t hurting anyone. This all seems so petty.”

■ ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

All school board members declined to comment until after the meeting on Thursday.

DO NOT DISTRIBUTE TO STUDENTS BEFORE OR DURING THE CONTEST!

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NEWS WRITING CONTEST TIPS AND SAMPLE STORY

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. As a general rule, open with a future lead. Here, the story comes out before the school board meeting.

Student Council officers will present a dress code proposal and a petition with signatures from more than half of the student body supporting the proposal to the school board Thursday. They are asking that the dress code be changed to allow males to wear makeup and nail polish.

2. Use direct quotes early in the story. After you introduce quotes, use the transition/quote formula. Be sure you attribute after the quote. An attribution should be: subject of attribution followed by the verb of attribution ("Brewer said," not "said Brewer.") Avoid stacking quotes. Avoid putting two or more quotes from different people together without placing a transition between them. Also, make sure transitions provide information and the quote does not repeat information revealed in the transition.

transition

The proposal and petition were started after junior Tony Poletski wrote a column in the Press about being sent to in-school suspension for three days because he wore nail polish to school.

direct quote

"I support the Student Council 100% and hope to speak at the school board meeting," Poletski said. "I know it won't be easy to change this, but it's way overdue."

transition

The Student Council presented the proposal to Principal Larry Brewer, but he said dress code changes need school board approval.

direct quote

"Students have asked for dress code changes in the past, and the school board has denied them," Brewer said. "Our dress code fits our community, and I think the board would agree with me on that."

3. Use third person. Don't say "our students" or "our principal Larry Brewer" or "Some of our students ..." Also, do not editorialize. For instance, you should not say "The dress code is wrong ..." without attributing that quote to someone.

4. Note how in the earlier example of transition/quote, each quote is its own paragraph. Don't be afraid to use one or two-sentence paragraphs.

5. Make sure both sides are represented in your story. Try to be as objective as possible.

SAMPLE STORY

Student Council officers will present a dress code proposal and a petition with signatures from more than half of the student body supporting the proposal to the school board Thursday. They are asking that the dress code be changed to allow males to wear makeup and nail polish. They are asking that the dress code be changed to allow males to wear makeup and nail polish.

“We are trying to get every student to sign it before the board meeting” Student Council president Victor Berry said. “Right now, we have 482 signatures, so we have less than half to go.”

The proposal and petition were started after junior Tony Poletski wrote a column in the Press about being sent to in-school suspension for three days because he wore nail polish to school.

“I support the Student Council 100% and hope to speak at the school board meeting,” Poletski said. “I know it won’t be easy to change this, but it’s way overdue.”

The Student Council presented the proposal to Principal Larry Brewer, but he said dress code changes need school board approval.

“Students have asked for dress code changes in the past, and the school board has denied them,” Brewer said. “Our dress code fits our community, and I think the board would agree with me on that.”

Poletski said the reason he had the nail polish on his fingers was because he forgot to take it off on Sunday night. He said he wears polish and makeup on the weekends. The dress code states the penalty for violating the dress code is in-school suspension “until the violation is rectified.”

“When Mr. Brewer first sent me to ISS, I planned to take off the polish as soon as I got home, but then I thought about it all day in ISS,” he said. “I don’t think the dress code policy is fair. I would have kept the polish on longer, but my mom was worried about what staying in ISS would do to my grades.”

Currently, Poletski is ranked No. 1 in the class.

“I want to stay there, so I removed it,” he said.

Poletski, who is gay, said he was “stunned” when he heard what the Student Council was doing.

“Not too many people have stood up for me over the years,” he said. “In fact, I’ve dealt with my fair share of bullying because of who I am. I don’t hide anything.”

Berry, a senior, said the dress code is outdated.

“This isn’t the 1950s,” he said. “No student thinks it’s a big deal if a guy wears nail polish or an earring. My girlfriend painted my nails last month, and it was no big deal.”

Students can sign the petition during lunch or after school in social studies teacher Julia Castro’s room.

“I haven’t signed the petition, but I will,” sophomore Kady Smith said. “I wear nail polish every day. I don’t understand why boys can’t. It’s stupid. I think it’s bullying by the school.”

Brewer said the ban is to eliminate distractions in the school.

“Students can wear what they want on the weekends,” he said. “Our students need to focus on their education, not on whether Johnny is wearing eyeliner.”

Twelve teachers, including Castro, have signed the petition.

“It will be hard for the school board to ignore their proposal if every student in the school signs the petition,” she said. “Even if 80% of the students sign it, that’s a powerful message.”

School board members declined to comment until after the meeting on Thursday.