

News Writing

State 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 1,700 students enrolled in grades 9-12. Since September, the school district has offered a virtual school option for students. At the beginning of the year, approximately 90% of the students chose this option. By the spring semester, 55% of students were back on campus for school. In April, the district announced a high school virtual academy option for the 2021-22 school year. Students who choose this option will not be allowed to participate in athletics or extracurricular activities, including clubs and school events like prom. The virtual academy also will have a dedicated set of teachers who teach only virtual classes. Classes at the virtual academy will look similar to the current virtual school, with regular class times for synchronous learning. For the first year, electives will be limited at the virtual academy and will include Spanish (all levels), art, computer science, physical education and creative writing.

For the virtual school to be economically viable for the district, at least 100 students will need to commit to it for the school year. Students must commit for the entire school year.

Next week, parents and students will choose their school option for the upcoming school year. The deadline is Friday, May 7. Students who do not submit a choice will automatically be enrolled in regular, in-person school.

Several parents have reached out to Superintendent Abigail Suthers to ask for greater flexibility and more choices with the virtual academy. They want the superintendent to postpone the deadline for making a school choice for next year until the end of the month. You are writing for the issue of the Press to be distributed Wednesday, May 5.

■ ABIGAIL SUTHERS, superintendent

“The idea of the virtual academy came from parents and students. After a year of attending virtual school, some students prefer it over in-person learning. The district listened, and now we have the virtual academy for next year as an option, assuming at least 100 students sign up.

“I know parents want more classes and other changes, but we are not in a position to offer them now. We designed the virtual academy to give as much flexibility and choice as possible within our budget. Unfortunately, we don’t have the funding to offer more classes.

“As far as extracurricular activities and school-sponsored events like dances and such, virtual academy students will not be allowed to participate. That was one provision the high school administrators requested. They wanted a clear delineation between on-campus and virtual learners. Students will have to make a choice that works for them. There is nothing that would deter the virtual academy students from creating their own clubs and events,

■ **ABIGAIL SUTHERS, cont.**

but those things would not necessarily be school-sponsored. I have no plans to extend the deadline or make major changes in the virtual academy plan. This is the best we can offer.”

■ **ASHLEY FRANCO, parent**

“When the district announced the virtual academy last month, many parents were a bit taken aback. A group of us asked for a virtual school option for next year, but this is not what we had in mind. In fact, the district did not ask for any input from us.

“My daughter has loved virtual school this year. She is thriving. Many of her friends also love it and want to continue next year. But the option the district offered is unacceptable. My daughter needs more access to electives and the opportunity to stay involved in clubs and events. The virtual academy is too limited, and the deadline to choose is coming too fast. Parents need time to ask questions and offer suggestions.”

■ **ALLISON NGUYEN, parent**

“I think the district wants the virtual academy option to fail. The plan is so restrictive, I doubt 100 students will sign up for it. It’s frustrating that the superintendent won’t budge. My son would love to be virtual next year, but he is on the UIL math team and doesn’t want to give that up. He should not be forced to. I have been calling school board members all week to ask for their help. Several of my friends are doing the same. The board needs to intervene and make changes. Even the UIL state office said my son could participate on the math team if the district approved it.”

■ **ASHER HOROWITZ, sophomore**

“I wanted to attend the virtual academy, but I participate in clubs and other activities. I am on the golf team, and I participated this year while I was a virtual student. I don’t want to give up golf. I went to every practice after school and participated in all of the competitions this year. It doesn’t make sense that I couldn’t continue to do that.”

■ **AMBER ABERNATHY, junior**

“It’s a no-brainer for me. I will do in-person school next year. I am not willing to give up all of my extracurricular activities. Plus, next year I will be a senior. I want to go to prom and all of the senior activities. I don’t know anyone who is interested in the virtual academy because of the way the district is structuring it. Students thought it would be like this year. That is, attend classes virtually during the day, and then come to school for extracurriculars.”

■ **ALLEN DAY, English teacher**

“From the chatter I’ve heard from students and parents, I don’t think 100 students will sign up for the virtual academy. Students want it to look exactly like this year, and that’s not feasible. I polled my students, and not a single one said they will select virtual for next year.”

■ **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

Approximately 30 parents and students plan to demonstrate outside the school district building on Thursday, May 6. They want the district to offer more electives for the virtual academy and allow virtual academy students to participate in extracurricular activities. The superintendent said the parents and students have the right to protest, but it will not affect the district’s plans.

School board members released a statement that says it “supports the superintendent’s vision of the virtual academy.”

DO NOT DISTRIBUTE TO STUDENTS BEFORE OR DURING THE CONTEST!

STATE • 2021 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 students choose their schooling option for next year and before the parent/student demonstration.

While a group of parents and students plan to demonstrate outside the school district building Thursday, the rally opposing the virtual academy for next school year will have no effect on the district's plans, Superintendent Abigail Suthers said. The deadline for selecting the virtual academy for the 2021-2022 school year will remain this Friday, she said.

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 ("Suthers said," not "said Suthers.") 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

In April, the district announced a virtual academy option for next school year. Students who choose the virtual academy will be limited in their electives and cannot participate in athletics or extracurricular activities. At least 100 students must select the virtual option for it to be viable.

direct quote

"When the district announced the virtual academy last month, many parents were a bit taken aback," Ashley Franco, a parent, said. "A group of us asked for a virtual school option for next year, but this is not what we had in mind. In fact, the district did not ask for any input from us."

transition

Franco said her daughter has thrived in the virtual school option and wanted to continue next year.

direct quote

"But the option the district offered is unacceptable," she said. "My daughter needs more access to electives and the opportunity to stay involved in clubs and events. The virtual academy is too limited, and the deadline to choose is coming too fast. Parents need time to ask questions and offer suggestions."

3. Use third person. Don't say "our students" or "our superintendent Abigail Suthers" or "Some of our students ..." Also, do not editorialize. For instance, you should not say "The virtual academy is too limited ..." without attributing that statement to someone. If it is an opinion, it **MUST** be attributed.

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

While a group of parents and students plan to demonstrate outside the school district building Thursday, the rally opposing the virtual academy for next school year will have no effect on the district's plans, Superintendent Abigail Suthers said. The deadline for selecting the virtual academy for the 2021-2022 school year will remain this Friday, she said.

"I have no plans to extend the deadline or make major changes in the virtual academy plan," she said. "This is the best we can offer."

The school board also released a statement saying it "supports the superintendent's vision of the virtual academy."

In April, the district announced a virtual academy option for next school year. Students who choose the virtual academy will be limited in their electives and cannot participate in athletics or extracurricular activities. At least 100 students must select the virtual option for it to be viable.

"When the district announced the virtual academy last month, many parents were a bit taken aback," parent Ashley Franco said. "A group of us asked for a virtual school option for next year, but this is not what we had in mind. In fact, the district did not ask for any input from us."

Franco said her daughter has thrived in the virtual school option and wanted to continue next year.

"But the option the district offered is unacceptable," she said. "My daughter needs more access to electives and the opportunity to stay involved in clubs and events. The virtual academy is too limited, and the deadline to choose is coming too fast. Parents need time to ask questions and offer suggestions."

Sophomore Asher Horowitz said he wants to attend the virtual academy but not if it means he can't participate in extracurricular activities.

"I don't want to give up golf," he said. "I went to every practice after school and participated in all of the competitions this year. It doesn't make sense that I couldn't continue to do that."

Parent Allison Nguyen said her son also wanted the virtual option, but he wants to continue to participate on the UIL math team.

"I think the district wants the virtual academy option to fail," she said. "The plan is so restrictive. Even the UIL state office said my son could participate on the math team if the district approved it."

When the district was designing the virtual academy plan, the superintendent said high school administrators did not want virtual learners to participate in on-campus extracurricular activities.

"They wanted a clear delineation between on-campus and virtual learners," Suthers said. "Students will have to make a choice that works for them. There is nothing that would deter the virtual academy students from creating their own clubs and events, but those things would not necessarily be school-sponsored."

Junior Amber Abernathy said she doesn't know anyone who will choose the virtual option for next year because of the way the district is structuring it.

"Students thought it would be like this year," she said. "That is, attend classes virtually during the day, and then come to school for extracurriculars."

English teacher Allen Day said he also doesn't think at least 100 students will sign up for the virtual academy.

"Students want it to look exactly like this year, and that's not feasible," he said. "I polled my students, and not a single one said they will select virtual for next year."

Students who do not submit a choice by Friday will automatically be enrolled in regular, in-person school.