

News Writing

Regional Meet • 2023



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 2,450 students enrolled in grades 9-12. Last month, Leaguetown mayor Khalil Bouaazzi submitted a proposal to the school board asking it to approve a pilot program to purchase three electric school buses by the 2023-2024 school year. In addition, the proposal asks the district to add funding to a future bond proposal to replace all 250 diesel buses with electric buses by the year 2026.

The mayor's proposal cited a 2018 report from the Environmental Protection Agency that found that diesel exhaust was a likely carcinogen that could potentially cause respiratory illness and worsen conditions like asthma in some children.

Though an electric school bus could cost up to \$400,000, compared to the \$250,000 price tag of a diesel bus, Bouaazzi said the district could apply for a special rebate program from the EPA to make up for some of the costs if it begins the pilot program.

In addition, the mayor's proposal said each electric school bus could save the district nearly \$4,000 per year in fuel costs and up to \$2,000 in maintenance costs, reflecting an overall cost savings in the lifetime of the bus.

If the proposal is approved, the district would add the cost of 250 electric buses to the next bond proposal for the fall of 2024.

After a month of studying the proposal and reading public comments, the school board will vote at its April 24 meeting on whether or not to go forward with Bouaazzi's proposal. You are writing for the issue of the press to be distributed April 21.

■ **KHALIL BOUAZZI, mayor**

"I first started talking about this two years ago when my daughter started kindergarten. That's when she was diagnosed with asthma and our pediatrician told us to try and minimize her time on the school bus. I thought this was a big problem and it was worth studying to see if we could help other children in Leaguetown, as well. The more I read, the more I knew we needed to do better for our kids.

"We have been working closely with our superintendent and Texas representatives from the EPA to collect enough data to present to the board. We hope this will secure a path for the district to potentially receive a rebate on its first set of electric buses. Hopefully, we can prevent some students from getting sick, help improve the air quality in our community and save the district some money in the long run.

"Getting to and from school should not come with a daily dose of toxic pollution. Our students are counting on us to keep them safe. As mayor, I thought spending time and effort on this proposal was time and effort well

■ **KHALIL BOUAZZI, continued**

spent. It's time for the district to prioritize the safety of our students and the sustainability of our planet. Electric buses are a good way to meet both of those goals."

■ **STEPHENIE WOMACK, superintendent**

"When Mayor Bouaazzi first came to me with this idea last year, I was a bit skeptical because of the tremendous costs on the front end. But the more I read the EPA study and talked with the mayor about what he had learned, the more it sounded like a move in the right direction for us.

"It's more than just the health and environmental benefits that caught my attention. The fact that we could save on maintenance and fuel costs over time was a huge plus for me. We are in a position where we will need to make a substantial bus purchase with our next bond proposal regardless of whether those buses are electric or diesel vehicles. Purchasing electric buses will ensure we have the latest and greatest bus technology that will last the district for many years to come. We have health benefits, environmental benefits and now financial benefits. I plan to speak in favor of the mayor's proposal at the school board meeting."

■ **RUDY RAMIREZ, EPA in Texas representative**

"We've been studying the effects of diesel school buses for years. We know diesel exhaust is a carcinogen. It causes cancer. It can cause asthma attacks. At this point, we would even go so far as to say that students who breathe diesel exhaust on a regular basis perform more poorly in school, including lower test scores, than those students who are not exposed to that low-quality air on a regular basis. I applaud Mayor Bouaazzi and the citizens of Leaguetown who elected him to make decisions like these to improve quality of life for the people of Texas."

■ **BECKY ODE, sophomore**

"I have ridden the bus to and from school almost every day for the past 11 years. I never realized how harmful the bus fumes could be before I heard about this proposal. I'm normally the first one on the bus in the afternoon because I get out of track early. I get on the bus and just sit there in a line of 30 buses running idle for a half hour at least. It smells horrible, but I've gotten used to it. Now I know all that time breathing bus fumes could be doing some real damage. I hope the school board passes the proposal so we don't have to breathe these fumes every day."

■ **JORDAN WYSONG, bus driver**

"I've been a bus driver for going on 18 years, and I've never had any kind of breathing problems. So while I appreciate the desire to keep students as safe as possible, I don't think we are putting kids in immediate danger just by having them ride the school bus. I'm told that if they approve purchasing electric buses, all the same drivers and maintenance crews will remain in their jobs, so that's a plus. It just seems like a huge expense at a time when we could be using our transportation funds to hire more drivers and make our routes more efficient."

■ **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

Leaguetown High School is one of five high schools in the district. The next school bond election is scheduled for the fall of 2024. The bond proposal is already expected to include a new high school campus and a new performing arts center as well as HVAC repairs throughout the district.

DO NOT DISTRIBUTE TO STUDENTS BEFORE OR DURING THE CONTEST!

Regional • 2023 News Writing Contest Tips and Sample Story

Contest Director: Give one copy to each judge to use during critiquing/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. Open with a future lead under the present circumstances. In this instance, the story will be published before the school board votes on a proposal to switch to electric buses.

The district could convert its entire fleet to 250 electric school buses by 2026 if the school board approves mayor Khalil Bouaazzi's proposal at its April 24 meeting.

2. Use direct quotes and get those quotes early in the story. After you introduce quotes, use the transition/quote formula. Be sure you attribute the quote. An attribution should be: subject of attribution followed by the verb of attribution ("Bouaazzi said," not "said Bouaazzi.") 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 to help the action of the story and the quote does not repeat information revealed in the transition.

transition

The proposal includes a pilot program to purchase three electric school buses ahead of the 2023-2024 school year. The district would add the rest of the buses to the upcoming bond proposal for the fall of 2024.

direct quote

"I first started talking about this two years ago when my daughter started kindergarten," Bouaazzi said. "That's when she was diagnosed with asthma and our pediatrician told us to try and minimize her time on the school bus. I thought this was a big problem and it was worth studying to see if we could help other children in Leaguetown as well."

transition

According to a 2018 report from the Environmental Protection Agency, diesel exhaust is a likely carcinogen that could potentially cause respiratory illness and worsen asthma in some children.

direct quote

"We've been studying the effects of diesel school buses for years," Texas EPA representative Rudy Ramirez said. "We know diesel exhaust is a carcinogen. It can cause asthma attacks. At this point, we would even go so far as to say that students who breathe diesel exhaust on a regular basis perform more poorly in

school, including lower test scores, than those students who are not exposed to that low-quality air on a regular basis.”

3. Use third person. Don't say “our students” or “our principal” or “Some of our students.” Also, do not editorialize. For instance, you should not say “This program probably won't work...” or “The school should ...” without attributing that quote to someone. These statements are personal opinions and cannot be made in a news story.

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

SAMPLE STORY

The district could convert its entire fleet of buses to electric by 2026 if the school board approves mayor Khalil Bouaazzi's proposal at its April 24 meeting.

The proposal includes a pilot program to purchase three electric school buses ahead of the 2023-2024 school year. The district would add the rest of the buses to the upcoming bond proposal for the fall of 2024.

"I first started talking about this two years ago when my daughter started kindergarten," Bouaazzi said. "That's when she was diagnosed with asthma and our pediatrician told us to try and minimize her time on the school bus. I thought this was a big problem and it was worth studying to see if we could help other children in Leaguetown as well."

According to a 2018 report from the Environmental Protection Agency, diesel exhaust is a likely carcinogen that could potentially cause respiratory illness and worsen asthma in some children.

"We've been studying the effects of diesel school buses for years," Texas EPA representative Rudy Ramirez said. "We know diesel exhaust is a carcinogen. It can cause asthma attacks. At this point, we would even go so far as to say that students who breathe diesel exhaust on a regular basis perform more poorly in school."

An electric school bus costs up to \$400,000, while a diesel bus costs \$250,000. However, the mayor suggested the district sign up for a special rebate program provided by the EPA to cover some of the costs of the pilot program.

"It's more than just the health and environmental benefits that caught my attention," Superintendent Stephenie Womack said. "The fact that we could save on maintenance and fuel costs over time was a huge plus for me. We have health benefits, environmental benefits and now financial benefits."

According to the mayor, the district will save up to \$6,000 a year in fuel and maintenance costs per bus by switching from diesel to electric buses.

"I'm told that if they approve purchasing electric buses, all the same drivers and maintenance crews will remain in their jobs, so that's a plus," bus driver Jordan Wysong said. "It just seems like a huge expense at a time when we could be using our transportation funds to hire more drivers and make our routes more efficient."

While Wysong said he hasn't noticed any kind of breathing problems in his 18 years as a bus driver, sophomore Becky Ode said she notices the fumes she is breathing in every day.

"I get on the bus and just sit there in a line of 30 buses all running idle for a half hour at least," Ode said. "It smells horrible, but I've gotten used to it. Now I know all that time breathing bus fumes could be doing some real damage. I hope the school board passes the proposal so we don't have to breathe these fumes every day."

If the mayor's proposal is approved by the school board, it will join other improvements from the 2024 bond proposal such as a new high school campus, a performing arts center and HVAC repairs.

"Our kids are counting on us to keep them safe, and as mayor, I thought spending time and effort on this proposal was time and effort well spent," Bouaazzi said. "It's time for the district to prioritize the safety of our kids and the sustainability of our planet. Electric buses are a good way to meet both of those goals."