

News Writing

State 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 980 students enrolled in grades 9-12. On May 12, the district released a statement in an email to parents of varsity swimmers announcing that the fall 2023 season would be canceled after reports of widespread hazing among members of the team. According to the letter from superintendent Jorge Estevez, the district obtained video of a recent incident that occurred in the training facility where multiple varsity swimmers held other students under water in the whirlpool baths for an extended period of time. In the video, which circulated on social media, one student can be seen choking and vomiting after another student releases their shoulders and allows them to get out of the pool. Varsity swimmers were allegedly initiating younger members of the team.

The district shared the video with police. They are still conducting their own investigation. Two seniors have been charged with assault related to the incident in the video.

Administrators have placed head coach Dirk Davenport and assistant coach Maryanne Stephens on unpaid leave pending a formal investigation. Davenport and Stephens both teach in the social studies department in addition to coaching. Under Texas law, any students or adults who have knowledge of hazing activities could be charged with a crime.

Administrators placed six members of the varsity team in the district's Disciplinary Alternative Education Program for the remainder of the school year for their involvement in the hazing incident. Freshman swimmer Nicole Oesterreicher, who was not involved in the hazing, has written a letter to the superintendent and school board and plans to speak at the school board meeting on Monday, May 22, and ask the board to repeal the cancellation of the 2023 varsity swimming season. You are writing for the issue of the Press to be distributed May 19.

■ NICOLE OESTERREICHER, freshman swimmer

"I moved to Leaguetown last summer, so I was never hazed when I joined the team, and I had no knowledge of inappropriate activities that were planned for this spring, either. I'm on varsity, but I'm still a freshman. I guess the older players didn't tell me everything.

"What they did was disgusting, and the players who hazed others all deserve whatever punishment they get. However, it is unfair to take away our swimming season next year. Yes, most of the team was involved, but I wasn't. I know two other sophomores who weren't involved, either. We have plenty of eighth grade talent from the middle school that could move up and create a new varsity team next year, not to mention the swimmers who were being hazed. I plan to speak at the school board meeting.

■ NICOLE OESTERREICHER, *continued*

“They don’t understand what they’re taking away from us by not even giving us a chance to have a season. We could be losing potential scholarships and other opportunities down the line.

“My dad even volunteered to coach the swimmers until the school can decide what to do about our coaches, but they said it would violate UIL rules. I don’t even know if they can do that, but we’re desperate. I love swimming so much. I can’t imagine not being able to swim with my team every day. Hopefully the school board hears my story and decides to intervene.”

■ JORGE ESTEVEZ, *superintendent*

“Students who don’t feel safe can’t perform at their highest potential. As a result, we have decided that suspending the swim program for next fall is the best and safest approach for the students in our charge, particularly while the investigation by law enforcement into the alleged hazing continues.

“At this time, evidence presented to the district reveals that this was not an isolated act but rather part of a systematic culture of hazing. This behavior has gone unchecked, possibly for several years, sadly. We know this outcome is unfortunate and some innocent students will be affected, but this is the best way for us to proceed.”

■ JENNIFER D’ONOFRIO, *principal*

“At this time, we are scrambling to find appropriate, long-term substitute teachers to fill in for our swim coaches. We know we will not have permanent staff in place before the end of the school year. Longer term, it will be difficult to find good coaches to replace these staff members, if needed, and hard enough to find someone who can take their academic classes. It will be difficult to install appropriately credentialed adults in these roles. Therefore, we can’t continue swim workouts and competitions that would prepare swimmers for next season.”

■ MAGGIE SNOWDEN, *sophomore swimmer*

“We were attacked after practice by a group of varsity swimmers. Luckily, they didn’t hold me under water for long, but they did hold one of my friends down until she was choking and sick. It was scary, and it wasn’t right. No one should have to go through that just to be accepted by other swimmers on the team. I’m not sure our coaches knew exactly what was going on, but they definitely knew something was happening because I saw Coach Davenport pop his head in and roll his eyes.

“That being said, now I’m the one being punished by not being able to swim anymore. Yes, the school is supposed to keep us safe, but the school is also supposed to provide us with a well-rounded education, which includes athletic programs.”

■ JIMMY OESTERREICHER, *parent of Nicole*

“We put my daughter in swim lessons when she was a baby. Ever since then, she’s gotten better and better each time she gets in the pool. We could have her join a select team, but then we’d have to drive an hour away three times a week just so she can do the thing she loves. I hope we can come up with a better solution than that.”

■ ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The swim coaches refused to comment during an open investigation. Because of privacy laws, administrators would not release the names of students involved in the investigation.

DO NOT DISTRIBUTE TO STUDENTS BEFORE OR DURING THE CONTEST!

State • 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 a student asks the school board to reinstate the swim season.

Freshman swimmer Nicole Oesterreicher will ask the school board to reinstate the fall 2023 varsity swim season on May 22 after administrators canceled it, citing a video that shows evidence of widespread hazing among swim team members.

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 ("Oesterreicher said," not "said Oesterreicher.") 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 head coach and assistant coach have been placed on unpaid leave for the duration of the investigation, and some varsity swimmers have been placed at the district's discipline campus.

direct quote

"Students who don't feel safe can't perform at their highest potential," superintendent Jorge Estevez said. "As a result, we have decided that suspending the swim program for next fall is the best and safest approach for the students in our charge, particularly while the investigation by law enforcement into the alleged hazing continues."

transition

The video was shared around social media and depicts varsity members holding other students under water for extended periods of time. Varsity swimmers were allegedly initiating their younger team members.

direct quote

"We were attacked after practice by a group of varsity swimmers," sophomore swimmer Maggie Snowden said. "Luckily, they didn't hold me underwater for long, but they did hold one of my friends down until she was

choking and sick. I don't think they meant to physically hurt anyone, and I don't think they realized it was hazing. But it was scary, and it wasn't right."

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

Freshman swimmer Nicole Oesterreicher will ask the school board to reinstate the fall 2023 varsity swim season at its meeting on May 22 after administrators canceled the season, citing a video that shows evidence of widespread hazing among swim team members.

The head coach and assistant coach have been placed on unpaid leave for the duration of the investigation, and six varsity swimmers have been placed at the district's discipline campus.

"Students who don't feel safe can't perform at their highest potential," Superintendent Jorge Estevez said. "As a result, we have decided that suspending the swim program for next fall is the best and safest approach for the students in our charge, particularly while the investigation by law enforcement into the alleged hazing continues."

With coach Dirk Davenport and assistant coach Maryanne Stephens both on leave, several varsity members in DAEP for the remainder of the school year and two seniors charged with assault, the swim team would rely on incoming freshman to form a varsity team next year.

"Yes, most of the team was involved, but I wasn't," Oesterreicher said. "I know two other sophomores who weren't involved, either. We have plenty of eighth grade talent from the middle school that could move up and create a new varsity team next year, not to mention the sub-varsity swimmers who were being hazed. That's why I plan to speak at the school board meeting."

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Snowden also said she saw Davenport briefly enter the room during the incident. Under Texas law, any students or adults who have knowledge of hazing activities could be charged with a crime.

"At this time, we are scrambling to find appropriate, long-term substitute teachers to fill in for our swim coaches," Principal Jennifer D'Onofrio said. "It will be difficult to install appropriately credentialed adults in these roles. Therefore, we can't continue swim workouts and competitions that would prepare swimmers for next season."

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Estevez said this incident was not an isolated incident.

"This behavior has gone unchecked, possibly for several years, sadly, and while hidden from the community, we have adults who knew this was happening," Estevez said. "We know this outcome is unfortunate and some innocent students will be affected, but this is the best way for us to proceed."