

COATED IN school pride

by jonathan castro & jasmine tabler

"I worked hard for it my freshman year. It felt good to get my letter for track and football."
-mario najera-10



"It's an accomplishment. I earned my jacket; I didn't just ask for it."
-marissa castillo-11

"I was the first person in my family to get one. I was very happy because I got it the same time I got my license."
-daniel mata-12



Earn it. Wear it. Show it off. From athletics to academics, a letter jacket defines what you accomplished in high school. Whether you got it freshman year or your last semester as a senior, it's something to cherish. It's not your average jacket. And now because of budget cuts, it's not free.

Letterman jacket in hand, junior Matthew Salazar heads to the west side of town to have a third letter stitched onto his jacket. The newest addition, a letter for football, will accompany his other two letters for baseball and academics. Like many athletes, he didn't have to buy his jacket. That's changing as the El Paso Independent School District (EPISD) will no longer fund athletic letter jackets.

"Everyone deserves a letterman jacket, athletics or not," Salazar said, "but the change is unfair. A letterman is part of the high school experience. It's part of the memories, and the district is taking that away."

It's all about the budget, Kenneth Owen, EPISD athletic director, said. The district has been wrestling with a \$17 million deficit, so cuts had to be made. Owen said the district's cost per jacket is \$50.95. The district provided, on average, about 1,000 jackets per year to all high schools.

"We go through a budget approval process each year," Owen said. "During the budget process, the letter jacket spending was not approved. The district was assigning approximately \$50,000 for this expense. We opted to provide a letter instead of the jacket, as the district is in a tight budget year. Many

districts, local and throughout the state, no longer provide jackets to their athletes. I don't see them coming back, but you never know."

Disbelief is what freshman Nyle Tabat felt when he learned of the change. He was moved up to varsity football mid-season.

"I'd love to have a letterman jacket," he said. "I don't like the idea of not getting a jacket anymore. Moving up to varsity is an accomplishment, and the jacket is an award for that. I think it's tradition for high schools to give the letterman to the varsity players, and I think they [district] should have kept it."

On the other hand, junior Jordan Steyer says the change levels the playing field for school involvement.

"I had to pay \$3.50 to stitch my letter onto a jacket that cost my parents more than \$250," she said. "Let athletes pay for theirs too. We [academics] pay for ours and still have a letterman as part of our high school experience. I work just as hard as any athlete. My season is all year with yearbook, but a lot of athletes don't think involvement in campus organizations is worth getting a letterman for free. This change makes it fair for everyone. It should be either we all get a letterman for athletics and academics or no one gets one for free."

"My jacket means the world to me. It shows what I've accomplished so far, though I am not done. I got Wu Tang because that is what a lot of people call me and I love the group."
-dominique huerta-11



MY JACKET MEANS...

JACKET WEATHER

School pride shows in the stands as senior Jasmine Ruiz and friends wear their letterman jackets. "It was pretty cool to see everyone wearing theirs because it wasn't planned," Ruiz said. "I don't always wear mine, but I did that night because it was cold and windy outside."

'B' READY

Football manager Ashley Camacho keeps track of officials in case they need a ball for placement. "I wore my jacket to most of the home games," she said. "It gets cold during the football season but my letterman definitely keeps me warm."



jonathan castro



annabeth burgett

THIS OR THAT: MATCH THE PATCH

Students show off their patches and their jackets. Can you guess whose patch is who's?



"My patch is musical and bright. It stands out compared to the rest on my jacket."
-jisselle gallardo-12



"My favorite childhood character is on my patch."
-jose quezada-12



"My patch represents my favorite Disney character."
-alexa riveria-11