

# Sorry To Burst

# Your Bubble

The editorial is an opinion held by the editorial board of the newspaper and is a collaboration of the board. It needs a simple majority to pass. This month's vote was 9-0.

In an \$81 million dollar building, housing 1,800 students, each with their own school-issued iPad, privilege lurks around every corner. These privileges create a bubble of safety around us. Our bubble at Johnston is easy to fall back on because the norms, traditions and viewpoints within it seem to be tried and tested. Yet, it can also hinder our ability to grow beyond the traditions and norms we simply accept to be true. "If you've only ever grown up in Johnston and if you've only ever attended really great facilities that are not 100 years old, you just don't know what you don't know," superintendent Laura Kacer said.

Understanding what the Johnston district and community encompass is difficult from the inside looking out; from the outside looking in though, the bubble spans a number of matters.

For one, race. The first glimpse of Johnston's community is through the district website. At the top of the page, a

slideshow cycles through images of students with differing ethnicities collaborating, disabled students beaming widely, and blue-collar workers operating.

These situations can occur in Johnston, but problematically, none of the pictures are actually of Johnston; they are simply stock images, cherry-picked to portray an idealistic version of our desired self-image. Administration cites the high quality of the photos as the reason for their use. "When you put information out there, you want really good photos to go with that," Kacer said. "We probably couldn't duplicate that with our students without taking quite a bit of time."

While the desire to have high-grade images is valid, the implications behind those images create equally valid concerns. Portraying Johnston as a completely diverse community with a perfectly happy student body is a misrepresentation.

The bubble also spans the idea of socioeconomic status. The 1:1 iPad system

is the first of our socioeconomic privileges. "The idea of iPads is a very privileged concept, because it's the assumption that everyone can go home to a power source and Wi-Fi and be able to do their homework on time," Matthew Ding '20 said.

Privilege is also evident by the number of students with AirPods and conversations of spring break trips to Cabo. "It's an unnecessary purchase, but every time I walk down the hallway, every single person is on their third pair of AirPods, because they lost the first two," Precious Maryah Pate '20 said. "There's two levels. There's the bourgeoisie and the poor people. The bourgeoisie have the AirPods, and us with strings are garbage."

Not every student has AirPods or is traveling out of the country, but there are enough students with those characteristics that we perceive Johnston to be overwhelmingly wealthy. "Issues, like poverty, don't seem like problems among the student body, since the people who are very prominent in the



student body aren't very representative of those problems," Ding said.

Recently, the pressing real-world impacts of our bubble materialized.

On Dec. 6, 2019, during a basketball game against Des Moines North High School, some Johnston students held a white bed sheet with the word "RAT" on it and wore masks of President Donald Trump's face. Media reported on the perceived racism, linking the bed sheet to comments made by Trump in which he called the 63% African-American populated Baltimore "rat infested". Some were upset by students likening the predominantly African-American team to rats. After the event, the students involved defended their actions on Twitter; overall, they intended to support a Johnston player, not antagonize North players.

The district handled the matter privately. "When we became aware of other perceptions

from other school districts, we had conversations around understanding perception, understanding what we were doing, what we were thinking, being self-aware, and understanding how our actions can be perceived by others," principal Ryan Woods said. "A lot of it was just reflection and learning and setting some goals to do better in the future."

The controversy at North was a wake-up call for us to reflect on our environment and its resulting advantages. While students may not have intended anything truly malicious by their actions, outsiders still had negative perceptions. The bubble we have at Johnston distorted our views of how free our speech is and blinded us to the consequences that would follow. Even apart from free speech, the overwhelming privileges in our bubble revolving around race and finances create a

false norm that we believe in.

Finding a simple solution to a multifaceted bubble is difficult. To understand every facet of the issue and include as many perspectives as possible, we have to start with one, being introspective and understanding what our privileges are, two, evaluating how our privilege affects our world view and those around us, and three, having direct discourse with our peers. Having candid conversations about the privileges within our school is the first step to recognizing that our bubble exists; solutions will follow after first recognizing the issue.

Living in Johnston is not necessarily any fault of our own, but it is our responsibility to understand how the Johnston bubble impacts us and expand beyond its constraints.

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