

Liberty to learn

Students should appreciate the education they receive at Johnston

From inside the walls of the high school, it can be easy to be close-minded and just focus on the negatives of high school. There is loads of homework, too many people in the lunch line, not enough parking spots and only one door open to the building after third period. But from the outside looking in, there are people who will never be fortunate enough to go to a school as nice as ours, and we should be thankful that we go to a school like this.

Senior Denise Ssozi knows this fact first hand. She was born in Uganda and lived there until she was five years old. Ssozi started attending school in Uganda at the age of one. "I went to preschool through first grade there, so when I came here (to Iowa) I was already ahead," Ssozi said. "They put me in kindergarten because of my age. It was just a breeze and I've kind of been ahead ever since then."

However, school in Uganda is a lot different than schools in the United States. "It was basically preschool through senior year all in one building," Ssozi said. "It went by levels, like preschool through fourth grade was all on one long level. It's nothing like getting involved with the technology we have here. They didn't really have that in Uganda. It was more like 'I'm gonna give you a book, you're going to read it, and you're going to learn from it.'"

Living in Johnston, many of us do not think twice about the technology we carry with us all through the school year. It has become somewhat expected to have teachers e-mail us throughout the day with study guides and homework help. The "dark days" of paper assignments seem long gone to the students that roam these halls, but to people coming from other parts of the world, it is a bit of a culture shock.

Although Ssozi had lots of fun while she lived in Africa, she says she wouldn't want to go back to Uganda to live there. "It's not as safe to raise kids in Uganda," Ssozi said. "It's a dangerous place to be. My uncle is over here, so we came and lived with him, then started moving all these different places. It's just not as safe."

Safety is among the many things we, as students at a successful high school in America, manage to take for granted. Living here and walking into our building, it can be assumed that not many - if any at all - students are concerned about their safety. Sophomore Joseph Puia agrees that safety is something that students at Johnston take for granted. He has gone to school in both Burma and Malaysia, which are southeast Asian countries. "When I lived in Malaysia, if you didn't have an ID card you could be arrested at any time," Puia said. "To not get arrested, we had to give the police money to bribe

them." Here, there simply are not the kind of safety concerns as there are in plenty of other countries. More kids worry about whether or not there will be enough cookies on cookie day at lunch than worry about getting assaulted in the halls.

Because Ssozi has lived in a different country and has gone to three different schools in Iowa, including West Des Moines, Waukee and now Johnston, she has a unique perspective on education that many students do not have. "The fact that I've come from a different country, I've seen both sides," Ssozi said. She recognizes part of the privilege comes from the iPads, but she also sees the other side - communication. "We have teachers that we can contact at the click of a button rather than waiting a couple of days like it is in Africa. They could be sick, they could be gone. We have direct contact with them and I feel like we take it for granted sometimes."

The most basic things that most students take for granted here would be a privilege at many other schools across the country and the world. "We just focus on the negatives, like how much homework we have, but it's for a good reason," Ssozi said. "They're directing us towards a better path, unlike other countries might."

Chemistry teacher Dave Oldham has a similar perspective on education as Ssozi. Oldham has taught in Texas, Germany, Colombia and here in Iowa. He agrees that the education students receive at Johnston is one of the best among the places that he has taught. "In Houston, there was no quality of education," Oldham said. "It was survival. It was a 99 percent free or reduced lunch school. Teachers got fired monthly, new ones came in, some didn't even have their teaching license. It was rough."

Students as a whole have a responsibility to check our privilege from time to time. Though it may be hard at times to appreciate what we have when we feel stressed, or overworked, that is when it is most important. The fact that we can feel stressed about things like homework or an upcoming test is a signal in and of itself that we have it pretty good. We can sit at home and stew over the-saurus pages, deciding which descriptive word will get us the best essay grade while people in countries not so far away from us have to focus their worries on other more pressing, more dangerous issues.

We have been given the gift of being able to finish up math assignments on Friday nights, e-mailing our teachers when we are confused and receiving a response in time to go to the football game. Not to mention, the football game will be safe and secure and we can focus on



Illustration/Kallie Beebe

cheering obnoxiously for our team rather than violence in the bleachers.

Before you tweet something crude about your teacher who dared to give you homework on a weekend, reflect on how lucky you are to get that assignment. Check your privilege, and more so, appreciate your stress. It is a gift.