

## *Dr. Thompson Highlights the Importance of Equal Education Opportunities*

By Kirk Hodkinson, '18

PERRY, Ohio -- When thinking about equal education opportunities, it is common for people to gravitate towards the idea of standardized testing and learning at one's own pace. However, many fail to realize school in America is a foreign environment to immigrant students or students of immigrant families. An interview with Dr. Jack Thompson brings to light the programs that Perry provides to immigrant students to help them get caught up with American culture so they can learn at a pace similar to the rest to the student body.

Superintendent Dr. Jack Thompson is genuinely concerned with the well-being of everyone at Perry High School and strives to provide all students with an equal opportunity to learn. "Educate first, ask questions later," Dr. Thompson explained in a recent PSL interview. It is quite surprising to see such a logical approach to education, as most people see education as corrupted and in desperate need of reform. However, Dr. Thompson firmly believes that everyone deserves an equal opportunity to be educated, as any predisposition put upon the student is far from their control.

Dr. Thompson's promise of equal education was far from empty. Perry High School, as Dr. Thompson explains, provides an English Language Learning program and the English as a Second Language program (or ELL and ESL, respectively) for immigrant students and students from families not native to America. Both programs, as Dr. Thompson explains, have "appropriate staffing for those students that qualify based on a test that they take." Better yet, the staff case manages students, meaning they work with students individually to make sure

that students of different demographics can grow at similar paces. This allows students of all backgrounds have an equal chance to a quality education.

Over the years, according to the 2012-2013 ELL District Plan for Perry Local Schools, the number of Hispanic students (the largest foreign demographic in Perry) “has grown from 9 in 2004 to over 121 in 2012. That is a 1,267% increase.” Due to the drastic increase in the Hispanic population, the number of Limited English Proficient, or LEP, has increased from zero in 2007 to 54 in 2011 and continues to increase. Students are considered Limited English Proficient (LEP) if they do not score a five on the OTELA or 4 followed by a trial mainstream year and then a score of a 4 is earned in the second year. To properly provide services to the growing number of LEP students, the PHS staff has been properly equipped with numerous bilingual teachers that can serve as interpreters to the students and their families. Dr. Thompson also explains that the Infinite Campus portal as well as any messages he sends out can be translated to Spanish if necessary.

Overall, Dr. Thompson’s goals for the environment regarding immigrant students is to be dedicated to providing an equal education opportunity for all students. Dr. Thompson explains that everyone must be sensitive and accepting of all cultures and beliefs that surround them so that everyone is included. One way that Dr. Thompson suggests immigrant students improve their quality of learning is to become involved in extracurriculars. Thompson explains that extracurriculars allow students to “feel a certain homage and feel connected to [Perry’s] culture.” Unfortunately, there are not as many immigrant students as American-born students involved in extracurricular activities. In order to level out the ratios, Dr. Thompson hopes the

school will provide more avenues to appeal to immigrant students and make them feel more welcome and accepted.