

## También Se Habla Español

When I was younger, I was scared to speak Spanish in public places. I distinctly remember that if my parents spoke to me in Spanish, I would make a point to respond—but in English. I made sure that I was loud, too, as if I were indirectly telling surrounding people: “Look at me, I speak English! I’m American, too!” For fear of not being accepted for our differences, many of us will change ourselves in ways that we believe will help us “fit in.” For me, that was making myself appear more “American” by speaking English in public. As I’ve grown older, I’ve come to realize that being able to speak a language other than English does not make me any less American than someone who can only speak English. I wish someone would have told me that when I was younger, and that I would not have spent so much time agonizing over making myself appear more similar to others. Our differences are what make us unique, and so it is vital to promote the acceptance of our differences—whether they are cultural, physical, or political—within our everyday lives.

I have a nine year old sister named Sandy, and she is one of the happiest and most outgoing children out there. She loves to color and has an enormous interest in the show Paw Patrol. Sandy was born with spina bifida. While she was still developing in the womb, a part of her spinal cord herniated, causing a little ball to form onto her back. She was quickly rushed into surgery after birth, and although she no longer has the ball on her back, her condition has inhibited her from being able to walk. Sandy uses a wheelchair to get around, including when she goes to school. The kids at Sandy’s school do not treat her differently from other children—in fact, they’re just as enthusiastic as she is about her being there. I remember once, on an occasion where my dad and I were dropping her off at school, a group of little girls who had just gotten off their bus surrounded Sandy and began talking to her. I watched as they enthusiastically greeted her; one girl even took the wheelchair handle my dad had been holding and began pushing her inside. It was very heartfelt to see that despite my sister’s physical differences, her peers accepted and treated her with the same kindness they gave everyone else. When people accept one another, differences included, it makes everyone feel like they belong. I think a wider application of this principle within the Goshen Community would help children that are like Sandy always feel like they belong.

From kindergarten to fifth grade, I attended Waterford Elementary, which is also the school Sandy currently attends. Although I never got to experience it, Waterford Elementary currently has a Dual Language Two-Way Immersion Program. Starting in kindergarten, the program helps cultivate bilingualism and biculturalism within students through the usage of both English and Spanish. Children, no matter if they’re native English or Spanish speakers, can learn and benefit from the program. Educational initiatives such as these are important, because they help teach children to be open-minded and accepting of other people’s differences, which is important at such a young age. It is vital that children are taught to be tolerant of cultures that are different from theirs, and that differences within people their own age is completely normal. My hope is that this program—which was created with the principle of promoting the acceptance of other people’s differences in mind—helps shape and cultivate Goshen’s leaders-of-tomorrow into becoming more tolerant and understanding individuals.

There is an abundance of cultural, physical, and political diversity within Goshen. To unify the community means to promote the acceptance of each other’s differences, and acknowledge the power in our diversity. Currently, the nation is very divided with respect to many important issues. In order to move forward and progress towards a better future, we have to start with progressing our local community of Goshen. Wider application of the CRC’s principle to promote the acceptance of differences will vastly aid

our goal in creating a more powerful and integrated community. We cannot move forward if we are not unified, and we cannot be unified unless we learn to stand together, differences included.

**Biography (35 word max):** I'm a dreamer who will go to great lengths in making my ambitions a reality. My hobbies include writing, listening to alternative/indie music, weightlifting, and obsessing over the film *Pride and Prejudice* (2005).