

A-23

Beyond Grades

Good afternoon.

For a long time, I thought intelligence had a sound. Fast answers. Perfect scores. Confidence. But mine sounded different. Mine sounded like hesitation. Like staying awake at night, wondering why trying so hard was still not enough.

Whenever I got a bad grade, I felt disappointed in myself. I believed that success depended on numbers, test scores, rankings, and report cards.

Have you ever felt like a percentage on a piece of paper?

Maybe you've looked at your test paper and compared yourself to others. Maybe you've felt pressure from school, parents, friends, or even from yourself. As someone who's often felt insecure about their English and afraid of making mistakes, grades sometimes become another reason to doubt myself.

Last semester, my English test results didn't go as planned, and I felt awful about it. I felt as if all my hard work was for nothing. As if I wasn't enough.

But I was wrong.

In today's society, academic success is often treated as the most important thing in a child's life. Students with high grades are praised. Students with lower grades are criticized. Little by little, many children begin to believe that their values depend only on their performance at school.

But I think we're forgetting a simple truth: every child learns differently. Some understand lessons quickly. Others need more time, more patience, and more encouragement. That does not make them less intelligent. It simply makes them human.

What begins as a simple desire to succeed can turn into a silent crisis, where exhaustion and self-doubt overwhelm their potential. A student may look lazy on the outside, but inside, they may be exhausted.

Instead of asking, "Why are your grades so low?", what if we asked, "Are you okay?"

Those three words can change a child's entire way of thinking. That is why emotional support is so important. I believe that one kind word can change a child more than hours of criticism. When parents and teachers say, "I believe in you," we slowly begin to believe in ourselves, too.

We also need to remember that not every child is talented in the same way. Some may not shine in math or science, but they may shine in sports, arts, music, communication, or kindness. Every person has different strengths. Every person has a different light.

Now, imagine a fish being judged by its ability to climb a tree. It would spend its whole life believing it was useless. In the same way, students should not be judged by only one standard. A single number cannot measure a whole human being.

I am not saying grades are unimportant. Education matters. Hard work matters. But emotional well-being matters, too.

True success is not only about entering a good school or getting high scores. True success is being able to live with confidence and hope.

Therefore, dear parents and teachers, let us not raise children who are academically perfect but emotionally broken. Let us raise children who are mentally strong, passionate, confident, and happy.

Because at the end of the day, grades may open doors, but emotional strength helps us walk through life.

And to my peers: I hope my speech lets you know that you are more than a number on a page. Your value is not decided by a red pen. And maybe true success is not only about being the best on paper. Maybe it is about continuing... even when the paper tells you to stop.

Thank you.