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Schools must understand kids' needs

How a young student might feel in school.....

My name is Jessica, but it could be Raul, Dashieka, or Jonathan. I'm ten years old and in the fifth grade. My problem is I'm shy. Well, I think I'm more than shy. See, I won't raise my hand in class. I'm always worried the teacher will call on me so I look down a lot instead of at the teacher. I hate it when I have to walk up to the board. I hate it even more when I have to give a report in front of the class. I worry for days before I have to do this. I feel sick the morning of the report. I can't concentrate on anything my teacher's saying. When she asks me to give the report, I walk up to the front of the room and everyone's looking at me. I hate to think what they're thinking about me. My hands and voice are shaking. I can't look out at anybody. It seems like forever until I can go back to my seat.

My shyness has gotten worse. When I go to lunch, recess, or PE, I don't know what to say to other kids. They're all joking around and I'm totally quiet. When I think of something I might say, I think it might be stupid so I don't say anything. I just kind of follow other kids around.

I wish my teachers understood how nervous I am. I wish someone would tell them that I have Social Anxiety Disorder. This is what the psychologist told my mom. If my teachers understood me, maybe they would make things a little easier. Maybe they wouldn't call on me unless I raised my hand. Maybe I could do another project instead of an oral report. Maybe I wouldn't be asked to read out loud or write on the board.

I have Social Anxiety Disorder but I could have depression, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, Asperger's Syndrome or lots of other mental health disorders that kids have. Some, but not all of us have learning problems that may have caused these other problems. Kids who have these problems usually don't cause behavior problems in the classroom so teachers don't know there's anything bothering us. Take my word for it, things bother us a lot. We have a hard time learning and doing our work. Our problems also make us feel different and weird.

I don't blame teachers for not knowing how to recognize these problems. For some reason I don't understand, teachers don't learn about these problems when they get teaching degrees. I guess special ed. teachers know a little bit more because they teach kids who behave really badly. But most kids with learning and mental health problems are in regular classrooms with regular teachers.

I don't get it. Teachers are **so** worried about how well we'll do on all those tests schools require. I wish teachers understood that the way kids learn and feel has a lot to do with

what kind of grades we'll get. If they knew this, maybe they'd be more interested in our problems and feelings. Then they'd be able to help us with these problems so we'd do better on tests. And we'd probably be a lot happier and like school more, too.

I've heard teachers talk about something called "differentiation". I think this is some new idea that says kids learn in different ways and teachers should teach kids based on how they learn. I have my own idea. I think that kids have different personal problems, too. Some of these problems are learning disabilities and others are mental health disorders. There are millions of us in classrooms. Our problems get in the way of learning, doing our work, and getting along with other kids. I think if someone would help teachers how to recognize and understand us, teachers and kids would be better off.

It's not all that complicated. People who run schools just have to want to understand us as much as we want to be understood.

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