

The role of family support and relations in rise to success

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I was very fortunate growing up because my home environment was one that really supported and encouraged my learning and my success in school. I had three primary caregivers growing up - my mother, my grandmother, and my grandfather, and they were very involved in my education. Because I attended a small private school associated with my religious parish, my family knew many of my teachers and peers' families prior to starting school. They were very involved with school activities, and someone was always at every play, recital, or other school-related activity to support me. This support continued from elementary school all the way through high school; in fact, sometimes they would even attend multiple showings of the same play that I was involved in! They were also very supportive in that they would drop me off and pick me up from school, instead of having me ride the bus. I remember a lot of conversations about school and my day happening in these car rides, and I am very thankful that my family made the effort to provide that space for me to communicate with them about school.

In my early years, I was supported by having three adults who would read books to me, answer questions that I had about the world, and would hold conversations with me. Because my caregivers all had different working schedules (full time days, full time nights, part time and college), there was always a different person around to spend time with me if someone else was busy. I received a lot of attention and support in these areas, and in turn, I excelled in these areas because they were so well supported at home. I was an early reader - I began reading before kindergarten, but my family would always take time to read with me, even if I could read a book completely on my own. I think this was very beneficial to me as a learner, because it

allowed me to think critically and ask questions about what I was reading from a very young age.

I had a very difficult time transitioning from home to school, especially at a young age. I had a lot of separation anxiety on the first days of school in my early years, until about third grade. I would have dreams leading up to the first days of school, and I would feel very emotionally unstable and fearful about beginning school after summer break. I remember going home early on the first days of kindergarten and first grade because I was so anxious, I couldn't function. My family had a conversation with me about how school was a safe place, and how they would be waiting for me when I returned from school. For some reason, the second day always seemed to go much better than the first day! With some time and a lot of patience, my family supported me through this difficult transition.

Another important aspect of my family's involvement at school was the amount of time they spent volunteering at my school. For any fundraiser, activity, etc., my family always did their best to participate. In fact, I can not think of a single time or event in which my family wasn't active. The involvement of my family was very high all throughout my learning experience – from pre-K to my senior year of high school. Even though I may have been a bit embarrassed by their involvement at the time (middle school!), I am so thankful that they showed me how important it was for parents to be involved with their children in the school community.

Additionally, I recall a time in high school when I was having some social issues. As a surprise, my grandfather purchased me a season pass to all the

home high school sports games, and encouraged me to go, either with my friends or with him. Again, I don't think I really appreciated this at the time, but now I see how very encouraging they were for me to be involved in the community of the school.

My family also showed their support of education and academic success by telling me how proud they were of my accomplishments, while at the same time reminding me that there was so much I still had to learn. My grandmother would always tell me to "learn something new every day", and this is a motto that I have really taken to heart. Even now, at the end of the day, I will sometimes reflect on what it is that I have learned that day. I hope that I will be able to reflect this understanding of and love for learning to the children and the families that I work with.

Other sources of learning support came from neighbors living next door to my family. These neighbors had two children who were around my age, and thus, they were my constant companions throughout childhood. I learned a lot from these friends, but also from their family as well. Because I was an only child, it was very beneficial for me to have these close, intimate connections with other children. We also all had our own sets of strengths and weaknesses, and we would help each other in whatever ways we could. This sense of community was another amazing support system that I had growing up.

The only aspect of my family life that wasn't always represented in my school setting was the fact that I had three primary caregivers, instead of being a child of 'traditional' mother and father family. My grandparents,
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mother, and I all lived in the same house, and my mother worked during the day and went to school at night. I remember one instance very vividly: in first grade, my classmates and I were asked to draw a picture of our families. I added all four people - myself, my mother, and my grandparents, and I worked very hard on this drawing. While I was working, the teacher (a long term substitute) came over and said " Oh no, I just meant to draw your immediate family - the people you live with - so that would be just you and your mom. You need to draw a new picture!" I remember being so confused by what she had said - and I burst into tears. I couldn't understand why my teacher was telling me that my grandparents weren't supposed to be living with me, and weren't part of my family! Additionally, my grandparents would sometimes attend parent-teacher conferences, since my mother had night classes to attend. I think this was very confusing for some of my teachers, but overall I don't think it was really that much of an issue.

For my own role in my school success, I would say that I was very curious, and always wanted to learn; this is probably from a combination of personality traits and from an encouraging home life! As a learner, I feel like I always wanted to know more, and I really did enjoy the academic part of school at most ages. The most challenging thing for me in school was probably the social aspect of school; though I had close friends, it took me a while to figure out my interactions with other children - especially because I was an only child!

Overall, I would say that I am extremely lucky to have a family that valued education as much as they did. In turn, they taught me the importance and

the value of education, which encouraged me to work hard academically and to participate in the school community. I hope that through my teaching, my words, and my actions, I can express to my students and their families that these are all things that I now value, and encourage them to cultivate as values in their children as well.