

OUR NEW HAMPSHIRE: FIVE STORIES

THE ALI FAMILY

The Ali family recently moved to their town because they had heard and read great reviews about the town's K-8 neighborhood school. Their children are in seventh and first grade. Dad works remotely for a tech company, only needing to commute out-of-state once a month or so, and Mom owns her own graphic design firm that operates out of their home. So, when it came time to look around New Hampshire, they felt really fortunate to have flexibility. They plan to stay in this town until the kids graduate from high school, as they know the reviews mirror what they have heard about their current school. They both pride themselves on attending every event at their children's school, and when their schedules allow, they both volunteer in the building. They read to their kids every night, but they don't focus too much on the homework that comes home in the folders – it has never felt like the teachers stressed about it, and so they don't stress about it either.

THE BRANCH FAMILY

The Branch family has lived in their community for three generations. Dad's two children are in eighth and fourth grade. He is a single parent and works two jobs to make sure all of the bills are paid, food is on the table, and his daughters never have to worry about fitting in with their friends. Both jobs include long hours and a lot of physical labor. Dad went to the same elementary and middle school as his children, and they will go to the same high school when they are old enough. When his daughters were younger, he made sure to read to them as much as he could, especially since his work schedule often did not allow him to make it to parent teacher conferences or most school events. When their teachers called to schedule conferences, he was not able to take time off of work. His daughters have always been smart, and they don't ever ask for help on any of their homework anymore – even though he wishes they would.

THE CRUZ FAMILY

The Cruz family immigrated to New Hampshire from Mexico six years ago, and moved to their current city through recommendations by family friends. Mom studied Psicología at a university in Mexico, yet faced challenges with potential employers, who didn't know if this degree was comparable to one from the United States. After searching for full-time employment, she decided to stay at home because the cost of childcare was higher than what she would have made in an entry-level position. Dad works as a manager in a commercial packaging facility, and often works over 80 hours a week. They have three children: their oldest daughter is a high school junior, their middle daughter is in eighth grade, and their son is in second grade. Both parents feel most comfortable talking with their children in Spanish – although Mom has noticed that she gets looks in the grocery store when she speaks Spanish instead of English. Overall, though, the Cruz family is content to live in a community where others have immigrated from Central and South America, as it means their children have friends in class with shared cultural experiences.

THE DOWNEY FAMILY

The Downey Family has had quite a bit of change over the past few years. Two years ago, Mom moved with the three kids out of the family's house and into an apartment due to safety concerns at home. Since then, Dad has been in treatment for his substance use disorder, and has limited contact with the kids. Mom works three jobs – more nights a week than not, and works incredibly hard to keep everything balanced. She is thankful that her parents live twenty minutes away and can help with pick-ups, drop-offs, and meals when needed. But she's worried that they may not be able to help much longer: they've been talking about selling their home and moving down South, where they grew up. Since they retired, they've been having trouble keeping up with their property tax payments, and the winters are getting too harsh for them.

The children are in fourth, sixth, and eleventh grade. Mom cares deeply about her children's education, but is stretched thin trying to keep their lives in order. She reads everything that comes home in her fourth grader's backpack, but does not have time to communicate with all of their teachers, especially since her children are in three different schools. Her eleventh grader has recently gotten a job after school to help her mom cover the monthly rent, and often works late hours during the week.

THE EDWARDS FAMILY

The Edwards family has been thinking about downsizing their home soon, especially since their youngest child is a junior and close to graduating from high school. Their older child got a job right out of high school and moved away. Both parents have been successful in their careers without finishing college. During dinner recently, they both shared with their son that he did not need to go to college, and that they would actually prefer that he did not go if he wasn't sure what he wanted to do with his life. They don't want him to have student loan debt without knowing what his career path will be.

We will revisit these families to help illuminate our findings, in order to answer the questions:

How do family and community factors relate to students' educational experiences?

How do these learning experiences differ between communities?