

## Power Autobiography

One of my earliest memories is of my maternal grandmother – my childhood hero – reading with me and asking thoughtful coaching questions to develop my comprehension of the story and its components. I don't remember the book, but I will always remember her warmth, her high expectations, and her unrelenting belief that I could accomplish anything I set my mind to. My grandmother, like myself, was a math teacher. She believed deeply in the value of education and instilled that same value in me. I credit her with pushing me to pursue challenging coursework, to advocate for myself when I needed to, and to acknowledge my mistakes when I made them. It wasn't until after my family lost her that I also reflected on what it meant that my grandmother, a white woman who had access to cultures of power and connections to elite education, was able to open doors of access for me while I was growing up.

As a biracial daughter of an immigrant father and a white mother, when I attended predominantly white institutions and private schools, I had dichotomous experiences. While I was not able to see my identity reflected in that of most of my peers, I was equipped to navigate the systems we were operating within, due to my proximity to whiteness and the unearned privilege of having family members with advanced degrees. I became keenly aware of the unequal distribution of those privileges – and how disproportionately, white and wealthy people were able to act as gatekeepers of opportunity as a result.

Armed with these reflections, when I entered college, I was drawn to study political science, public policy, and education in service of understanding how systems of power operate. I pursued opportunities to tutor and serve as a student-teacher in public and charter schools in my communities. And I determined that the single most impactful way I could contribute to the disruption of the systemic inequities I saw playing out in the world would be to follow in my grandmother's footsteps and become a teacher.

My students – hundreds of brilliant, curious, joyful, resilient children over the years I taught middle school math in DC public charter schools – taught me more than I could have ever possibly taught them. And their families showed me time and time again what it looks like to be an advocate. Mothers, fathers, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and caregivers who showed up at all hours to discuss their child's growth, to support them when they struggled, and to celebrate them when they succeeded. I am no stranger to parent power.

In my time as a teacher, I also witnessed the impact of formal systems of power that failed my students and their families. I saw firsthand the impact of school segregation that resulted in more than three quarters of my school's student body having experienced childhood trauma, with access to only one school-based mental health practitioner. I was required to enact policies that determined which of my students were placed in accelerated math classes,



resulting in a disproportionate number of white, higher-income children gaining access to above grade level work as compared to students of color and low-income students. I realized that without dismantling the underlying structures that perpetuate inequities, schools and teachers will continue to struggle to bring solutions to scale.

I believe that these systems have to be rebuilt, and that the stakeholders who have been most deeply impacted should be at the forefront of reimagining them. I know that parent leadership is crucial to policymaking and implementation, and that amplifying the voices of Black, brown, and low-income families who have traditionally been excluded from the decision-making table is key to building better systems for all families. The power that parents hold is not only their expertise in their own children, but also in their ability to build partnerships within and across diverse communities towards collective advocacy goals.

My memory of reading with my grandmother stands out so clearly because of all that it represents to me: the power of relationships, the power of learning, and the power of love. In my work at PAVE, I aim to tap into that power, and to work in service of the leadership of our incredible parents, who give so much so that their children and all of our city's children can have a better and more just future. That is the power of parent leadership.

