



## Educating parents. Enriching families.

April 11, 2023

To: Montgomery County Councilmembers  
Fr: Kathy Hedge, Executive Director, Parent Encouragement Program (PEP)  
Re: PEP Written Testimony on Montgomery County Proposed Operating Budget for FY24

Dear Council President Glass and Members of the Montgomery County Council,

Montgomery County – like the rest of the nation – is experiencing a devastating children’s mental health crisis. While the County’s proposed FY24 operating budget is funding a significant increase in school mental health resources for children, much more needs to be done for those who have the biggest impact on children: the children’s parents and caregivers. Research overwhelmingly confirms that **an investment to strengthen parenting and create a supportive home environment is one of the most important ways to support the mental well-being, emotional resilience, and school readiness of children.**

I’d like to share with you the **results that we at PEP have experienced with our Family Resiliency Program** in the past 9 months thanks to a \$250,000 grant from the State of Maryland. Over 400 parents and caregivers—mostly new immigrants from under-resourced communities in Montgomery County—have taken part in this multi-week, culturally competent program. Based on initial results provided by our research partner NORC from the University of Chicago, parents are reporting: **improved relationships with their children; less yelling at their children; increase in children talking to their parents about problems; increase in children getting along cooperatively with others; increase in children using constructive, non-aggressive ways to solve problems; increase in children showing responsibility for their schoolwork; increase in parental willingness to seek professional help when children need it;** increase in parents calming themselves before addressing a problem with their children, and; overall decrease in parental stress and worry. In addition, the participants have told us they feel that this program is like therapy for them, and they don’t want the program to end.

In January 2023, PEP submitted a request to County Executive Mark Elrich to continue the program next year (see attached). It was not included in the County’s proposed FY24 Operating Budget. **We respectfully request the County Council to enable this program to continue at its current level by allocating \$100,000 of funding toward the program next year, which will be matched with State of Maryland funds.**<sup>1</sup> This would allow us to hold 20 classes of approximately 20-25 parents each, to reach about 460 families, or 1,012 children. That \$100K investment from the County works out to about \$217 per family, or \$99 per child. We are near completion of an MOU with MCPS to partner with PEP on this program, and they are planning on adding an additional week to the curricula to share with parents the mental health resources available through schools.

At a time when mental health professionals are scarce and private psychiatric services are not affordable for most, strengthening parenting is a wise investment – both as a crisis response and as preventative care. We urge the Council to make this investment.

Sincerely,

Kathy Hedge  
PEP Executive Director

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<sup>1</sup> The PEP Family Resiliency Program is currently in the State of Maryland budget at \$250,000; however, we do not expect that we will be able to use that full amount for Montgomery County in FY24, since the expectation is that we will also be expanding to other Maryland counties.



# Educating parents. Enriching families.

March 9, 2023

To: Councilmember Gabe Albornoz and Councilmember Will Jawando  
Fr: Kathy Hedge, Executive Director, Parent Encouragement Program  
Re: Request for Funding to Expand Parenting Education and Support to Address Children's Stress, Mental Wellness and School Readiness

Dear Councilmember Albornoz and Councilmember Jawando,

In July 2022, the Parent Encouragement Program (PEP) received a \$250K grant from the State of Maryland to pilot the PEP Family Resiliency Program in Montgomery County. It's a multi-week parenting program, in English and Spanish, developed with Suburban Hospital/JHM and evaluation partner NORC from the Univ. Chicago. The program **helps parents and caregivers support their children's mental wellness and resiliency**, and success in school and later in life. **Evaluation results and participant feedback have been extremely positive**, we have a waiting list for classes, and parents are saying they don't want the program to end.

In January 2023, we submitted the attached request for funding to County Executive Mark Elrich for \$287,000 **to continue to offer the PEP Family Resiliency Program next year, for 575 families of color and those living in under-resourced areas of Montgomery County**. Unfortunately, PEP's request was not included in the budget that the County Executive is submitting to the County Council later this month.

Therefore, **we are now requesting that the County Council include the PEP Family Resiliency Program in the final Montgomery County FY24 budget**. We recognize that there are many competing demands for County funding, and, we are working to identify State of Maryland sources that can help fund this program. Therefore, **we would like to ask the County Council to allocate \$100,000 of funding toward this \$287,000 project**, and PEP will seek funding for the remaining cost from State sources.

## Summary:

**Program name:** The PEP Family Resiliency Program  
**Target Audience:** Mont. County families of color & families living in under-resourced communities  
**Program offering:** A 10-week parenting class to support children's mental well-being and resiliency  
**Program scope:** 25 classes of 20-25 parents each, offered over FY24 fall, winter and spring sessions  
**Delivery partner:** Montgomery County Public Schools\*  
**Expected Impact:** Serve 575 families and about 1,328 children\*\*, working out to a cost of \$499/family, or \$216/child.  
**Funding Request:** \$100,000 from Montgomery County toward \$287,000 project budget

\* We are finalizing an MOU with MCPS at this time. MCPS plans to use the final week of the program to share information with parents and caregivers about mental health resources in their children's schools.

We would be happy to meet with you to discuss this request further. Please feel free to contact me at [Kathy.Hedge@PEPparent.org](mailto:Kathy.Hedge@PEPparent.org) or 301-502-5801.

Sincerely,

Kathy Hedge  
Executive Director

\*\*based on data from our Fall 2022 cohorts of parents/caregivers



## *Educating parents. Enriching families.*

January 4, 2023

To: Mr. Mark Elrich  
Montgomery County Executive

Fr: Kathy Hedge  
Executive Director, Parent Encouragement Program

Re: **Direct Support Funding Request of \$287,000** to Expand Parenting Education and Support to Address Children's Stress, Mental Wellness and School Readiness

Cc: Jennifer Bryant, Director, Office of Management and Budget, Montgomery County, Maryland

Dear Mr. Elrich,

**The Parent Encouragement Program (PEP) is requesting funding of \$287,000 in the Montgomery County base budget for FY24 to offer its PEP Family Resiliency Program to 575 Montgomery County families from under-resourced communities in the 2023/24 school year. This multi-week parenting program, offered in English and Spanish, helps parents and caregivers support their children's mental wellness and resiliency, and success in school and later in life.** Launched in the fall of 2022 as a pilot in Montgomery County thanks to a \$250K grant from the State of Maryland, the program has received strong reviews from participants, many of whom have asked that the program continue beyond its current six weeks of sessions. The pilot reached over 200 families and we expect to serve an additional 200 families this winter and spring. **However, we currently do not have funding for FY24, because the State of Maryland funding was only for one year. We are requesting funds from Montgomery County to be able to continue this program in FY24 to help many more Montgomery County families, particularly those living in under-resourced areas, support their children's mental health.**

The Need: It is clear that the Covid pandemic drastically accelerated the decline in youth mental health in Maryland. Annie E. Casey Foundation's 2022 Kids Count Data Book reports that the percentage of children in Maryland who had anxiety or depression rose by 36% between 2016 and 2020. Maryland's mental health system is not able to address the influx of children who need help, especially with workforce shortages, and even if it could, many Maryland families lack health insurance to cover mental health treatment.

While more is needed to help address children in crisis, as many professionals are noting, **we need to shift toward preventative care that promotes children's mental wellness and resiliency.** Research overwhelmingly confirms that an investment in parenting skills and knowledge about effective parenting approaches is one of the most important ways to support the mental well-being, emotional resilience, and school readiness of children.

This is where PEP comes in. **For 40 years, our mission has been to strengthen one of the most influential factors in a child's healthy development: the child's relationship with his/her parent and the quality of the home environment.** Our programs give parents and caregivers approaches and tools to help children cope with stress, handle strong emotions, and become resilient, capable, and self-motivated adults.

Proposed Project: Since 2017, Montgomery County has provided PEP with annual funding of \$20,000 – initially as a grant and later as part of the County’s base budget – to offer its parenting classes in Spanish in a handful of MCPS/Linkages to Learning schools. As the children’s mental health crisis worsened during the pandemic, PEP updated its curriculum to have a stronger focus on children’s mental wellness, with select content provided by Suburban Hospital. With a \$250,000 grant from the State of Maryland, we launched the updated program as the PEP Family Resiliency Program this past fall, serving over 200 families in under-resourced areas of Montgomery County. It is a culturally competent, support group-style program offered in English and Spanish that provides parents and caregivers with tools to help them help their children cope with stress and anxiety, strengthen their relationship and communications with their children, and learn positive, non-punitive ways to instill self-discipline and self-motivation.

**Participant feedback has been overwhelmingly positive and reflects an urgent need to expand the program.** Participants have asked if we can extend the program (we are working to add more sessions); they are asking if their spouse, relatives, and friends can take the class (we are offering more classes in the winter and spring); and parents are reporting numerous beneficial changes with their children and family life. Some participants are saying that this is the first time they have ever been able to talk with someone about mental health challenges and parenting issues. More about participant demographics and participant feedback is in Appendices C & D, and we are also conducting an independent evaluation of results with NORC of the University of Chicago, which will be ready in mid-January.

**We are now requesting \$287,000 in funding to expand the program to serve 25 cohorts of 20-25 families each with a 10-week parenting class in FY2024. This would reach 575 families and about 1,328 children\*, working out to a cost of \$499/family, or \$216/child.** We will hold the program in Montgomery County in partnership with Montgomery County Public Schools, with whom we are currently discussing the possibility of adding an additional week to the program so that MCPS officials can share information with parents and caregivers about mental health resources in their children’s schools.

PEP has in place: a diverse corps of parent educators and facilitators; an evidence-based parenting curricula delivered in English, Spanish, and Amharic; an established online platform; and a program model that works in partnership with other agencies and schools to reach local parents. We are well-positioned to expand this program next year to serve more families in under-resourced areas. Based on our experience this fall and from 40 years of conducting parenting programs, we know that PEP parenting education is an effective way to support children’s mental wellness, resiliency, and school readiness.

PEP very much appreciates the County’s support of its work with the Linkages to Learning program over the past 5 years, and we **hope that you will commit resources to expand the PEP Family Resiliency Program to serve more Montgomery County families in FY24.** If you have any questions or would like to observe the program this winter, please contact me at [Kathy.Hedge@PEPparent.org](mailto:Kathy.Hedge@PEPparent.org) or 301-502-5801.

Sincerely,



Kathy Hedge  
Executive Director

\*based on data from our Fall 2022 cohorts of parents and caregivers



## Appendix A

### Budget for FY24 Request for Funds

1	Project Management	\$ 54,336
2	Promotion and delivery of twenty-five (25) PEP parenting classes to parents and caregivers (each class includes 10 weekly sessions plus 1 evaluation session)	157,673
3	Participant Costs	25,000
4	Evaluation	23,900
5	Subtotal	260,909
6	Administrative Costs @ 10%	26,091
7	Total	\$ 287,000

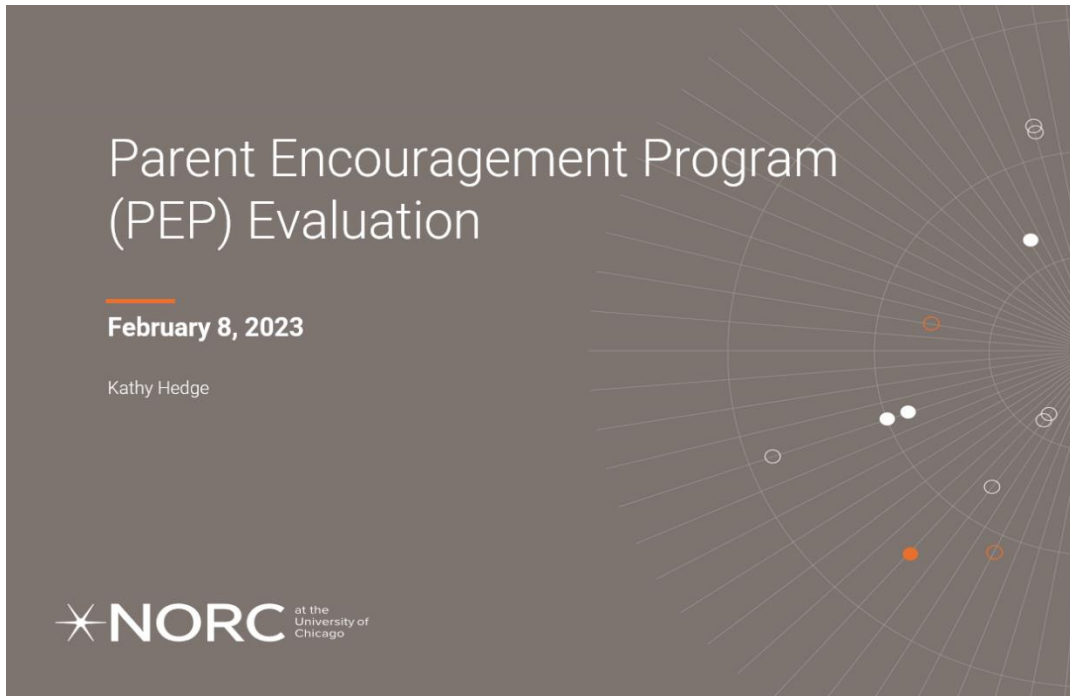
#### Notes to Budget


1. Program management will be conducted by the staff of the Parent Encouragement Program. This includes coordination with individual schools and school officials to promote the program to reach local parents; development of promotional and registration materials and informational web page; and training sessions for facilitators.
2. Includes the cost of administering and delivering 25 Family Resiliency Program classes, online via Zoom, consisting of 1.5-hour weekly sessions over 10 weeks plus one week for evaluation. (Note that this is an expanded timeframe from the current 6-week program model, based on overwhelming interest among parents for more weekly sessions.) Each class accommodates 20-25 parents or caregivers. Each class is facilitated by a PEP team consisting of a PEP-trained lead facilitator, PEP-trained assistant facilitator, and admin assistant. Zoom sessions are set-up and hosted by PEP. Approximately half the classes to be conducted in English, half in Spanish. Includes the cost of promoting the program to local groups of parents, managing participant enrollment and communiques, setting up sessions on Zoom platform and instructional videos on YouTube, managing weekly text messages and phone call reminders to participants, and other class administration activities. Classes to be held fall 2023 and winter and spring 2024.
3. Includes \$50 Target or grocery store gift card for each participant who attends 2/3 of the class sessions and the evaluation session.
4. Includes cost to hold evaluation sessions via zoom for all participants with independent survey administrators (English and Spanish speaking) who read the survey questions to participants and guide participants through the survey. Also includes tabulation of results and writing report.
6. Calculated at 10% of total project costs. Includes cost of online platform subscription fees for running program (Zoom, Vimeo, Remind, and Qualtrix), organizational IT costs, and other organizational administrative costs.

## Appendix B

### Preliminary Evaluation Results from Fall 2022 Family Resiliency Program as conducted by NORC of the University of Chicago

(slides below are from NORC presentation to PEP)



PEP EVALUATION : OVERVIEW	 4
<p>PEP worked with NORC at the University of Chicago to conduct an evaluation of its Family Resiliency Program in fall 2022.</p> <p><b>NORC and PEP collaborated to develop and administer a survey instrument</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• NORC gathered survey questions from validated scales and questions in peer-reviewed literature, and tailored these based on PEP input</li><li>• The survey was administered from November 15 to December 8, 2022<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– Surveys were administered by PEP staff in both Spanish and English to several classes</li></ul></li><li>• It consisted of 102 questions</li></ul>	

For the bulk of the survey, questions were asked in two parts: *BEFORE PEP* and *AFTER PEP*.

How true are the following statements for you?

20. I make time to talk with x.

How you feel **NOW, AFTER FINISHING** the PEP classes:

Not at all

A little

Quite a lot

Very much

How you felt **BEFORE YOU STARTED** the PEP classes:

Not at all

A little

Quite a lot

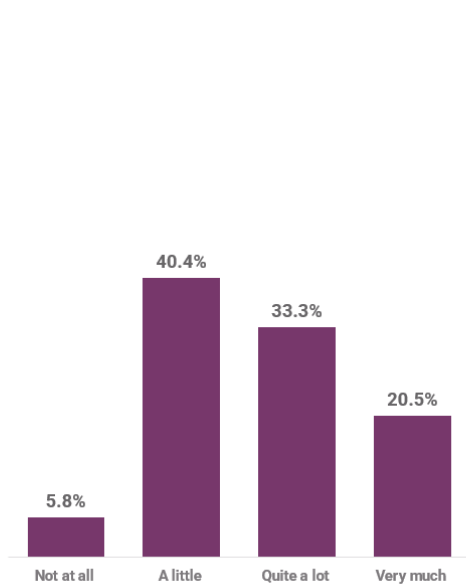
Very much

### Survey topics included:

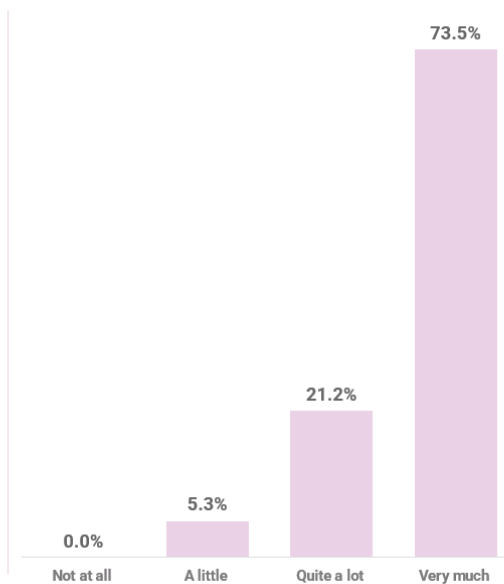
- Parent-child relationship
- Parent confidence, knowledge, and involvement with child's school
- Parent report on child behavior
- Parent-child communications
- Parent self-sufficiency
- Parent self-efficacy
- Positive and Negative Parenting
- Parental Adjustment
- Demographic questions

I have a good relationship with my child.

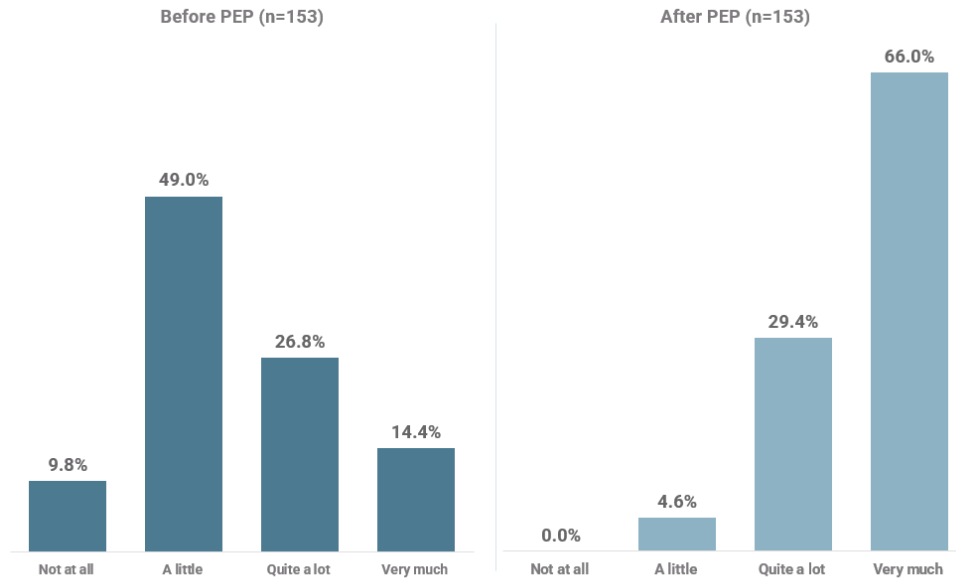
Before PEP (n=156)



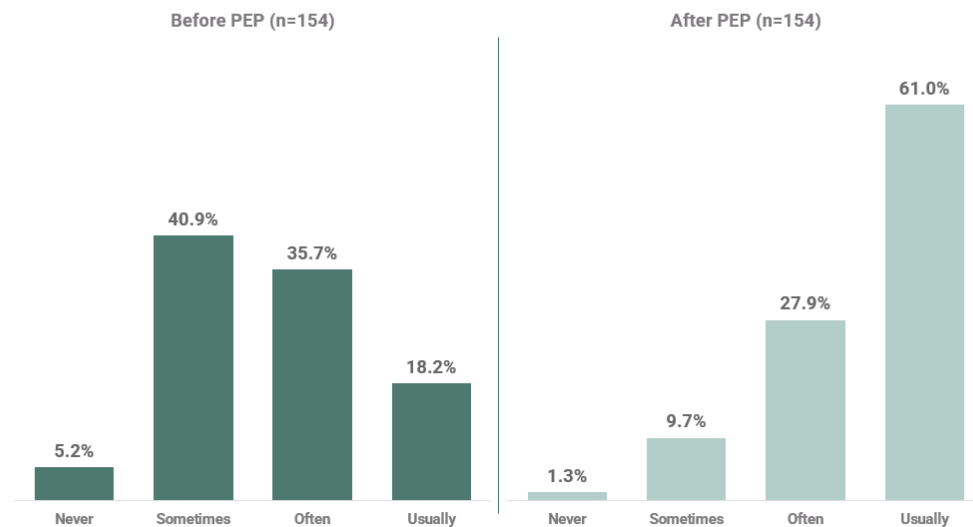
After PEP (n=151)



I try to understand my child's perspective.

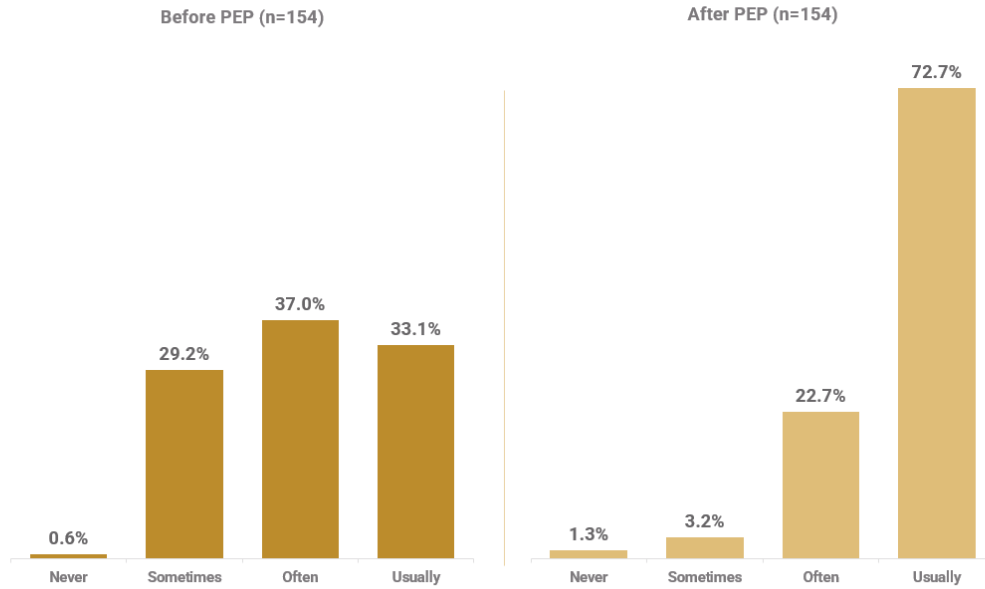


My child shows responsibility for their schoolwork (as is appropriate for their age).

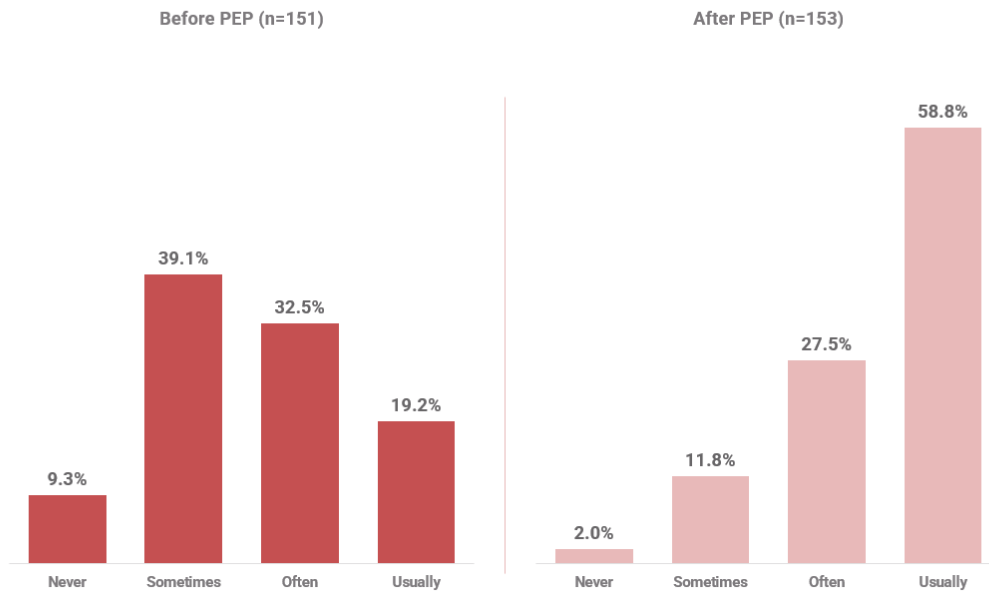




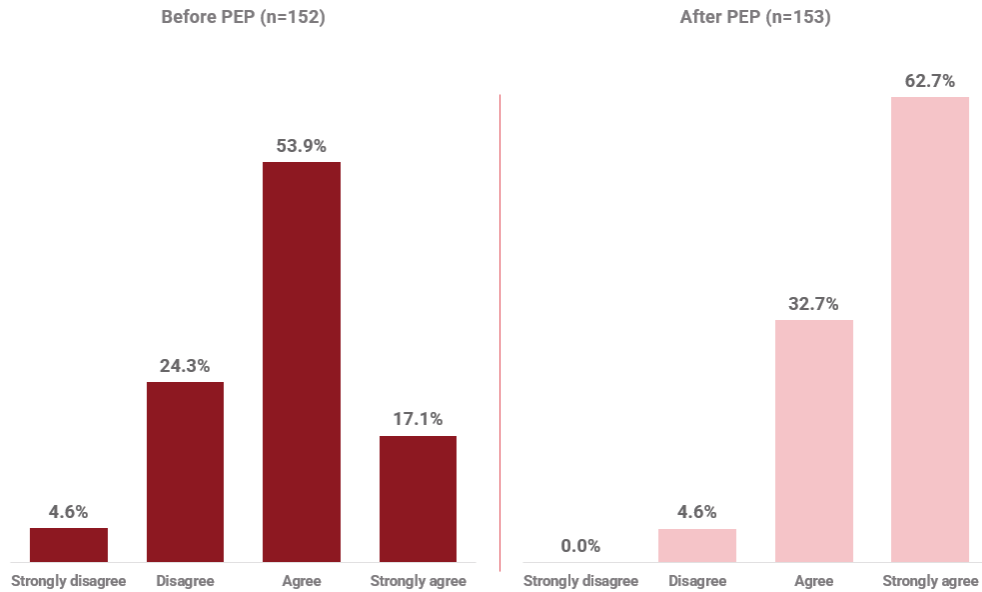
My child gets along cooperatively with others.



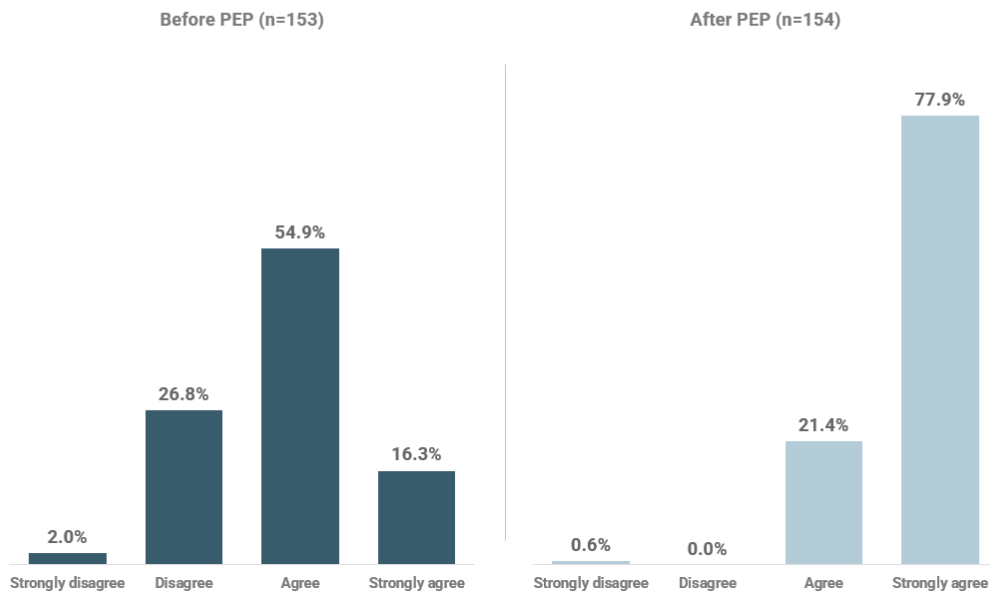
My child talks to me about his/her problems.



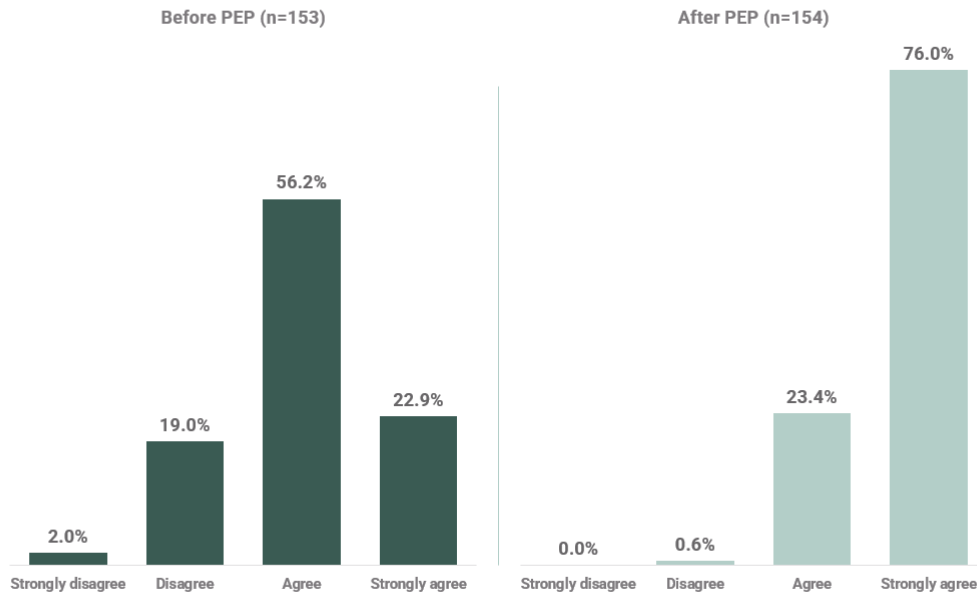
My child would say I'm a good listener.



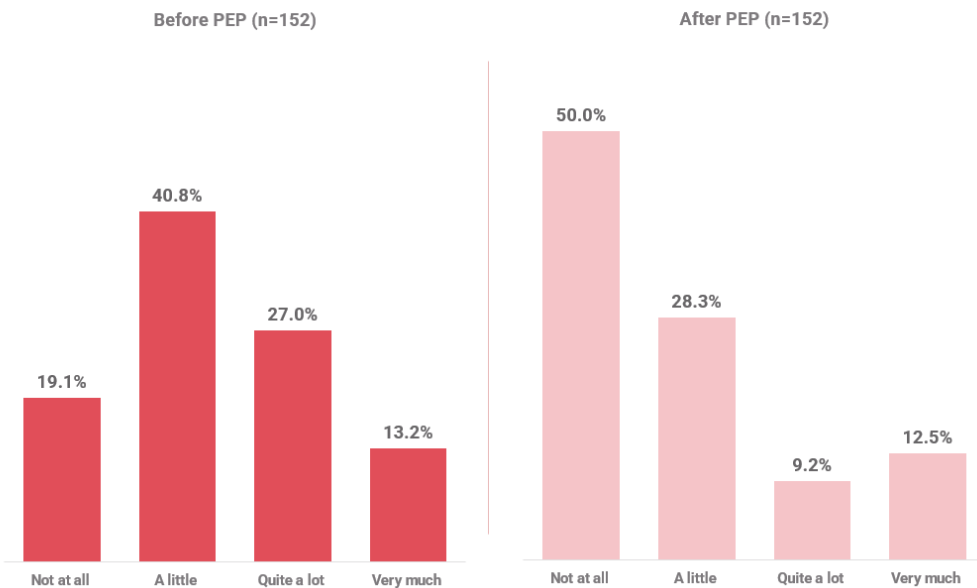
I have strategies that help me solve most problems that arise with parenting.



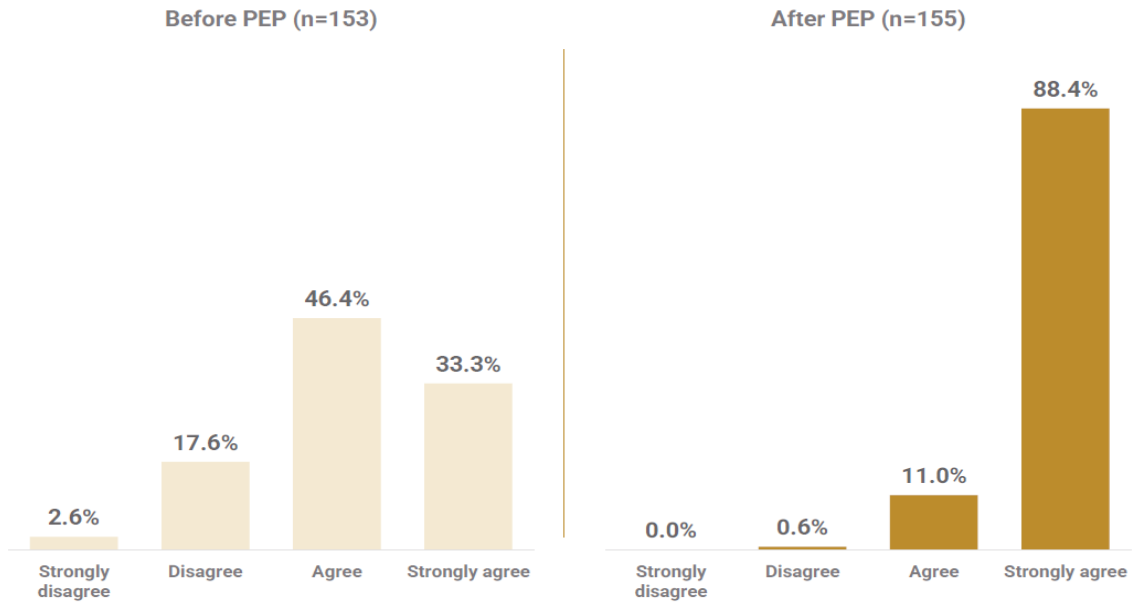
I have confidence in myself as a parent.



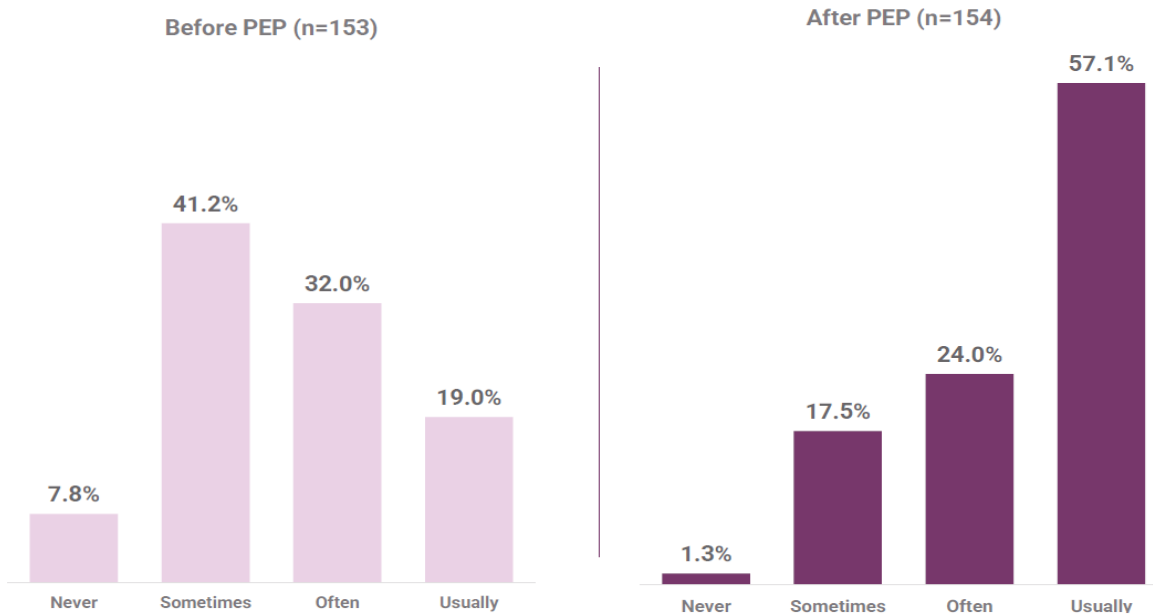
How often do you yell at your child to get him/her to listen?



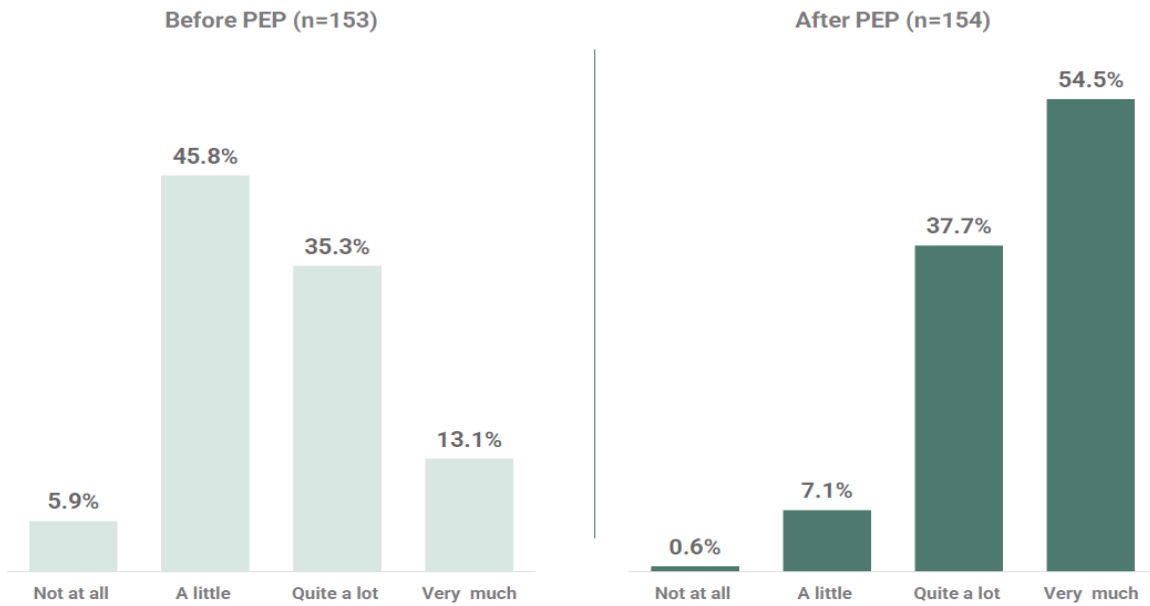
I am willing to seek professional help when my child needs it.



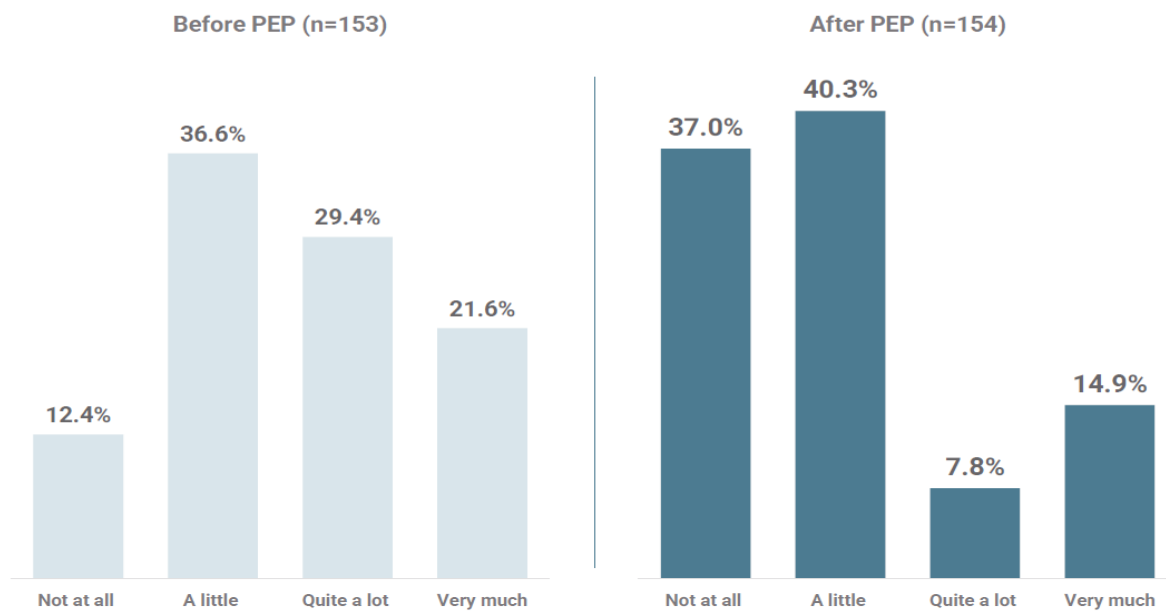
My child uses constructive, non-aggressive ways to solve problems.



How often do you calm yourself down before addressing a problem with your child?



I feel stressed or worried.





## Demographics of PEP Family Resiliency Program Participants, Fall 2022

During October-December 2022, PEP held 9 FRP classes in English and Spanish attended by 207 parents and caregivers (average of 23 attendees per class), serving an estimated total of 479\* children. Details about the participants in these classes were collected from the enrollment forms (note that only 168 participants completed enrollment forms, and not all of those parents answered all questions).

<b>Total # Parent/Caregiver Participants in Fall 2022 Family Resiliency Program: 207</b>
<b>Total # Parent/Caregiver Participants who completed 4 or more of 6 sessions: 150 (73%)</b>
<b>Total # of Children Served through Fall program: 479*</b>

<u>Are you Hispanic, Latino or Spanish Origin</u>	
No	33%
Yes	52%
Not Answered	15%

<u>Participant Gender</u>	
Female	77%
Male	7%
Not Answered	16%

<u>How would you describe yourself?</u>	
Asian	2%
Black or African American	23%
Latino/Hispanic	16%
White*	26%
Two or more races	11%
Not Answered	22%

*\*This includes Latino parents who identify as "white." Note in the box above that 52% of participants identified as being of Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin.*

<u>Highest Degree or Level of School Completed</u>	
Primary school or less	16%
Some high school	5%
High school degree or equiv.	29%
Some college, no degree	23%
Associate's degree	4%
Bachelor's degree	12%
Masters	4%
Doctorate/Prof Degree	1%
Not Answered	16%

*Continues on next page*

\*based on average number of children per family reported by 168 participants who completed enrollment forms

## Appendix C, Continued

### Demographics of PEP Family Resiliency Program Participants, Fall 2022

<u>Country of Origin</u>	
Bangladesh	1%
Belarus	1%
Brazil	1%
Colombia	1%
Dominican Republic	1%
El Salvador	18%
Eritrea	3%
Ethiopia	3%
Guatemala	7%
Haiti	1%
Honduras	8%
Ivory Coast	1%
Jamaica	1%
Mexico	8%
Netherlands	1%
Nicaragua	1%
Nigeria	5%
Pakistan	1%
Panama	1%
Peru	4%
Phillipines	1%
Slovakia	1%
United States	23%
Not Answered	17%

<u>How long have you lived in the U.S.?</u>	
My whole life/was born here	22%
Over 20 years	10%
10-20 years	23%
5-9 years	18%
Less than 5 years	11%

<u>Marital Status</u>	
Single (never married):	4%
Married/Domestic Partnership	54%
Separated	2%
Divorced	23%
Widowed	2%
Not Answered	15%

<u>Age of children of participants/caregivers</u>	
Under 5 years	24%
5 to 12 years	53%
13 – 18	21%
Over 18	2%



## Appendix D

### Select Comments from Fall 2022 Family Resiliency Program (FRP) Participants

“(The FRP class) **helped me a lot to be patient with my younger son**, to get to his level when he has a problem and **help him to calm down his rage and anger.**”

“(The FRP class) has been one of the most gratifying experiences – the respect in the group and the confidence that motivated us to be able to talk about all the situations we experience. Something that I took from the (class) is about the idea of resiliency. It motivated us to stay patient and strong in the face of difficulties. Looking ahead, staying positive, and finding the most appropriate solutions for the good of our families.”

“The truth is, **these (FRP) classes were like therapy for me** and they helped me a lot. I am very grateful because I learned to use strategies to have a good relationship with my daughter. I feel that it is bearing fruit. Thank you.”

“This class is helping me a lot because I must **have more patience to know how to talk to my daughter to be less angry.**”

“I like this class because I want to learn to balance parenting where (my children) can hear that their emotions are valued, and learn to have responsibilities according to their ages. As a mother, sometimes I feel frustrated because I didn't make myself understood, but now **I'm learning techniques to get (my children) to listen** and both parties agree.”

“Thank you for helping us improve ourselves as parents. Sometimes we do not realize that we are dealing with children, and we think that we are doing the right thing (but on many occasions we are harming our children). **We have learned together to become better parents and our children one day will also take that same lesson with their children.**”

“**I learned to manage my temper** and put myself at my son's level and give him options.”

“**I will be on the lookout if there is another course**, I will gladly sign up.”

“(The FRP class) **helped me to have more confidence and empathy** and, above all, **we have become more united as a family.**”

“(The FRP class) **helped me to have better communication with my 8 grandchildren** (and 5 of them are in Middle school)!”

“**I learned to be more patient, more confident, to be less distrustful** and, most importantly, I learned not to pretend that I always have the right answer because “I'm the Mom.”





## Appendix E

### About the Parent Encouragement Program

Founded in 1982, the Parent Encouragement Program (PEP) is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to build strong, harmonious family relationships through parenting education, skills training, and support. The philosophy of the program is based on the work of Dr. Alfred Adler and Dr. Rudolf Dreikurs, whose theories of social psychology offer a particularly useful way of viewing human behavior and promote such values as mutual respect, personal and social responsibility, cooperation, social equality, and contribution to the community. PEP believes that these principles have great intrinsic appeal and application for all families—and all relationships—in a democratic society.

PEP seeks to provide a safe, supportive space for parents to reflect on the experiences that have shaped their own view of parenting and to articulate their goals and desires for their children. We also aim to share with participants a democratic approach to parenting that promotes child empowerment and resiliency and that give parents a deeper understanding of their children's perspectives so that they can build a lasting relationship with them. PEP's effectiveness comes from the fact that:

- We use an evidence-based curriculum that includes role playing, videos, and modeling—techniques confirmed by research to be most effective.
- PEP classes encourage peer support and interaction and promote reflection and problem-solving. We work to bring the parents' voices and experiences into the class, which also serves to tailor the class to the needs of the group.
- PEP parent educators position themselves not as experts, but rather as peers. They work to create an atmosphere that is non-judgmental, and they share their own stories and stumbles.
- PEP's Latino programs are culturally competent and presented by Latinx parent educators who understand the context and cultures of the Latinx participants.
- Evaluations consistently show strong results of behavior change among parents and children, and high satisfaction from participants about the quality of the PEP class experience and instructors.

PEP and its programs have won numerous awards over the years: Washingtonian of the Year 2021 (founder Linda Jessup); Telly Awards for online classes; Parenting Media Association awards for articles. We are frequently referenced in media such as Washington Post, Wall Street Journal, NPR, and others.

A sample of institutions with which PEP has worked in recent years include:

- Linkages to Learning/Montgomery County Public Schools
- Identity, Inc.
- U.S. Agency for International Development
- Head Start Program
- National Institutes of Health
- MCPS Parent Academy
- Montgomery Housing Partnership (MHP)
- Catholic Charities
- Suburban Hospital/Johns Hopkins Medicine
- World Bank Group
- Rainbow Families