



CENTERING PARENT VOICES: **UNPACKING THE HISTORY OF INJUSTICE**

By: Ana Herrera, PhD, MPH and Mercedes Perry, PMP

ABOUT MEASURE

MEASURE works to use data and education to mobilize communities to fight structural racism and eliminate social disparities. Through our CARE Model process and other tools, we ensure communities and institutions embrace lived-experience data of marginalized populations to deconstruct underlying narratives and work together to find equitable solutions. The organization's vision is for Powerful Black, Brown, and Multi-Racial/Ethnic communities to have access to information that will support them self-advocate towards an antiracist and equitable future.

ABOUT PARTNERS IN PARENTING (PIP)

The goal of Partners in Parenting (PIP) is to work to serve families that have historically been underserved such as Spanish-speaking, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), and LGBTQIA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, queer, intersex, asexual, pansexual, and allies) families in the Austin, Texas region by offering weekly parenting support groups for new parents. PIP strives to exist in the community to provide a safe space for parents to share the highs and lows of parenting, grow as new parents, combat social isolation, and build community.

WHAT IS THE GOAL/BACKGROUND OF THE ISSUE?

The overall purpose of the partnership between MEASURE and PIP was to gain further programmatic insight, through the use of the MEASURE Equity Focus Group Tool, on how PIP could better center and amplify the voices of the families in their community. Initially, two Certified MEASURE Educators (CME) met with two directors from PIP for a project kick-off meeting. During the initial project kickoff meeting, the following topics were discussed: current process of engagement, community needs, recommendations to increase parent engagement, PIP services, and challenges to access in regards to problem PIP leaders were aiming to rectify. MEASURE CMEs also learned more about the origin and foundation of PIP and reviewed the project timeline, scope, and objectives to ensure alignment.

HISTORICAL TIMELINE

The following historical timeline was developed to provide further context for how education reform as well as key historical and current events and trends may have impacted the cultural and social norms attributed to the role of parents in rearing and educating their own children. The timeline also highlights moments that (PIP) made key strategic changes to actualize the organization's strategic pillar of "growing equity within the village" through centering the voices of parents who participate in PIP programs.

[Link](#) for full-size version of timeline.



CENTERING PARENT VOICE

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AUTHORS

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METHODOLOGY

The MEASURE Equity Focus Group (EFG) Tool was developed using a racial-equity lens whereby those who are historically and systematically impacted by disparate social outcomes must make up most of those in the focus group. This prioritization results in an elevation of their lived experience and voice as we gain a meaningful understanding of the subject that we are working on unpacking. Generally, focus groups provide a deeper understanding and feedback loop with those with lived experience of social justice topical areas and the hardships experienced as a result. MEASURE's Equity-Focus Group Tool yields granular insights that can only be gained by deep conversations with those with lived experience. These insights help build highly specific and high-leverage feedback from community members.

PURPOSE OF EFG TOOL

The purpose of the EFG tool was to understand how PIP can better center and amplify the voices of the parents in their community. The first focus group meeting with two parent leaders led to the development of the questions for the protocol used in the last two focus groups. Following the initial discussion, topics and questions were co-developed by the parent leaders, PIP staff, and Certified MEASURE Educators (CMEs). This helped ensure that topics and questions reflected the priorities of parent participants and PIP staff. Parent leaders that were involved in the development of the protocol for the EFGs were offered a \$2,000 stipend as compensation for their time and insight.

RECRUITMENT

To increase the chances of recruiting a diverse sample of current and former parent participants, parent leaders provided insight as to who and how parent participants should be recruited. Then, PIP staff invited several current and alumni parent participants via email. This included new parents, parents with child(ren) 0-3 years old, those identifying as BIPOC, and those with low-income. A total of 19 parent participants were invited to participate in one of two 90-minute virtual focus groups based on their current or previous participation in a PIP program. One focus group was conducted in Spanish and one focus group was conducted in English. Twelve parents were invited to attend the Spanish focus group and seven participants were invited to attend the English focus group. Each participant was offered a \$175 gift card as compensation for their participation and insight.

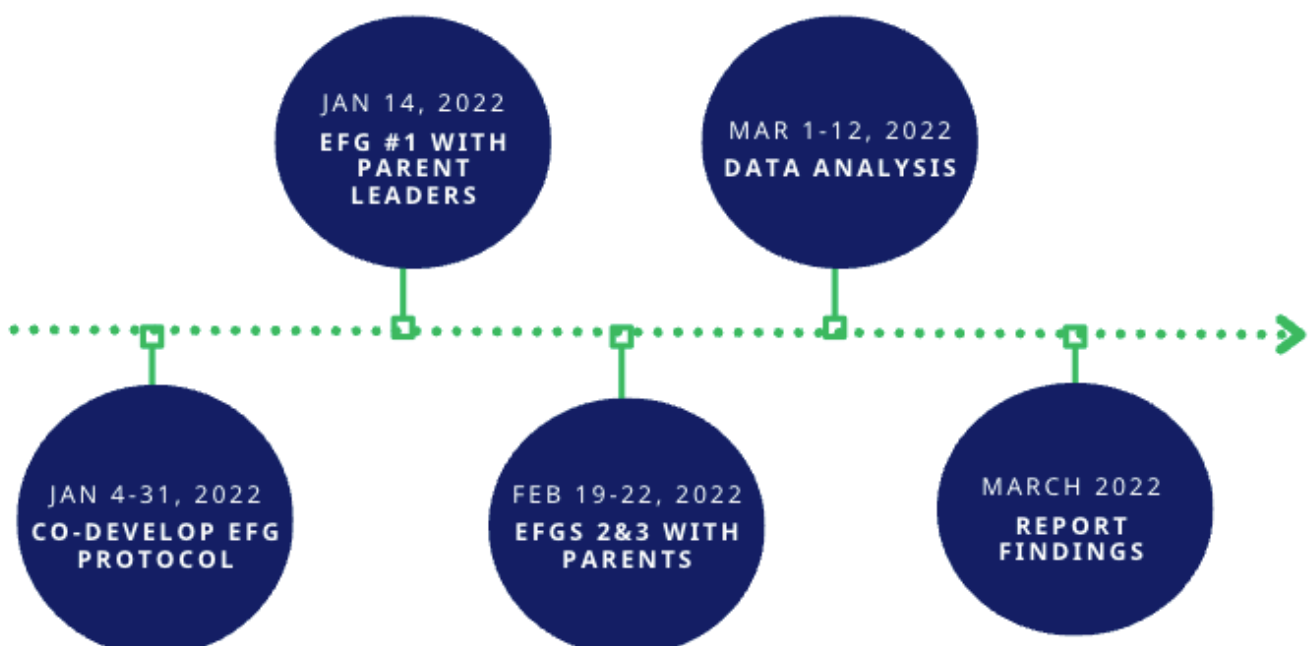
METHODOLOGY (CONTINUED)

A total of three focus groups were scheduled in the months of January and February 2022. As previously mentioned, the first focus group consisted of two parent leaders, one English-speaker and one Spanish-speaker, who provided valuable input and assisted in the development of the protocol for the remaining two focus groups. The remaining two focus groups were designated for parent participants (i.e., current and alumni). There were 9 participants in the Spanish EFG and 5 in the English EFG for a grand total of 14 participants. Using MEASURE's EFG tool, CMEs were able to facilitate the discussion by asking the participants to share their honest thoughts on the following topics:

- Parent community needs
- Current PIP engagement strategies
- Challenges for engagement
- Recommendations for increased engagement

Two facilitators were present during the virtual focus groups. Upon the completion of all three focus groups, using a research framework of thematic analysis, both note-takers analyzed transcribed notes to determine common themes and key insights to inform recommendations. Using a racial equity lens, these findings were then shared with MEASURE's research team for their input before sharing with PIP. Using MEASURE's Equity Focus Group Tool, two facilitators asked the participants to share their honest thoughts on how PIP can improve their incorporation of parents' voices in the Austin community.

PROJECT TIMELINE



LIVED- EXPERIENCE DATA & STORYTELLING



“I guess they don't really go deeper into what the problems are of real parents. Like, if someone is going through, like, let's say like financial difficulties or health difficulties or anything like that.”

- Parent in Austin

"I guess, any type of social gathering, if they were to do something like that, that would be nice with like some kind of guest speaker that was an expert in, let's say, I don't know, like mental health or something like that."

- Parent in Austin

"You get out of it, what you put in... I feel like some of us not being able to bond is maybe lack of participation as well."

- Parent in Austin

our experience
makes us

EXPERTS

THEMES & RECOMMENDATIONS

EXPAND TOPICS

The PIP curriculum covers a variety of parenting topics. However, parents would also like to **dive deeper into topics that support their own development and wellbeing**, perhaps with guest speakers that are experts in areas such as mental health and self-care, media literacy, leadership empowerment, communication between parents, and anti-bullying strategies. Additionally, it is important for parents to have a space to openly discuss their own feelings, concerns, share resources, and offer parenting tips as a way to connect and develop a support network. As one parent mentioned, *"...I guess they don't really go deeper into what the problems are of real parents. Like, if someone is going through, like, let's say like financial difficulties or health difficulties or anything like that."* Facilitating a space for parents to come together and share their concerns can help normalize these feelings and help parents identify strategies to cope.

EXTEND TIME OF PROGRAMMING

Parents mentioned that PIP's **current 8-week programs feel too short in duration and do not allow for participants to develop a strong support network**. Parents only begin to feel comfortable and develop trust among each other towards the end of the 8 weeks, and then the program ends, thus presenting a missed opportunity for connection and social support. It is recommended to extend the duration to at least 12 weeks as this could allow for the incorporation of topics based on parents' interests/needs plus offer more opportunities for connection.

HOLISTIC SUPPORT

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated many challenges that parents already faced. Thus, **parents need support to access comprehensive, community-based services to support their families, including housing assistance, daycare, food assistance, behavioral health, etc.** While it is understood among parents that PIP does not currently provide wraparound services for families, the creation and distribution of an accessible list of community resources available (via PIP website and printed materials) can help increase parents' awareness of available resources and reduce information access barriers. Additionally, *"collaborating with other parenting programs for deeper outreach and working together with other [community-based] programs"* could help develop partnerships and may even lead to being able to provide warm handoffs to other community providers. This could go a long way to provide holistic support for the whole family.

THEMES & RECOMMENDATIONS

MULTIMODAL COMMUNICATION

Parents access information via various platforms. While some rely on printed materials such as brochures, flyers, and pamphlets to learn about upcoming events and how to access resources, social media and word of mouth communication are still important ways to spread the word not only about PIP services, but also about additional support systems available in the community. It is recommended that PIP takes a multimodal approach with their current and potential parent participants in order to expand their reach and give them various options to access information.

CONTINUOUS FEEDBACK

The opportunity to verbally share their insights was much appreciated by parents and there was consensus that being able to do so made them feel heard. **Parents expressed a great desire to continue to voice their opinions and provide feedback to PIP, preferably in person and throughout the duration of PIP services, rather than wait until the end.** As parents' needs and priorities can vary depending on a variety of factors (e.g., first-time parent, single-parent, same-sex parent, parent with teen, etc.), it is important to implement practices that encourage continuous feedback loops to continue to improve services and programming. Moreover, it is important to involve partners and caregivers in the space. As one parent mentioned, *"I was under the impression it was a parenting group and my partner felt really left out as all the participating members were moms"*. As children may receive care from other caretakers, such as fathers, aunts, grandparents, etc., these individuals can also bring in a new perspective into the overall work and services of PIP.

DISCUSS EXPECTATIONS

Finally, **it is important to set expectations of participation and feedback from parents during initial engagements** because as one parent puts it, *"you get out of it, what you put in... I feel like some of us not being able to bond is maybe lack of participation as well"*. Discussing the expectations and benefits of participation at the beginning of the sessions, in conjunction with small incentives (e.g., preferably baby-related items such as diapers, formula, bottles, children's books, or gift cards), can help initiate engagement from parents. Current parent participants feel confident that over time, the bonds and connections forged between them may be enough to sustain their engagement even without incentives.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

When it comes to incorporating the voices of parents in the Austin community, parent participants highlighted several things:

- Parents want classes and support for themselves too, in topics such as mental health, self-care, media literacy, and leadership development. For parents to be able to support the health and wellbeing of their children, they also need to be able to take care of themselves.
- Opportunities for connection, preferably in-person, are essential for parents to build a support network inside and outside of PIP services.
- Holistic support for basic needs, such as housing, food, daycare, etc. can support the family's overall well-being.
- A multimodal approach of communication strategies is needed to extend PIP's reach and engagement from current and potential participants.
- Ongoing engagement opportunities throughout the entire process are needed, as parents' needs are not "one-size-fits-all".
- Be explicit about PIP's anti-racism strategies to help foster safety for Black, Brown and Spanish-speaking participants to encourage willing and consistent engagement with PIP programs and services.



CONCLUSION/OUR EXPERIENCE MUST INFORM CHANGE

Overall, parents expressed gratitude for the opportunity to provide PIP with feedback on the needs and challenges for parents in the Austin community, as well as strategies to encourage parent engagement. Having the space and opportunity to voice their concerns and share their ideas to improve future programming empowered these parents to want to continue to find ways to contribute. This is why we encourage PIP and other community-based programs to intentionally curate spaces and implement practices across the organization that encourage continuous feedback from their community members as a way to keep their finger on the pulse of the community. This helps ensure their needs are being met in a way that is meaningful for them, and doing so is likely to result in increased levels of trust and engagement from the Austin parent community.

