McKean County
STRENGTHENING *families* PROGRAM

McKean County
Summary of Survey Results
April 14th, 2010

In the fall of 2009 and winter of 2010, the School Districts in McKean County completed the Strengthening Families Program (SFP). SFP is an interactive workshop series for fifth and sixth graders and their parents designed to strengthen family communication and prepare families for the teenage years. Trained community leaders facilitated the sessions.

Workshop Locations: Bradford, Kane, Otto-Eldred, Port Allegany, and Smethport.

Workshop Coordinators: Betty Jo Wilcox, Casey Schillinger and Jodie Holmberg

Workshop Dates: *Fall 2009:* October – November
Winter 2010: February – April

Graduates: 70 families with 89 parents and 73 youth.

During a seven-week period, SFP classes were held at the schools for two and one half hours weekly. The evening began with a 30-minute dinner followed by two, one-hour sessions. The classes were designed to be fun, comfortable and confidential. Participants were taught individual skills while in separate peer groups (one for youth and one for parents), and then brought together as a whole group to work on family communication techniques. The following topics were covered during the series.

Youth Topics

- Having goals and dreams
- Appreciating parents
- Dealing with stress
- Following rules
- Handling peer pressure I
- Handling peer pressure II
- Reaching out to others

Parent Topics

- Using love and limits
- Making house rules
- Encouraging good behavior
- Using consequences
- Building bridges
- Protection against substance abuse
- Using community resources

Family Topics

- Supporting goals and dreams
- Appreciating family members
- Using family values
- Building family communication
- Reaching our goals
- Putting it all together and graduation

Funding for these workshops was made possible through a grant to The Guidance Center from the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency.

At the conclusion of the workshop series, both the parents and the youth completed a survey where they rated their skills on a scale of 1 to 4 (with 4 being the highest score). Participants were asked questions about their skills prior to attending the classes (***before***), and their current skill level after attending the classes (***now***). The following analysis compares the *before* and *now* responses in order to understand improvements made by the families as a result of the program.

Two noticeable improvements reported among participants were in the area of family communication and youth peer resistance skills. Both parents and youth developed a greater understanding of each other's wants and needs, and how to effectively communicate as a family. Youth learned peer resistance steps and practiced these refusal skills together in groups.

Overall, the findings suggest that the parents and youth made impressive gains by learning new techniques in their peer groups, and then by practicing these techniques together along with other family units.

Parent Outcomes:

- **Improved Stress Management Skills.** Overall score = .93 point gain between pre and post testing.

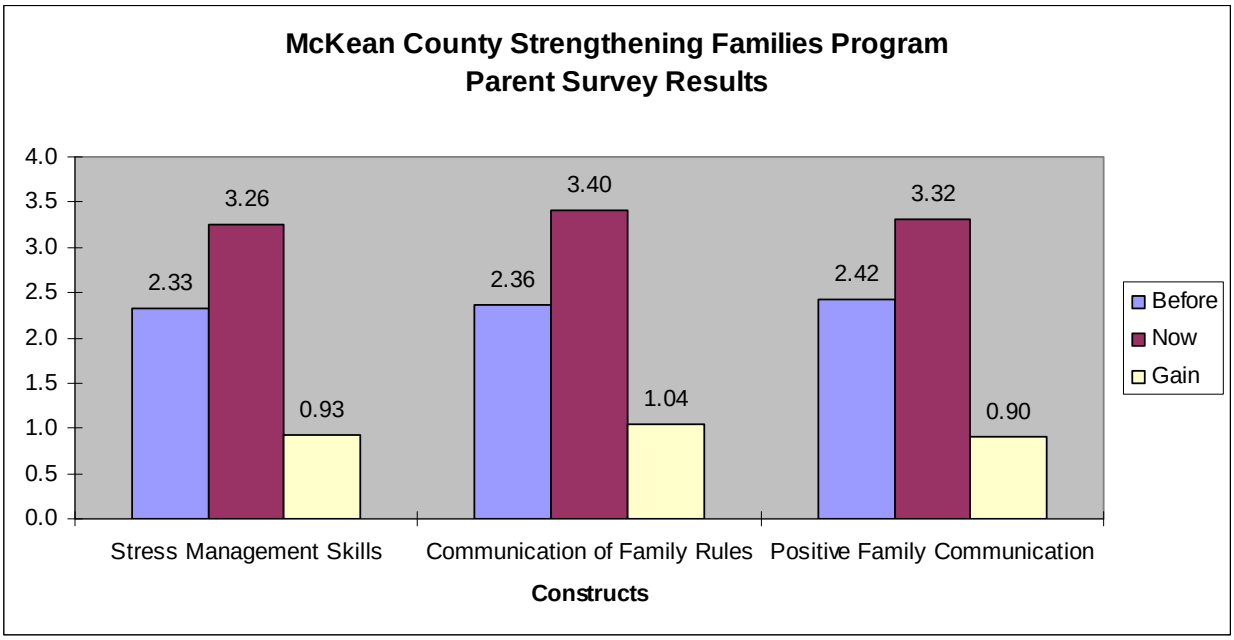
  Parents learned how to manage their own and their youth's emotions. They reported being better at waiting until they had cooled down in order to deal with problems with their child (1.04 gain); remembering that it is normal for children to be harder to get along with at this age (.94 gain); and listening to their youth more often when that child was upset (.81 gain). The youth verified that their parents were more effective at managing their emotions. They stated that their parents were relatively calmer when they disciplined them (1.35 gain).

- **Better Communication of Family Rules.** Overall score = 1.04 point gain between pre and post testing.

  Parents reported that their practices and follow through with reinforcing family rules improved. Parents reported that they were better able to help their child understand what the family and house rules were (.98 gain); that they let their child know what the consequences are for breaking rules (.99 gain); and that they follow through with consequences each time their child breaks a rule (1.15 gain).

- **Positive Family Communication.** Overall score = .90 point gain between pre and post testing.

  Family communication was an area of improvement reported by both the youth and parents. Survey results show that families gained the necessary insight and techniques needed for effective give-and-take communication. The parents greatly improved in their ability to communicate with their youth in a direct yet respectful manner. Parents reported including their child more in family decision-making about fun and work activities (.88 gain); working together with their youth to solve problems that come up at home (.83 gain); and trying to see things from their child's point of view (.99 gain).



- **Positive Youth Outcomes Reported by Parents.** Parents recognized the positive changes in their youth as a result of the program. 95% of parents claimed their youth's behavior at home, at school and in the community had improved since beginning SFP (slightly – 76% and greatly – 19%). Many also saw a positive change in their youth's academic achievement. 61% of parents reported that, since beginning SFP, their child's school performance and their grades had improved (slightly – 50% and greatly – 11%). 100% of the parents indicated that, during the program, their child's behavior and academic performance had either improved or had not changed.

Youth Outcomes:

- **Improved Stress Management Skills.** Overall score = 1.35 point gain between pre and post testing.

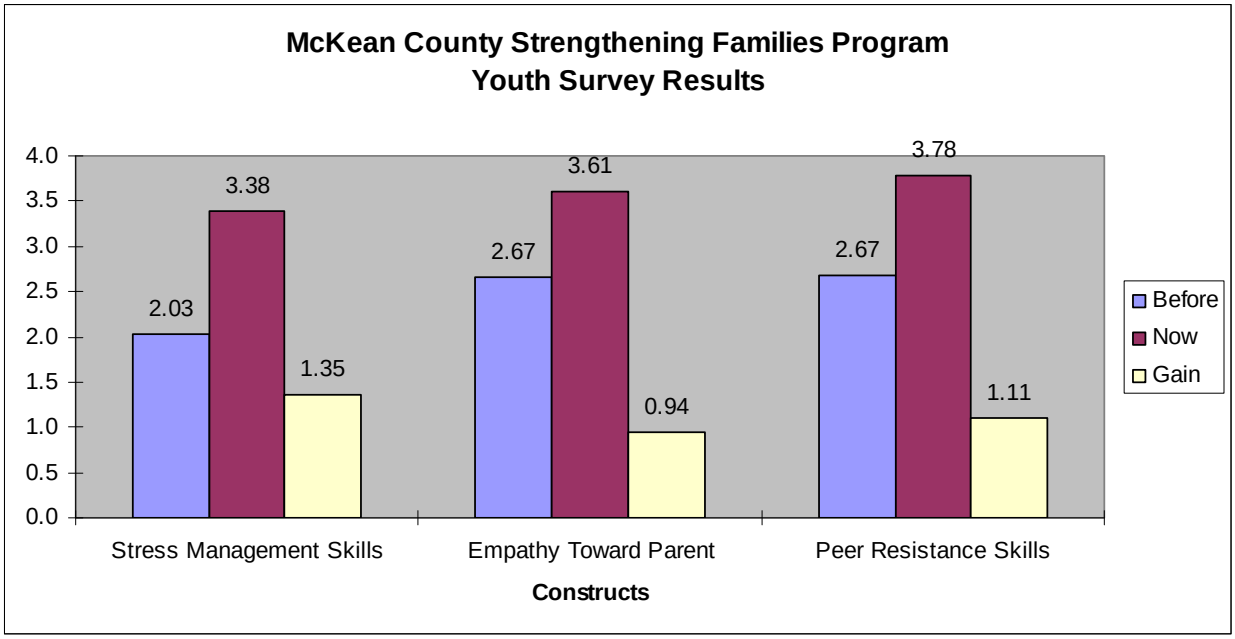
  Youth participants were taught new approaches to handling stress, and as a result, reported being better able to recognize and then handle conflict. Youth reported doing things to help them feel better when they are under stress (1.59 gain); recognizing when they are under stress (1.23 gain); and overall, being able to sit down together with their parents and work out problems without yelling or getting mad (1.23 gain).

- **Increased Youth Empathy Toward Their Parents.** Overall score = .94 point gain between pre and post testing.

  Youth gained the necessary empathy toward their parent that creates a positive communication flow and dynamic. This greatly improves family relations. Youth reported that they appreciated the things their parents do for them (.68 gain); listened to their parent's point of view (1.34 gain); and are able to tell when their parents are stressed or having a problem (.80 gain).

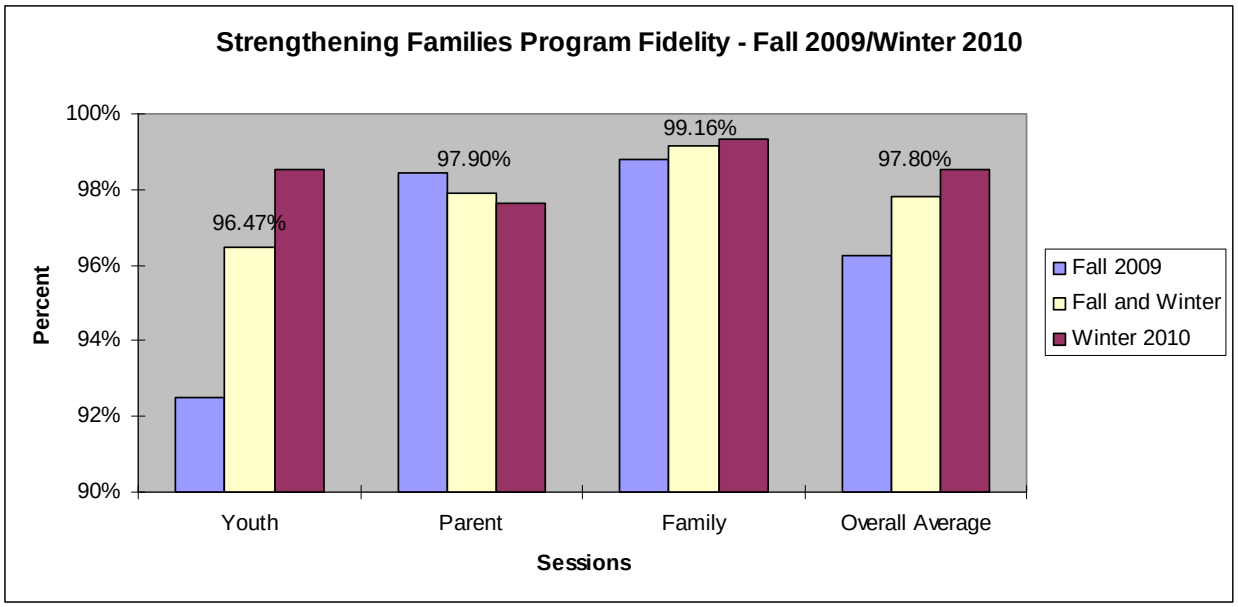
- **Better Peer Resistance Skills in Youth. Overall score = 1.11 point gain between pre and post testing.**

  The youth reported that they gained knowledge about how to resist peer pressure and, if a friend suggested they do something that could get them both into trouble, they would be able to get out of doing it (1.27 gain). The youth also reported that they knew the qualities that are important in a true friend (.95 gain).



Fidelity Evaluation Results:

The Strengthening Families Program curriculum is backed by Evidence Based Research, which means that it has been tested and shown to have positive outcomes for participants over several years. This implies that, if delivered as designed, the participants are more likely to be affected in positive ways. To ensure this outcome, sessions are observed to certify that the program is implemented as designed. These evaluations show that the Strengthening Families Program delivered to McKean County followed the curriculum by *97.80%*, surpassing our goal of 90% and almost a half percentage point (.39%) improvement over last year (97.41%).



Wrap-Up:

At the end of the survey, the participants were asked what was the most valuable thing(s) they learned during the Strengthening Families Program. Responses by both parents and youth affirmed that they were strengthened as individuals and as families.

"That my child is very close to the teen years and that the most important thing in getting through those years is to stay calm, show love and be consistent." – parent

"How to stay calm – remember they are kids and they need love and limits." – parent

"To not argue with my child; but to state the rule, consequences and loss of privilege if they fail to comply." – parent

"There are goals you have to work harder to reach, but the outcome will be good." – youth

"How to make friends and to tell a good friend from another." – youth

"How to handle peer pressure. How to calm myself down when I'm mad. How to reach my goals. What a true friend is like. How to understand parents." – youth