

**McKean County**  
**STRENGTHENING**  
*families*  
**PROGRAM**

McKean County  
 Summary of Survey Results  
 April 17<sup>th</sup>, 2009

From the Fall of 2006 through the Winter the of 2009, the School Districts in McKean County have completed the Strengthening Families Program (SFP) twice during each school year. SFP, an interactive workshop series for fifth and sixth graders and their parents, is 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, Ron Hammersley and Casey Schillinger

**Workshop Dates:** Fall 2006 – Winter 2009

**Graduates:** 291 families with 378 parents and 314 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 = 1.06 point gain between pre and post testing.

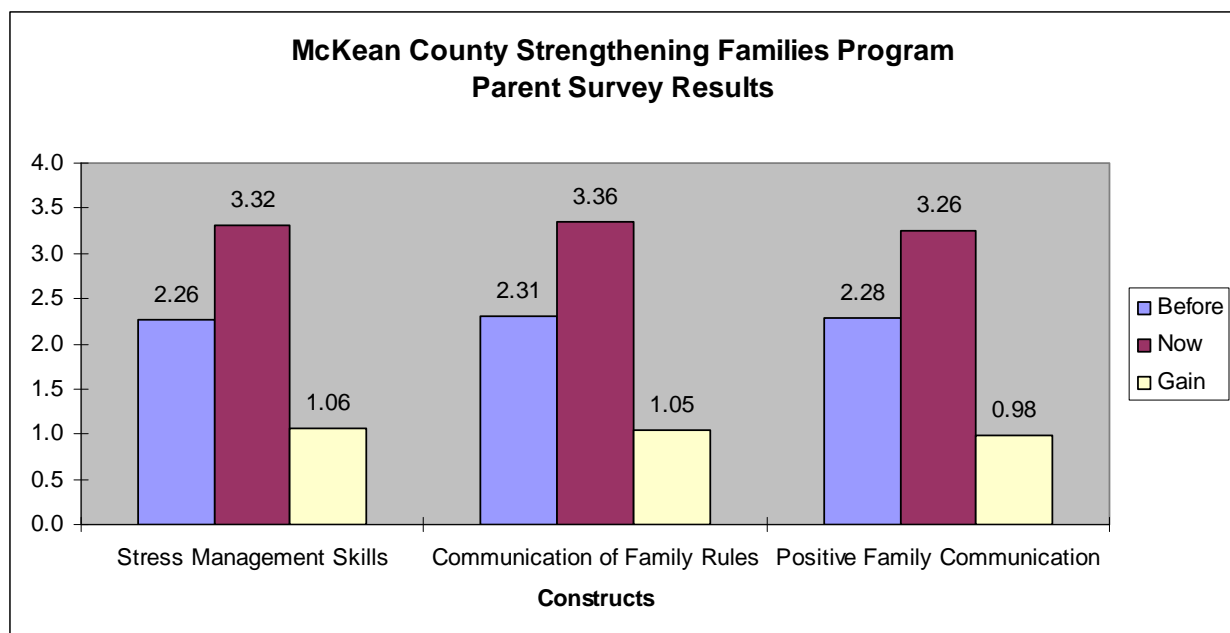
Parents learned how to manage their own and their youth's emotions. They reported being better at waiting until they had cooled down in order to deal with problems with their child (1.33 gain); remembering that it is normal for children to be harder to get along with at this age (.93 gain); and listening to their youth more often when that child was upset (.90 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 (.82 gain).

- **Better Communication of Family Rules.** Overall score = 1.05 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 (1.09 gain); that they let their child know what the consequences are for breaking rules (1.01 gain); and that they follow through with consequences each time their child breaks a rule (1.04 gain).

- **Positive Family Communication.** Overall score = .98 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 (.90 gain); working together with their youth to solve problems that come up at home (.94 gain); and trying to see things from their child’s point of view (1.09 gain).



**Youth Outcomes:**

- **Improved Stress Management Skills.** Overall score = 1.10 point gain between pre and post testing.

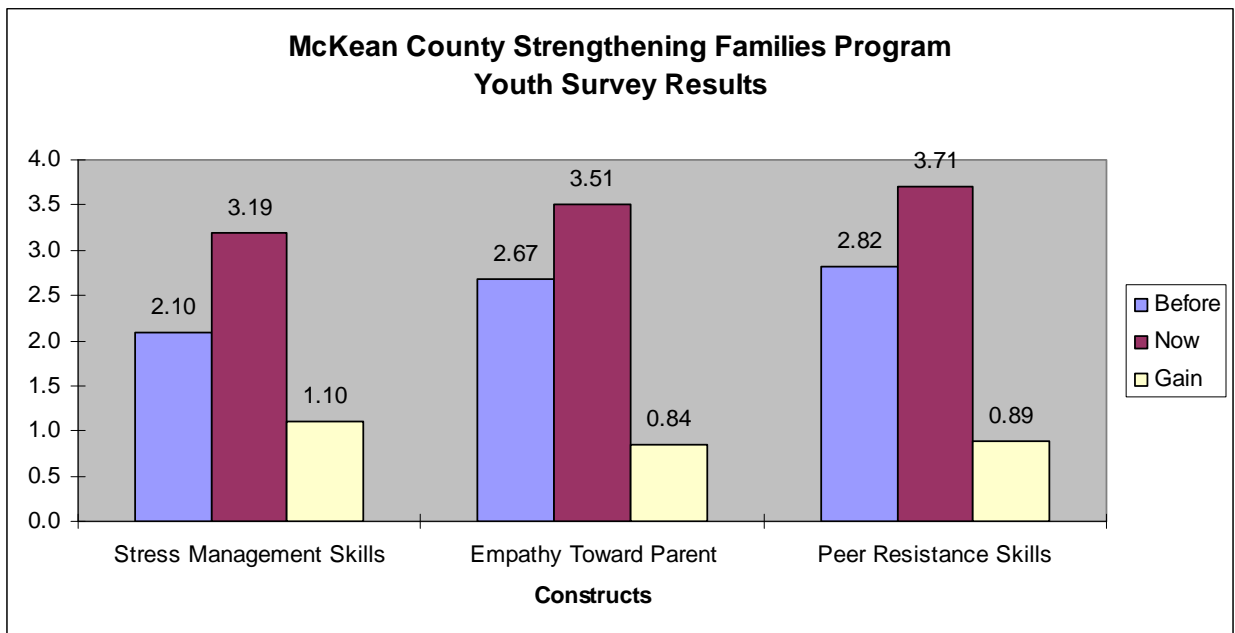
Youth participants were taught new approaches to handling stress, and as a result, reported being better able to recognize and then handle conflict. Youth reported doing things to help them feel better when they are under stress (1.25 gain); recognizing when they are under stress (.93 gain); and overall, being able to sit down together with their parents and work out problems without yelling or getting mad (.90 gain).

- **Increased Youth Empathy Toward Their Parents.** Overall score = .84 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 (.73 gain); listened to their parent’s point of view (1.00 gain); and are able to tell when their parents are stressed or having a problem (.80 gain).

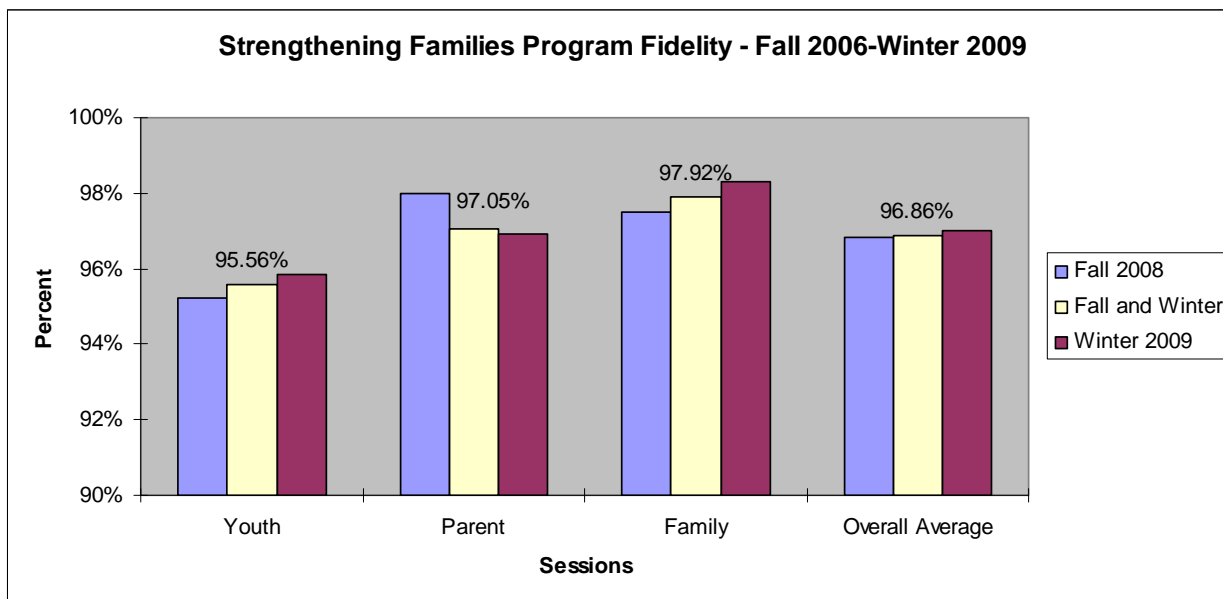
- **Better Peer Resistance Skills in Youth.** Overall score = .89 point gain between pre and post testing.

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 (1.02 gain). The youth also reported that they knew the qualities that are important in a true friend (.76 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 over the past three school years followed the curriculum by *96.86 percent*, surpassing our goal of 90 percent.



### **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.

*“I personally was one that was love and no limits—I have realized how a child needs to have rules and not for me to be a pushover—that it not only makes me feel bad, but teaches him not to have to respect me. I’ve enjoyed this program and will recommend it to all. I’ve seen a great change. Thank you. I’m sad it’s over.” – a 2006/2007 parent grad*

*“That my child thinks a lot about his future and his place in the world, and that he really values my input in decisions about his growth.” – a 2007/2008 parent grad*

*“Just knowing other families are in the same boat is helpful.” – a 2008/2009 parent grad*

*“I learned many valuable things during the program. But out of all of them, I think learning how to deal with peer pressure was the most valuable because it can help get and keep you and your friends out of trouble.” – 2007/2008 youth grad*

*“I learned that when you get mad or stressed, don't take it out on all the people around you. Take some time to cool off. Also I learned that you don't have to do something just because your friend wants you to.” – a 2008/2009 youth grad*

*“I enjoyed the program for spending time with my mom, which is something I don't do a lot. And I liked doing the family tree and learning more about my family” – a 2006/2007 youth grad*